

# THE PHILADELPHIA BIBLE RIOTS OF 1844

## CONTEST OVER THE RIGHTS OF CITIZENS

*Amanda Beyer-Purvis*  
*University of Florida*

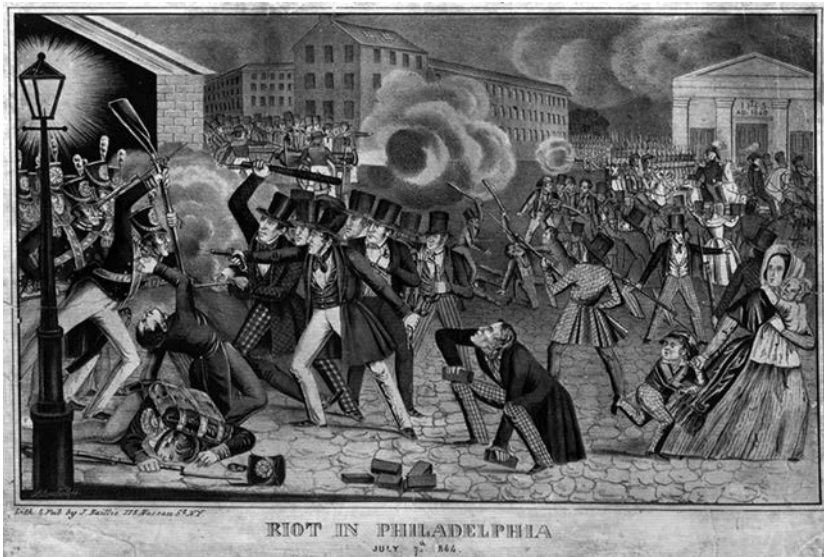
**ABSTRACT:** This article seeks to illuminate the ways in which the Philadelphia Bible Riots were generated by Catholic demands for access to the rights of citizens. The rhetorical importance of the right to religious free exercise and right to education were key features of American citizenship during the mid-1800s. Doubts about Catholics' ability to participate as citizens and claim these rights in American democracy sparked controversy over Catholic demands. The discourse of rights, however, and their widening application to more populations than just white, landholding Protestants was gaining rhetorical force. The riot can be framed as an exercise of popular sovereignty by white Protestant nativists who made attempts to enforce the "natural" order of the community. As Catholics publicly demanded rights to freedom of conscience, and rights to decide the form of education in public schools, the Protestant majority pushed back by violently asserting traditional boundaries around who could act as citizens.

**KEYWORDS:** Education in Pennsylvania, religious rights, citizenship, anti-Catholicism, 1844 riots

On the evening of May 8, 1844, John Morin Scott, the mayor of Kensington, now a suburb of Philadelphia, stood on the steps of St. Augustine Catholic Church and delivered a speech to a group of angry rioters, pleading with them to save the church from the fate Saint Michael's Catholic Church had suffered just hours before. Mayor Scott had arrived at a peak moment in a day-long escalation of mob activity. His late arrival to the scene was later criticized as being a result of his lingering too long at his daughter's birthday celebration. Perhaps he had not grasped the seriousness of the situation at its commencement, but the destruction of Saint Michael's and the subsequent attack on St. Augustine's seemed to rouse city authorities into action.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to being a symbolic attack by nativist rioters on their perceived Catholic enemies, the attack on St. Michael's Church began as a result of rumors that rifles and other firearms had been concealed within the building for use by Catholic protesters. Standing in front of the rioters' next target, the mayor assured the crowd that St. Augustine's contained no stockpile of firearms and that he himself held the key to the building.<sup>2</sup> Though armed militia men on horseback surrounded the building, the mayor assured the rioters that they had no authority to harm the crowd. Unconvinced by the mayor's reassurances about the lack of firearms hidden inside the church, but guaranteed of the militia's restraint, the rioters pushed into the church and set it aflame. Within an hour, the building was completely engulfed and "did not cease burning until everything was destroyed but the walls."<sup>3</sup>

Before the riot in May of 1844, tensions between nativists and Catholics had already resulted in some outbursts of violence throughout the country. In 1834 an Ursuline convent and school in Charlestown, Massachusetts, was attacked and burned by a mob of Protestants stoked by rumors of coerced Catholic conversion and sexual deviance behind the convent walls. In 1842



**FIGURE 1** "Riot in Philadelphia. July 7th 1844." Hand-colored lithograph 9x13cm, by H. Bucholzer printed in New York by James Baillie. From: Pennsylvaniana Collection, Digital Library@Villanova University. Original at Falvey Library, Villanova. Used with permission.

a Catholic priest in Champlain, New York, burned King James Bibles given to Catholics by Protestant Bible societies, enraging Protestants already primed for resentment against Catholics. That same year anti-Catholic riots broke out in Newark, New Jersey, and the next decade would engender anti-Catholic riots in Maine and Kentucky.<sup>4</sup>

Philadelphia was itself experiencing a rash of racial and ethnic conflict during the Jacksonian period. The rapid growth and diversification of the population led to several violent disturbances throughout the city including a violent confrontation between immigrant Irish weavers and native Americans in Kensington in 1828, race riots in Southwark in August 1834 and July 1835, the burning of both the abolitionist-affiliated Pennsylvania Hall in downtown Philadelphia and the Friends Shelter for Colored Orphans in 1838, and an attack in the summer of 1842 by the Irish on black temperance marchers.<sup>5</sup> The Bible Riots in 1844, however, had the distinction of being the most deadly and destructive the city had seen. Why these particular riots led to such widespread destruction, death, and injury is a question several scholars have addressed in their examinations of the unrest in Philadelphia. Anti-Catholic sentiment had been building throughout the country for decades, but sources at the time pointed to a two year-long controversy over the use of Bibles in public schools as the catalyst for the riots in Philadelphia.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent scholarly examination of the riots has made an attempt to look beyond this initial explanation to the underlying factors contributing to such a destructive and deadly incident of unrest in 1844. Michael Feldberg in his book, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict*, produced one of the most notable recent examinations of the deeper causes of the riots. Feldberg argued that the city's changing economic landscape, including a growing immigrant population, an increasingly established Irish Catholic working class, and rising class anxiety among skilled artisans during the economic depression beginning in 1837, led to tensions exacerbated by cultural and religious conflicts between nativists and Catholics. Feldberg accounts for the robust membership in nativist groups and popular political parties such as the Know-Nothing Party during this time by pointing to rising rates of immigration coupled with rising class anxiety from men who were "particularly susceptible to the Jacksonian siren song of upward mobility through capital accumulation." This during a time when that upward mobility was becoming increasingly difficult to achieve. While economic woes set the stage and religious tensions led to action, what allowed the riots to reach the level they did, according to Feldberg, was the weakness of coordinated peacekeeping forces in Philadelphia at the time.<sup>7</sup>

Feldberg's work presented a more dynamic set of causes than earlier analyses of the violence, particularly work by scholars such as Dennis Clark, who attributed the riots to the rise of Protestant evangelicalism during the mid-1800s as the effects of the Second Great Awakening gained traction. Clark also pointed to the climate of Philadelphia in particular, noting that the American Protestant Association—a virulent anti-Catholic nativist organization—was founded in Philadelphia in 1842, the same year that Philadelphia's Bishop Kenrick began agitating for Bible equity in public schools. This combination created a very public and very contentious debate over Bible reading in schools.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, however, Clark argued that the cause of the riots was primarily a result of the tension between Irish Protestants and Catholics of Irish decent. The significant involvement of nativists with Irish last names and the lack of involvement by, controversy with, or vitriol directed at German Catholics led Clark to conclude that economic concerns or more general nativist activity in the city had less to do with the outbreak of violence than a very particular ethnic-religious conflict. For Clark, the riots did not spring from Philadelphian issues but instead was an inter-Irish issue. As a counterpoint to Clark's microanalysis, the complexity of Feldberg's argument and the growing popularity of economically driven historical analysis made Feldberg's text on the riots the standard for nearly twenty years.

