

# 'AMERICA FIRST': WHY HAS NATIVISM RESURFACED IN THE NEW WORLD?

DONALD J. TRUMP AND NATIVIST POLITICS IN THE USA

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“Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people – a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs.” (Jay)

“You are a stranger in your own land. You do not recognize yourself in how others see you. It is a struggle to feel seen and honored. And to feel honored you have to feel – and feel seen as – moving forward. But through no fault of your own, and in ways that are hidden, you are slipping backward.

You turn to your workplace for respect – but wages