The work of Alexandra Griswold in the late 1990s, however, revisited the importance of religion to the riots, reexamining some of Clark's points on a broader scale. Griswold argued that the impact of the religious turmoil within the Protestant world during the time of the riots was a key element leading to the violent events in Philadelphia in 1844. As Second Great Awakening religious fervor began to gain popularity over the traditional Calvinistic Protestantism, old world religious tensions were experiencing a revival. Griswold highlighted the driving force of religion for rioters by noting occurrences like the playing of "Boyne Water, a tune commemorating the Protestant William of Orange's victory over the Catholics of Ireland in 1690" during the burning of St. Michael's Church.<sup>9</sup>

Re-examining the importance of religion in causing the riots gained significant academic traction in the following years. Scholars like Bruce Dorsey and Katie Oxx expanded the historiography on the importance of religion in driving the riots. Dorsey's work framed the riots as a contest over the place of the Bible in public life—a barometer for the complex contest raging between the right to freedom of conscience and popular politics.<sup>10</sup> Oxx delved deeper into this issue, arguing that the riots happened for

distinctly religious reasons. She attributed the importance of the distinctive understandings of the Bible by Catholics and Protestants, the transnational and historical animosity between Protestants and Catholics, and the evangelical fervor of the Second Great Awakening to creating the groundwork for the riots.<sup>11</sup> For Oxx, the riots were primarily about religion. Issues of immigration, ethnicity, labor, socioeconomic status, institutional development, or public schooling growing pains could not explain the violent and targeted uprising in Philadelphia without the issue of religious conflict playing the starring role.

Recently, voices pointing to causes beyond religion have returned. Kenneth Milano, for example, in his book, *The Philadelphia Nativist Riots: Irish Kensington Erupts*, looked once more at the role the economic downturn of 1837 played in the 1840s to turn those in cities against immigrants, but also examined other political factors having to do with the conference of rights of citizenship on a broader swath of “recent” immigrants that were particular to the state of Pennsylvania. He highlighted the 1838 Pennsylvania Constitution, which gave all white men twenty-one and over the right to vote and allowed for the naturalization of immigrants after only five years.<sup>12</sup> These tensions, according to Milano, caused an increasing worry for “native” Philadelphians about the growing influence immigrants would have over the political process. The agitation by Catholics over issues of the Bible in schools served as proof of their concerns. The return by Milano to the importance of immigration emphasized not just economic issues, but also the quarrels during the mid-1800s over how immigrants should and should not have been allowed full participation in the American experiment.

Accessing the causes of events is a layered process, and the scholarship on the Philadelphia Bible riots has done much to illuminate the circumstances that influenced and sparked the violence in May and July of 1844. This article seeks to build on this project by illuminating the ways in which the Philadelphia Bible riots were generated by Catholic demands for what were widely considered the rights of citizens of the United States. The political, the social, and the religious are often deeply intertwined in the public imagination. The rhetorical importance of the right to religious free exercise and right to education—which became law in the state of Pennsylvania in 1834—were key features of American citizenship during the mid-1800s. Concerns about Catholicism—particularly Catholics’ ability to participate as citizens and claim these rights in American democracy—sparked controversy over Catholic demands in the public sphere. The riots,

then, can be framed as a clash of competing visions of the United States as one of popular will or of law and order. The attempt by nativists to exercise popular sovereignty through violence and rioting was an effort to enforce the “natural” order of the community and show Catholics that the rights of citizens belonged exclusively to white Protestant Philadelphians.<sup>13</sup> The efforts by nativists to use the tried-and-true methods of popular sovereignty, however, bumped up against an increasingly dominant rights discourse deployed by the Catholics that demanded their rights as citizens, protected by the Constitution, to freedom of conscience. Though the issue of the moment was protecting their children’s right to exercise this freedom of conscience in publicly run institutions, the deeper issue at stake was their status as full citizens of the United States.

Anti-Catholicism was a long-standing American tradition, stretching back to colonial religious establishments and Protestant denominational dominance. The popular sentiment of Protestant primacy continued to hold powerful sway into the nineteenth century when anti-Catholic sentiment developed not only religious and ethnic features, but a civil dimension as well. The idea that Catholics were not just religious and/or ethnic outsiders, but also ideologically incompatible with republicanism, was an integral part of the nativist movement ideologies of the 1830s and ’40s. Nativism was an already long established social and political movement in the United States by the time of the riot, and continued to hold sway in the politics of the Know-Nothing party in the 1850s.

The nativist movement in Philadelphia reflected this national movement of anti-Catholicism. Nativists were generally comprised of middle-class journeymen artisans and members of the working class. The rising population and stability of the Irish community in Philadelphia provided a clear target for nativist groups concerned about the growing voice of Catholics in the community. The Protestant clergy in Philadelphia played a significant role in casting suspicion and distain on the Catholic community and its right to full citizenship. Over 100 Protestant clergymen from nine different denominations were founding members of the nativist group, the American Protestant Association (APA), which formed in Philadelphia in 1837. The group had an active and venomous discursive presence throughout the city. Pinpointing the number of official members of nativists groups in Philadelphia in the mid-1800s is difficult, but their ideas had enough traction within the city to support the publication of five nativist newspapers at the height of circulation prior to 1845.<sup>14</sup> Their organizational platform proclaimed precedential

rights for the Protestant majority, questioned Catholics' claims to citizenship, and equated the behavior of Catholic priests with the anti-Christ.<sup>15</sup>

The backing of nativist sentiments by the religious community fed an already healthy prejudice against Catholics throughout Philadelphia. As Catholics more publically demanded their rights to a freedom of conscience, and a right to decide the form of education in public schools, the Protestant majority began push back by violently asserting traditional boundaries around *who* could act as citizens. The APA, perhaps overconfident in their perception of the strength of support from the city's population, felt the need to make its presence increasingly known—even in areas with large Catholic populations. Meanwhile, Catholics in Philadelphia were gaining economic and social status and beginning to demand their place as decisionmakers in the city's political landscape. The collision of these two movements led to an eruption of tensions, causing a full-fledged riot in the spring of 1844.

Despite its infamous riots, Philadelphia was not the progenitor of Catholic agitation surrounding the King James Version of the Bible in public schools. New York City in the early 1840s housed an intense conflict between Catholics and Protestants over Bibles in public schools led by Catholic bishop John Hughes. Hughes accused the city's supposedly nonsectarian schools of denying Catholic requests to use their own Bible, and also blatantly promoting Protestantism and demonizing Catholicism. Hughes had launched an aggressive campaign confronting the Public Schools Society of New York. The Public School Society was a private organization affiliated with nondenominational Protestantism that controlled the distribution of public funds for education. Although beholden to the dictates of the New York Constitution, which mandated, "The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed in this state to all mankind," the Society saw its directive as including in city curriculums the transmission of religious truth and morality found in the Bible.<sup>16</sup> As a practical matter, this meant schools in New York, just as in Philadelphia, used the Protestant Bible along with Protestant hymns and prayers in daily instruction.<sup>17</sup>

Bishop Hughes and his followers found the use of Protestant Bibles to be a direct violation of Catholic rights to freedom of conscience and began aggressive campaigns to rectify the public school situation in New York. He initially focused on keeping the Bible *in* schools as its teachings, he argued, were important to preserving moral instruction.<sup>18</sup> Hughes, at this stage, was only advocating reform in the public schools in order to make them

more welcoming to Catholic students and less catered specifically toward Protestant teachings. Hughes eventually gave up on the possibility of implementing these changes and shifted his advocacy toward gaining public funds from the Society in order to support Catholic parochial schools under his supervision. When the Society denied funding to parochial schools on the grounds that it violated the church/state divide, Hughes once again changed his tactic, by aligning with Jewish leaders in the city to advocate for legislation that would remove Bibles from public education entirely. Hughes's agitation for the religious rights of Catholics in public schools was waged in the press, in the legislature, and through politics. In November of 1841 Hughes organized a political party specifically in time for the election in order to try to win seats (and votes) in support of his fight against Protestant teaching in schools.<sup>19</sup>

Catholics were fighting a battle against an education system deeply rooted in the Protestant tradition. The use of the Protestant Bible in public schooling was rooted in the nearly universal idea at the time that religion was necessary to develop the moral character of children, in addition to the very literal connection the public school system had to Protestant roots.<sup>20</sup> Colonial and early national schools had no distinction between the concepts of public or private institutions and were often founded and run by Protestant clergy.<sup>21</sup> Pennsylvania became one of the first states in the nation to incorporate into their 1790 Constitution a provision to educate all poor children, though rich parents were expected to pay for their children's education. The distinction between public and private education, however, began in the 1830s with the Common School Movement. Clergy members remained crucial to the movement's expansion. They were often the "evangelizers" of the Common School movement, traveling west to bring the civilian-molding, progress-making Common Schools to the wilds of the plains. The movement's goal was to provide free education to children in order to mold moral and active American citizens (that they argued factories and farms could not provide). Including Protestant teachings in that education was, for these educators, a key aspect to achieving their goal.

As the American public school system developed, its form and goals were influenced by several social and historical trends and its presence in the national imagination perpetuated questions about the country's value system. The Second Great Awakening, promoting a nonsectarian Protestantism, led to an integration of the nonsectarian concept in Common Schools. Nondenominational, but generally Protestant, schools were understood to



be inclusive to all beliefs. The large waves of immigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, bringing increasing numbers of Catholics to the urban centers of the United States, led to a growing perceived threat to the makeup of American democracy, as well as a threat to the Common Schools. If Catholics challenged the Protestant curriculum, then the schools' mission to provide moral instruction was in jeopardy. If Catholics pulled their children from public schooling and started their own institutions of education, public school funds would be threatened as many localities had the practice of distributing educational funds to all educational institutions.

This fear of Catholic influence on public schools was perpetuated by the rise of bigotry in political and social movements such as nativism.<sup>22</sup> Nativist groups like the Know-Nothing Party attached themselves to the traditionally Protestant Common School goals and promised to keep Bible reading in school and stop public aid from going to Catholics schools. Additionally, influential Protestant clergy in the school movement, many of whom were reluctant to accommodate Catholics and eager to promote their own school systems, engaged in attempts to make public school attendance mandatory. A mandatory policy would have forced Catholics to send their children to Protestant-influenced schools, exposing their children to unwanted religious instruction, and to intensive anti-Catholic rhetoric. Mandatory attendance policies failed in the context of Common Schools, but would find new acceptability when the school systems became community- and government-run. The public school system, far from being a secular establishment, was frequently created and perpetuated by evangelical Protestants who believed they could create a nondenominational (Protestant) education that served to create good American citizens while keeping faith integral to that project.<sup>23</sup>

The anti-Catholicism rampant in the school debates of the twentieth century can be seen as representative not only of questions surrounding the place of religion in schools, but of greater national values undergoing debate beginning during this time. Steven Green argues that "the school question" of the nineteenth century that arose in battles over Protestant Bibles in schools were a proxy for questions about (a) the right to universal education, (b) the duty of the government in promoting religious values, (c) the connection between moral virtue and civic participation, (d) the role of religious institutions in civil society, and, most important, (e) the compatibility of religious diversity within a republican system largely based in Protestant traditions. In other words, the school question was fundamentally about the place of religion in the public sphere of the United States.<sup>24</sup>

Though religious instruction in Philadelphia schools at the time of the riot had already been mandated to reflect nonsectarian or nondenominationalist values, teachers were expected to instruct students on the virtue of piety but to limit the teaching to generically “Christian” doctrine that could be agreed upon across denominations.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, teachers *were* engaged in moral instruction, particularly through the use of prayer, hymn singing, and devotional Bible reading from the King James Bible. The King James Version was often used as the default Bible in public schools due to its significant popularity. Catholics, however, had their own version of the Bible, the Douay-Rheims, based on the Latin Vulgate translation of the fourth and fifth centuries instead of the translation of ancient Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that the Protestant Bibles relied on. The reading of scripture in public schools (especially the “wrong” scripture) also came up against the Catholic belief that religious doctrine must be read communally, even better with an intercessor who could interpret the text through the lens of church theology and tradition.<sup>26</sup> As such, the Catholic Bible contained within the text commentary on biblical passages and interpretive notes, content expressly prohibited by the public schools in Philadelphia. The restriction on commentary created a complicated bind for Philadelphia Catholics who, as we shall see, decided to pursue a policy of no Bibles in school instead of a demand to allow the Catholic Bible in.

The controversy in New York was carefully monitored by the Catholic bishop in Philadelphia, Francis Kenrick. A strong proponent of Catholic education, Kenrick faced a small and ill-equipped parochial school system in Philadelphia that catered exclusively to girls. Unable to find funds or interest from lay Catholics to expand and improve the Catholic schools, he turned his attention instead to the reform of Protestant-oriented public schools.<sup>27</sup> The public school system in Philadelphia was established in 1834. That same year, the Board of Controllers for the Public Schools of Philadelphia put forth a series of resolutions including a section addressing the appropriate place of religion in schools.<sup>28</sup> The Controllers used as the basis of their religious mandates the clause of the 1790 Pennsylvania Constitution which states:

That all men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience; no man can of right be compelled to attend, erect or support any place of worship, or to maintain any ministry against his consent; no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the

rights of conscience; and no preference shall be given to any religious establishment or mode of worship.<sup>29</sup>

Based in this understanding of religious free exercise, the board passed a resolution on December 9, 1834, stating, “This board cannot but consider the introduction or use of any religious exercises, books or lessons into the public schools, which have not been adopted by the board, as contrary to law; and the use of any such religious exercises, books or lessons, is hereby directed to be discontinued.” In the same vein, another resolution was passed by the Controllers on January 10, 1834, directed “That no children be required to attend or unite in the reading of the Bible in the public schools, whose parents are conscientiously opposed thereto. Resolved, that those children whose parents conscientiously prefer and desire any particular version of the Bible, *without note or comment*, be furnished with the same.”<sup>30</sup>

These resolutions indicated that at its inception the Philadelphia school system took seriously the right to a “freedom of conscience” by all those participating in a free public education. Religious “exercises, books and lessons” were all off limits, but the Bible itself could be used as a reader, the only stipulation being that educators could not inject “note or comment” into the use of scripture. This prevented schools from getting involved in denominationally based theological instruction while still employing the Bible as an educational tool. Four years later, in 1838, however, the state legislature began *requiring* the Bible’s use as a textbook in schools. The act stated, “The Old and New Testaments, containing the best extant code of morality, in simple, beautiful and pure language, shall be used as a school book for Reading, without comment by the Teacher, but not as a textbook for religious discussion.”<sup>31</sup> Before this act passed, scriptural readings would often be recited aloud to the student body to start the school day, adhering somewhat easily to the requirement that no “note or comment” accompany the text.<sup>32</sup> The use of the Bible—particularly the default use of the King James Version—as a textbook in class, however, made many Catholics increasingly concerned that Protestant religious instruction would inevitably accompany classroom reading while Catholic Bibles would be legally prohibited because of concerns about religious commentary.

The legislative change in 1838, along with the growing controversy among New York Catholics agitating for right to freedom of conscious in their public schools, led Bishop Kenrick and his supporters to begin putting pressure on the Philadelphia school systems. Unlike Hughes’s agitations,

however, Kenrick's campaign was less politically aggressive and—instead of going through a progression of positions—immediately began demanding the removal of the Bible from educational instruction in public schools. Though the public education system in Philadelphia was relatively new, the idea that public education was a right for all children was beginning to gain ground by mid-century.<sup>33</sup> Some form of publicly funded education had been around in Pennsylvania for nearly forty years by the time of the riots. The first state education act was passed by the Pennsylvania legislature in 1802. Quickly dubbed the Pauper Education Act, it provided state-funded schooling for children whose parents could not pay for private education. The act was renewed in 1804 and again in 1809 until, in 1834, the free public schools system was established not only for the poor but for all children of the state.<sup>34</sup>

As public school systems began to emerge, in Pennsylvania, and around the country, education began to represent social and economic opportunity, together with entry into citizenship. As Hilary Moss noted in her article, "The Tarring and Feathering of Thomas Paul Smith: Common Schools, Revolutionary Memory and the Crisis of Black Citizenship in Antebellum Boston," the job of education was to impart basic academic skills, and to adapt all students into their role as national citizens. Moss notes, "the school-house . . . was an agent of Americanization, an institution whose central purpose was to create a loyal and homogeneous citizenry. As immigrants flooded the new nation's ports of entry, schooling for citizenship assumed an even greater urgency."<sup>35</sup>

The right to control the education of their children in their own religious tradition was important, but was symbolic of a larger deprivation of full citizenship felt by Catholics. By agitating for agency in deciding school curriculum, Catholics were exercising rights they claimed as citizens. Equal access for their children to Catholic Bibles in schools, or—barring that—as Francis Kenrick demanded, no Bibles in schools at all, was an assertion of Catholics' position as equal citizens to their Protestant counterparts, with an equal say in how and what their children were taught. This was particularly important to Kenrick and his supporters as their ability to establish a system of parochial schools in Philadelphia was hampered by lack of monetary support. Public schools, therefore, were the only option for the vast majority of Catholics around the city and dictating the program of study in those schools was an exercise of their constitutional rights. The stakes were high, as their demands represented nothing less than their status as full citizens of the United States, able to claim the right to freedom of conscience in the public sphere.

Freedom of conscience, for those embroiled in this debate, derived from a long developing understanding of the relationship between religion and the state in the American context.<sup>36</sup> The writings of John Locke on the separation of religion and state, and its influence on the language and ideas found in the US Constitution, as well as significant ideas on religious tolerance from documents like the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen Freedom, created a discourse of rights in the United States that ostensibly allowed citizens to freely believe anything they wished, even if in error, without the threat of persecution or denial of the rights as a result of those beliefs. Freedom of conscience as a natural right of men, however, was not a concept that sprung fully formed with total unanimity of acceptance in the United States. Before the nation was even established as such, religious establishment by some colonies—and later some states—was juxtaposed against ongoing political and social debates over the extent to which minority religious populations had the right to adhere fully in the dictates of their conscience without penalty in *any* aspect of civil life.

Scholars such as Sidney Mead have warned against giving too much credit to colonial America and the early US nation for launching a triumphant, united march toward religious acceptance and equality. According to Mead, at the time of the founding there did not exist a religious majority powerful enough to force establishment of their preferred group and therefore no one denomination had a dominant enough position to strong-arm an establishment. As a result, Mead suggests, the tradition of free exercise came from a practical necessity: if religious groups expected the freedom to worship, they reluctantly had to let others do the same.<sup>37</sup> Despite the possibility of such a pragmatic origin, the language and philosophical influences of the nation's founding documents regarding the right of every citizen to the free exercise of religion had gained rhetorical purchase—if not always practical application—at the time of the riots.

The presence of religious free exercise as an important value in national discourse, however, did not stifle debate over *which* religious traditions should be covered by such rights and whether or not some religious traditions—particularly Catholicism—could even be considered compatible with democratic republicanism. For many, Protestantism was *the* “culturally established symbolic religion” that dictated the form and function of most all civic institutions. Though there was an effort made by public officials and organizations to indicate no preference among Protestant sects, the preference for Protestantism itself was blatant. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania itself was born of

this kind of contradictory narrative of religious free-exercise. William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, had established the colony as a safe haven for persecuted Quakers based in ideals of religious toleration and freedom of conscience. His founding principles expanded beyond the protection of Quakers and promoted “religious toleration, participatory government, and brotherly love” for all. Because of its commitment to religious tolerance, Pennsylvania attracted settlers of many faiths but, despite the right to worship as they chose, Jewish and Catholic settlers in Pennsylvania were still denied full rights as colonial citizens. Not Jews, Catholics, or the Native Americans Penn went to pains to maintain good a relationship with could hold political office or vote.<sup>38</sup> Those political rights were reserved for Protestants only.

Nearly 150 years later, in the 1830s, cultural Christianity continued to prevail and many considered Protestantism the “de facto established religion.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Protestant dominance was not simply an innocuous default position that reflected the identity of the majority, but was symbolic of an overarching Christianity that America had a duty to preserve. The civic myth of Puritans crossing the ocean to seek religious freedom loomed large in the American imagination by this time. These perceived values of religious freedom brought by the Puritans were now key pieces in the cultural imagination of the moral responsibilities held by the citizens of United States to secure the place of religion in American society, as well as the obligation for the United States to set an example for the rest of the world. Bequeathed by the “Puritan fathers,” John Winthrop’s phrase “City upon a Hill” and its implications trickled down into contemporary narratives concerning the place of religion in the United States and the duty of her citizens to honor their origins by respecting the nation’s founding intentions.<sup>40</sup> The United States, for many, could only continue in its mission as the proverbial “City upon a Hill” if its Protestant traditions remained dominant.<sup>41</sup>

Catholics provided a particularly troublesome threat to those looking to preserve the Protestant dominance in the United States. Catholicism, despite its peripheral similarities to Protestantism, was seen as a religious tradition that posed a direct danger to the tenants and requirements of democracy. In the nineteenth century, anti-Catholic sentiment derived from the widely held belief that “Catholicism was incompatible with democracy.” The devotion of Catholics to the pope was understood as overriding all other potential loyalties and, even worse, Catholics were seen as blindly following papal edicts without the ability to form political and social opinions on their own, corrupting the idealized view of the democratic process. In this same

vein, “parochial schools allegedly encouraged separatism and kept Catholics from becoming loyal Americans.”<sup>42</sup> The risks were imminent for Protestants who believed that Catholics derived all instruction in thoughts and deeds straight from the Vatican, leaving no room for personal will.<sup>43</sup> If Catholics had influence over democratic systems in the United States, their theocratic dogmata were perceived as a threat to the freedom of conscience so crucial to an American democratic society. Protestant activists were uncomfortable with the idea of Catholic schools flourishing in the United States because of the perceived threat to the Enlightenment-inherited right to freedom of conscience in religious and social matters.

These prejudices by Protestants were a particularly bitter irony for Catholics, as the right to freedom of conscience was exactly what they perceived as being infringed upon by Protestant activists. Catholics found the public funding of Protestant-influenced public school systems to be blatant examples of the prejudicial differentiation between acceptable forms of religious instruction. Catholics throughout the Northeast were tapped into the issue of education and religious freedom for years before the uprisings in Philadelphia. One of many local papers serving the growing Catholic population in the United States, the *Catholic Press*, published between 1829 and 1832 in Hartford, Connecticut, devoted a whole section of their newspaper to “Prejudice in Education,” which examined what schools taught both Protestant and Catholic children from young ages. The paper admonished the education of young children, in which, “the child is ushered into the school and here is more solidly confirmed what the nursery had begun. Here tracts and theological rubbish are put into their hands, and as they respect their teachers, they do not call in question the truth or falsehood of what they read; and of course believe them to be true.” The “tracts” and “theological rubbish” in the article referenced a predominance of anti-Catholic rhetoric imparted to children in both direct and indirect ways through the schools. The schools were seen as agents of the state and, as such, Catholics protesting their Protestant slant argued that the schools had a responsibility to hold up the right to religious freedom of conscience they believed to be their constitutional due. The author of the piece in the *Catholic Press* calls upon the public schools to channel “the ever memorable founding fathers of the constitution, whose ideas are elevated above the dismal shades of bigotry, who consider every individual as a brother, and are willing to allow their neighbor what they claim to themselves—the right of worshipping God according to the dictates of their conscience.”<sup>44</sup> Though many articles like the above appeared in specifically Catholic papers early on, the discussion moved

more and more into mainstream newspapers in the 1840s as the controversy over Bibles in public schools intensified.

This was the religious, ideological, and political environment infused throughout the nation and particularly in the city of Philadelphia in May of 1844. What would end up being one of the most violent and destructive events in the city's history began with a simple meeting announcement placed by the American Republican Association in one of the most circulated native newspapers, the *Native American*. The American Republicans scheduled the meeting to take place in the heart of an Irish neighborhood in Kensington. Emboldened by their rising poll numbers, the group was in the midst of a campaign to open branches of their political party all around the city, even—perhaps especially—in neighborhoods like Kensington.<sup>45</sup> The notice ran on both May 2 and 3, advertising that the gathering would occur on “Friday afternoon, May 3rd, at 6 o’clock, at the corner of Second and Master Streets. All friendly to the cause are invited to attend.”<sup>46</sup> At the appointed time, the Third Ward group assembled outside in an open lot next to the State house and began a round of speeches by party members laying out the tenets and beliefs of the nativist party. The American Republican Party claimed they sought to “protect the country” with a political platform requiring that only native-born Americans be allowed to hold office, that the Bible be taught in public school, and that naturalization require a twenty-one-year waiting period.<sup>47</sup>

The assembly, purposefully held in a predominantly Irish Catholic section of town, was certainly an act of provocation, though what type of reaction the nativists intended compared to what they received is unknown. As the speeches became more outwardly aggressive about Catholic intentions to “sell the [Constitution] to a foreign power,” the gathering Irish crowd began heckling the speakers who then challenged the Irish to come debate the nativists on any of the points presented. The majority Irish Catholic crowd, seemingly uninterested in a futile debate, instead rushed the makeshift stage, “demolish[ing] the platform and carry[ing] it home for firewood.”<sup>48</sup> The broken-up meeting forced the nativists to flee the premises and reassemble at the George Fox Temperance Hall.<sup>49</sup> The nativists resolved to reassemble in the same location on May 6 at four o’clock in the afternoon. Their new notice in the *Native American* called for nativists and their supporters to reassemble with the direct purpose of “expressing their indignation at the outrage of Friday evening last, and to take the necessary steps to prevent a repetition of it. *Natives be punctual and resolved to sustain your rights as Americans, firmly but moderately.*”<sup>50</sup>



On the night of the second assembly, speeches criticizing immigrant election abuses and condemning the influence of religion in the politics of Catholics were underway and Irish Catholics began gathering in the periphery. Reports said a crowd nearly ten times larger than that of the previous meeting gathered, certainly comprised of both Irish Catholics and nativists who had heard of the previous gathering's disruption. The second speaker had barely begun when a heavy rain forced the nativists and the wary Catholics to flee for shelter.<sup>51</sup> As the nativists proceeded through the Irish section of town toward the public market house, territorial tempers among the Irish flared, incensed that the nativists would use a site so integral and personal to their community to continue their anti-Catholic rhetoric. A scuffle soon began, and though the nativists were able to force

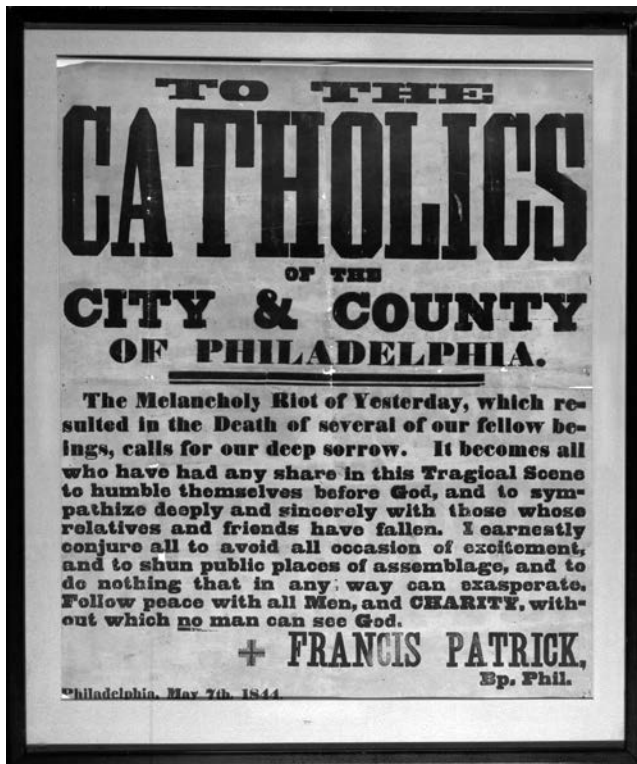


FIGURE 2 Broadside, Bishop Francis Patrick [Kenrick], Philadelphia May 7, 1844. From: American Catholic Historical Society Collection. Digital Library@Villanova University. Used with permission.

the Irish out of the marketplace temporarily, being in the heart of an Irish Catholic community was their ultimate undoing. Blows from fists, bricks, and clubs were soon accompanied by several shots from firearms, one of which struck and killed a nativist marcher, George Shiffer. Fleeing the open market place as first gunfire broke out, the nativists found themselves outnumbered on enemy ground with nowhere to go and soon retreated back to the market house until one of their members, Peter Albright, brought muskets, rifles, and additional men to help them fight their way through Kensington, attacking the houses of notable Irish community leaders along the way.<sup>52</sup>

The battle was broken up at five o'clock, two hours after it began, by Sheriff McMichael and his deputies. Despite the temporary calm, however, a third haphazard assembly of the nativists was formed later that evening where they discussed what should be done to aid and avenge the dead and wounded. The meeting quickly adjourned around ten in the evening, unleashing the group of angry and riled nativists into the Irish quarter of Kensington where the attacks on Irish homes, businesses, and churches began and continued into the next day.<sup>53</sup>

On the morning of May 7 the streets were filled with crowds "gathered on every corner, listening to volunteer speakers exhort against Catholicism. A procession was hastily formed and marched through the streets bearing a torn American flag on which was painted: 'This is the flag that was trampled under foot by the Irish papists.'"<sup>54</sup> Both Catholic and nativist leaders released statements in an attempt to address the crowds. Bishop Kenrick had bills posted through the city condemning the participation of Catholics in what was increasingly becoming a city-wide riot. Nativists, on the other hand, in the first heated hours of the riots called for action. The *Native American* declared that "another St. Bartholomew's day is begun in the streets of Philadelphia. The bloody hand of the Pope has stretched itself forth to our destruction. We now call on our fellow-citizens, who regard free institutions, whether they be native or adopted, to arm. Our liberties are now fought for;—let us not be slack in our preparations."<sup>55</sup>

Nativist rioters took heed of the call and burned more than thirty Irish homes, the Hibernia Hose Company—an Irish fire company—and St. Michaels and St. Augustine churches before the militia broke up the rioting by the morning of May 9. Though Irish property received the most damage, papers reported that "between fifteen and twenty persons have been killed, and nearly two hundred maimed or wounded. Of the number

killed, only two were Irish, the others were all Native Americans.”<sup>56</sup> Though the assessments of the number of dead and wounded continued to change, consensus was that nativists suffered the bulk of the deaths. Whether these deaths were a result of Catholics defending themselves from attack or acting the aggressors was a subject of great debate among the newspapers.<sup>57</sup> Both sides proclaimed their innocence by claiming their actions were in self-defense. Self-defense was indeed at play in the action of both the Irish Catholics and the nativists at various points in the progression of the riots. The violent aggression by the Kensington residents during the American Republican meeting was provoked only by rhetoric. The firefight between nativists and Catholics on the night of May 6 was the result of nativists acquiring guns to support their own defense. But the widespread and devastating destruction of the Third Ward by nativists for days afterward was most certainly seen as an act of revenge. The fact that the defense of this property by Catholics resulted in more deaths for nativists, however, gained sympathy for the anti-Catholics in certain circles, and the debate over who was truly at fault went unresolved.

Also contested in the immediate aftermath was the cause of the riots themselves. Many nativist publications attributed the disturbance to attempts by the Irish Catholics to abridge their right to free speech and assembly. Others attributed the riots to the public display of bigotry and intolerance by the nativists in a known Catholic part of town, but increasingly the tensions over the issue of the Bible in public schools began to emerge in the public assessment as the root cause of the confrontation.<sup>58</sup> The *Jeffersonian Republican* reported several weeks after the riots that “there had been some ill feeling in that district, for some time, between the catholic and protestants, concerning the use of the Bible in Common Schools.”<sup>59</sup> The causal nature of this tension was certainly reinforced by two very telling resolutions by nativists, drafted in the midst of the riots during one of their many impromptu meetings:

*Resolved*, That we consider the Bible in the Public Schools as necessary for the faithful course of the instruction therein, and we are determined to maintain it there, in despite of the efforts of naturalized and unnaturalized foreigners, to eject it therefrom. *Resolved*, that this meeting believes that the recently successful friends of the Bible, in the district of Kensington, was the inciting cause which resulted in the murderous scenes of the 6<sup>th</sup> inst.<sup>60</sup>

The rush to blame the violence on the issue of Bibles in schools, however, was soon complicated by Catholic writings on the riot that pointed toward more fundamental issues at stake in assessing what led to the eruption of violence and how the causes would be interpreted in the aftermath.

The contests over the meaning of the riots were intimately related to contests over the rights of citizenship. After the May 1844 riots in Philadelphia Bishop John Hughes wrote many editorials and delivered many talks on the issue of religious freedom and the Catholic claim to the same rights enjoyed by Protestants of all denominations. Knowing the blame for the violence could easily be attributed to Catholic actors and used as an excuse to delegitimize their political demands regarding right to freedom of conscience, Hughes made an appeal to Protestants and Catholics alike to recognize what was at stake if nativist assessments of the riots, and nativist ideology more generally, prevailed. Hughes asked for nothing less than an acknowledgment of religious equality among sects:

In the public schools which were established according to a system now in force, our children had to study books which we could not approve, religious exercises were used which we did not recognize, and our children were compelled to take part in them. . . . The Public School Society has introduced just so much of religious and sectarian teaching as it pleased them, in the plenitude of their irresponsible character, to impart. They professed to exclude religion, and yet they introduced so much in quantity as they thought proper, and as much a quality as violated our religious rights. . . . We do not ask the introduction of religious teaching in any public school, but we contend that if such religious influences be brought to bear as the business of education, it shall be, so far as our children as concerned, in accordance with the religious beliefs of their parents and families.<sup>61</sup>

Hughes's most powerful statements concerning the rights of Catholics within education came when addressing Catholic audiences, telling them directly that

there has been an invasion of your religious rights, and as spiritual guardian of those now before me, I am bound to help their cause . . . we will never submit to a direct violation of our rights . . . in this community, all religious denominations are supposed to be equal. There is

no such thing as a predominant religion, and the smallest minority is entitled to the same protection as the greatest majority. No denomination, whether numerous or not, can impose its virtue on a minority at the common expense of threat minority or itself.<sup>62</sup>

In demanding the right to freedom of conscience in schools by expressing a desire for truly nondenominational instruction, Hughes and his supporters were attempting to exercise their right to take part in public life as citizens of the United States. The rhetorical importance of the right to religious free exercise and right to education were widely recognized aspects of the rights of citizens during the mid-1800s. Having a hand in dictating the nature of what their children were taught was most certainly important to Catholic parents. Bringing their children up to respect and not revile their religious heritage was, no doubt, a profound issue for the community. The riots, then, *were* about religion. They *were* about immigration. They *were* about political participation, and education, and Bibles. But behind all of these issues was one of status. If Catholics could be considered full citizens with all the rights and responsibilities that entailed, then their abilities to make decisions for their children and their communities well into the future was assured.

This battle over the rights to citizenship was a major motivator in the outbreak of the Philadelphia Bible Riots. Concerns over the ability of Catholics to uphold loyalty to the United States over their devotion to a remote sovereign pope, made blatant claims by Catholics to citizenship an incendiary action. Protestant nativists, in reacting to Catholics, were attempting to enforce what they perceived as the “natural” order of the community. The discourse of rights, however, and their widening application to more populations than just white, landholding Protestants was gaining rhetorical force. William Penn’s “Holy Experiment” was being pushed to its logical conclusion, testing the limits of its promise of inclusivity and tolerance. In the end, Catholics were the ones who were seen as having had their rights violated in the arena of freedom of conscience, and the city of Philadelphia worked to compensate them for some of their losses. This compensation did little to resolve the issue, either for Kensington or the nation. Despite the concern and outrage felt by Philadelphians and others around the country at the destruction the Bible Riots caused, Catholics would continue to endure decades of controversy surrounding their right to request religious neutrality in schools and their status as American citizens. World War II would raise suspicion among Protestant purists about the ideological connection between fascism and

Catholics. Wartime anxiety over Catholics infusing fascism into American government soon turned into a panic that Catholics desired to merge church and state and mount a takeover of what purists saw as America's originally Protestant, but increasingly secular structure. After the war Catholics would also find themselves participants in seminal cases leading all the way up to the US Supreme Court that challenged their right to gain government funding for parochial schools. The Supreme Court decisions of *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township* (1947) and *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948), traditionally framed as exclusively concerned with the concept of separation of church and state, were cases engaged in "an ongoing discussion about Catholicism and democracy," a discussion reanimated once again during John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign.<sup>63</sup> The Philadelphia Riots of 1844 was one in a string of controversies involving Catholics' right to full citizenship that emerged throughout American history, finding little resolution well into the twentieth century.

While other scholars mentioned in this article have argued from the perspective of either religion or economics perpetuating the violence of this event and many others, my argument asserts that issues of citizenship are at the heart of the riots, an issue that encompasses religion, economics, rights, and race. The concerns expressed by the nativists that framed Catholics as incompatible with American religiosity, capitalism, and democratic voluntarism made *who* could have access to citizenship the central issue driving their actions. Religious belief, access to economic systems, political and social rights—all of these things came together to constitute how national identity was defined, who comprised the nation, and therefore what, by extension, constituted a citizen. The Philadelphia Bible riots were an attempt by the nativists to control citizenship in the United States at the expense of Catholic rights.

AMANDA BEYER-PURVIS is a Ph.D. candidate in US history at the University of Florida, Gainesville.

#### NOTES

Thanks to advisers and colleagues for their support, suggestions, and critiques: Dr. Elizabeth Dale, Dr. Kathryn Wilson, Christopher Sawula, the participants in the Atlanta Graduate Student Conference in US History at Emory University, and Jason Purvis.

1. Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800–1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 226.
2. Ibid.
3. John H. Lee, *The Origin and Progress of the American Party in Politics: Embracing a Complete History of the Philadelphia Riots in May and July, 1844 . . . and a Refutation of the Arguments Founded on the Charges of Religions Proscription and Secret Combinations* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 81.
4. Katie Oxx, *The Nativist Movement in America: Religious Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Routledge Press, 2013), 3, 57.
5. Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 4.
6. For more information on this trend see Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 220. He notes, “For more than a decade before the middle 1840s forces had been at work to create antipathy toward Rome; societies, lecturers, newspapers, magazines, churches, ministers, and a political party had all been enlisted to the cause.”
7. Feldberg, *Philadelphia Riots*, 55, 5. See Feldberg’s historiographical discussion on the work of David Montgomery, Bruce Laurie, Martin Lipset, Richard Hofstadter, Earl Rabb, and David Brion Davis’s interpretations of nativist membership.
8. Dennis Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1973).
9. Alexandra F. Griswold, “An Open Bible and Burning Churches: Authority, Truth, And Folk Belief in Protestant-Catholics Conflict—Philadelphia, 1844” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 8.
10. Bruce Dorsey, “Freedom of Religion: Bibles, Public Schools, and Philadelphia’s Bloody Riots of 1844,” *Philadelphia Legacies* 8, no. 1 (2008): 12–17.
11. Oxx, *Nativist Movement* 55. Oxx attributes the riots to three distinctly religious influences. First, she notes the importance of how distinctive understandings of the Bible—particularly the use or exclusion of commentaries, translations, and apocryphal books—functioned in different Christian communities. Second, she highlighted the transnational and historical animosity between Protestants and Catholics that led to public conflict over what constituted non-establishment and free-exercise. Third, the evangelical imperative to Christianize the American nation, stoked by the Second Great Awakening but derived from a long national tradition, made nativist groups both aggressive in their own efforts and wary of Catholic intensions.
12. Kenneth Milano, *The Philadelphia Nativist Riots: Irish Kensington Erupts* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013), 48.
13. For more on uprisings, riots and popular sovereignty see Pauline Maier “Popular Uprising and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America” *William and Mary Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1970): 3–35; Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People*:

- The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: Norton, 1988); Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution" *William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1994): 3–38.
14. Feldberg, *Philadelphia Riots*, 54; Oxx, *Nativist Movement*, 87. Nativist groups were constantly merging and splitting. The Order of United American Mechanics and the Patriotic Daughters of America were affiliated. The Native American Party became the American Republican Party, claiming 110,000 members. The American Protestant Society merged with the Christian Alliance in 1848. In 1849 the Christian Union and Foreign Evangelical Society joined them to form the American and Foreign Christian Union. In the 1850s, as the Native American party/American Republican party began to wane, the national Know-Nothing Party emerged to take their place. With the constant merges and reorganizations, membership tallies are unreliable.
  15. Oxx, *Nativist Movement*, 57–58.
  16. David H. E. Becker, "Free Exercise of Religion Under the New York Constitution" 84 *Cornell L. Rev.* 1088 (1998–1999), 1102.
  17. Stephen R. Prothero, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn't* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2007), 121.
  18. *Ibid.*, 122.
  19. Bernard C. Diethorn and Vincent P. Lannie, "For the Honor and Glory of God: The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1840," *History of Education Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 52
  20. Steven Green, *The Bible, The School, and The Constitution: The Clash that Shaped Modern Church-State Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
  21. Lloyd P. Jorgenson, *The State and the Non-Public School, 1825–1925* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), vii. Not all historians agree on what these roots meant for the development of modern public schooling. One of the early assessors, R. F. Butts, promoted in the 1950s the concept that original intent should inform the formation of the church/state/school relationship. Butts used founding documents, court cases, and writings by founders to attempt to prove that direct aid or support to religious schools by federal or state governments was aid to a religious institution and thus unconstitutional and that the principle of separation of church and state in education prohibited the use of public funds for many kinds of religious schools as fully as it prohibits the use of public funds for a single kind of sectarian school. His work also displayed anti-Catholic leanings when taken in context of the liberal intellectual movement calling for separation in the face of parochial encroachment. Lloyd P. Jorgensen, less interested in originalism and more interested in the historical narrative of public school creation in the United States, wrote on the origins of what motivated the political and legal principles that nonpublic schools are ineligible to receive public funds and that Bible reading and prayer are forbidden in the public school.



22. For an extensive exploration of this movement see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925* (New York: Athenaeum, 1971).
23. Emma Long, *The Church-State Debate: Religion, Education, and the Establishment Clause in Postwar America* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 12. According to Long, “The public school movement was spurred on by Protestant Christian groups [in the early nineteenth century], mainly Baptist and Methodists, who believed in making education available for all. Although not intended as places of religious dogma, elements of Protestant religious belief and practice permeated the schools, whether intended to preserve order in the classroom, mould the good character of their (largely Protestant) students or simply to recognize the wonder and power of God. . . . The public schools thus became a symbol of the history of anti-Catholicism in the United States, an image which persisted into the twentieth century.”
24. David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Robert W. Lynn, *Protestant Strategies in Education* (New York: Association Press, 1964), and Timothy L. Smith, “Protestant Schooling and American Nationality, 1800–1850,” *Journal of American History* 53 (1966–67): 679–94. Scholars writing after Frasier also repeated this argument.
25. Donald H. Kent, “The Fight for Free Schools in Pennsylvania,” *Historic Pennsylvania Leaflet*, no. 6 (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1976). Available online at <https://archive.org/details/FightForFreeSchoolsInPennsylvania>.
26. Prothero, *Religious Literacy*, 120–21.
27. Diethorn and Lannie, “For the Honor and Glory of God,” 46.
28. Annual Report of the Controllors of the Public Schools of the City and County of Philadelphia First School District of the State of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, Pa.). Controllors of the Public Schools, the Board of Controllors (January 1844).
29. *Ibid.*, 5.
30. *Ibid.*, 6.
31. *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Controllors of Public Schools* (Philadelphia: J. Crissy, 1842), 5.
32. Diethorn and Lannie, “For the Honor and Glory of God,” 56.
33. For more on the development of public education in the United States see R. F. Butts, *Public Education in the United States: From Revolution to Reform* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978).
34. Kent, “Fight for Free Schools.”
35. Hilary J. Moss, “The Tarring and Feathering of Thomas Paul Smith: Common Schools, Revolutionary Memory and the Crisis of Black Citizenship in Antebellum Boston,” *New England Quarterly* 80, no. 2 (June 2007): 218–21.
36. Certainly it can be traced back much further. See, for example, Sanford Cobb, *The Rise of Religious Liberty in America: A History* (New York: Macmillan, 1902),

- ix–x. Cobb's section on *The Old World Idea* is a massive summary of the Western Christian ethics of liberty of conscience including the following: "Persecution by Diocletian—Toleration of Galerius—Constantine—Augustine—Rome—Gregory the Great—Charlemagne—Henry IV.—Innocent III.—Church supremacy—Frederic II.—Boniface VIII.—Edward I.—Philip the Fair—Lutheran and Reformed—Calvin—Church of England—Church of Scotland—Westminster Confession—Spinoza—Cartwright—Hooker—Cromwell—Quakers—John Locke—English Toleration Act—Burke—Anabaptists." Cobb does make a point of crediting A. Innes of Edinburgh's text *Church and State* with having provided much of the material for this section.
37. Sidney Mead, "From Coercion to Persuasion: Another Look at the Rise of Religious Liberty and the Emergence of Denominationalism," *Church History* 25, no. 2 (1956): 317–37.
  38. William C. Kashatus, "William Penn's Legacy: Religious and Spiritual Diversity," *Pennsylvania Heritage Magazine* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011), <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/pa-heritage/william-penn-legacy-religious-spiritual-diversity.html>.
  39. Ronald, F. Thiemann, *Religion in Public Life: A Dilemma for Democracy* (Georgetown: Georgetown University Press/Twentieth Century Fund, 1996), 33–34.
  40. The Puritans, in fact, have served many rhetorical purposes during different time periods in US history. As George McKenna points out in his text, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*, perceptions about what the Puritans represented began to change even before independence was declared; "Since the middle of the seventeenth century, then, the original Puritans had undergone three makeovers. First, they were changed from a people seeking shelter from persecution to visionaries bent on evangelizing the world. Then they turned into sturdy Whigs, defending God-given freedoms from the devouring British Antichrist . . . in the last years of the eighteenth century, they became the benevolent but firm 'Puritan Fathers,' keeping watch over their people and inculcating habits of lawfulness and hard work." George McKenna, *The Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 76. The historical narrative of the Puritans recounts their settlement originating in New England, mostly in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the 1630s, and focuses their new life—free of religious prosecution—on the integration of scriptural dictates in the running of their governing bodies, as well as their spiritual lives. The Puritans, according to this history, saw themselves as entering into a covenant with God, chosen to establish a new Israel in America with the intent of making their new home a "City upon a Hill": a beacon to the world exemplifying the religious purity and perfection of a nation devoted to the will of God. See Frank Lambert, *The Founding Fathers and the Place of Religion in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 74. The first use of this "Puritan phrase"

as a descriptor of the new commonwealth is attributed to the speech “A Model of Christian Charity” given by John Winthrop, governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, aboard the “flagship of the first Puritan immigration.” McKenna, *Puritan Origins of American Patriotism*, 18.

41. One of the most prominent figures in this debate was Rev. Jasper Adams, who delivered a sermon for the South Carolina Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1833 entitled “The Relation of Christianity to Civil Government in the United States.” For his part, Adams welcomed disestablishment, and any denominational preference was undesirable to him. He believed a generalized Protestant Christianity should be institutionalized as the foundational religion of the country in order to shape the “social, civil, and political institutions.” In addition, Adams circulated his sermon widely among intellectuals and statesmen of the day, making his philosophy and, more important, his name well known in influential circles. For this reason, Adams was a prominent part of the reemergence of a heated public debate on “whether Christianity was a part of common law” in the late 1820s through the early 1830s. Both Jefferson (before his death) and Justice Story weighed in often and loudly during the debate. Jefferson vehemently denied that the United States was, in any legal sense, a Christian nation. In other words, whatever relation US law had with Christian moral principles, common law courts had no ability to legislate or enforce religious orthodoxy. Story countered with the argument that God’s law was a fundamental, natural law: the foundation of all human law, found in church doctrine, and also revealed in religious truths that shaped the human code of morality and, therefore, the concept of legislation. Adams, though approving of Story’s response, was able to provide a more concrete rebuttal, citing American case law where judges referenced religious discourse in their decisions, to prove his point that Christianity always had been and continued to be a part of common law in the United States. For Adams, the only way to assure that religion would not be destroyed by a secular society, which he saw as inevitable if the governing constitution did not explicitly endorse Christianity as the national religion, was to read the meaning of the First Amendment as having a Protestant-specific connotation. Jefferson and Madison’s ideas were exactly the opposite; the only way for religion to flourish was to keep government and religion in completely separate spheres. See Daniel L. Dreisbach, ed. *Religion and Politics in the Early Republic: Jasper Adams and the Church-State Debate* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 2–15.
42. Lynn Dumenil, “The Tribal Twenties: ‘Assimilated’ Catholics’ Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1991): 22.
43. Philip Hamburger, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). “They thereby developed an anti-ecclesiastical perspective, from which growing numbers of Protestants, whether or not theologically liberal, perceived the Catholic Church as a threat to individual mental freedom” (194).

44. *The Catholic Press* [Hartford, CT], June 7, 1832, 3.
45. Feldberg, *Philadelphia Riots*, 96.
46. *Native American*, May 2, 1844.
47. Oxx, *Nativist Movement*, 87.
48. Feldberg, *Philadelphia Riots*, 102.
49. The immediate response of this first incident by the *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, an ostensibly nonpartisan paper, framed the Irish as the aggressors in violating the nativists' Constitutional right to assembly. The paper condemned the Irish reaction, noting, "The citizens who comprised this meeting were assembled in the exercise of a right which is guaranteed to them by the constitution, and it has come to a pretty pass if, availing themselves of their constitutional rights, they are to be assailed by others, and their lives sacrificed in the streets." Lee, *Origin and Progress of the American Party*, 44–45.
50. *Native American*, May 6, 1844 (emphasis in the original).
51. Feldberg, *Philadelphia Riots*, 103.
52. Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 223–24.
53. Lee, *Origin and Progress of the American Party*, 55–56.
54. Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 224.
55. *Native American*, May 7, 1844, referenced in Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 255.
56. *Jeffersonian Republican*, May 23, 1844.
57. The *Native American* and the *Sun*, both nativist papers, naturally framed the Catholics as aggressors. The *Public Ledger*, the *Forum*, the *United States Gazette*, and the *Daily Chronicle*, all "neutral" papers struggled a bit more with the issue. Lee, *Origin and Progress of the American Party*, 103–11.
58. *New-York Daily Tribune*, May 16, 1844: "This was the case, as I can bear witness, so as long as the speakers confined their remarks to the political question named for discussion in the published notices for the convening of the meeting; and it was only when one of the most violent of the orators began to denounce the religious sentiments of his fellow citizens, (a subject upon which the Constitution has foreclosed all debate,) that the tumult began to show itself."
59. *Jeffersonian Republican*, May 23, 1844.
60. Lee, *Origin and Progress of the American Party*, 71.
61. *Ibid.*, 7.
62. *Ibid.*, 8.
63. John T. McGreevy, "Thinking on One's Own: Catholicism in the American Intellectual Imagination, 1928–1960," *Journal of American History* 84, no. 1 (1997): 97–131, 122. *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township* was a case involving a challenge to a statue originating in the New Jersey legislature that allowed local boards to compensate parents for the cost of bussing to both public schools and Catholic parochial schools; *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 US 1 (1947). *McCullum v. Board of Education* was a case challenging the legality of allowing "release time" for religious instruction during the public school day; *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 333 US 203 (1948).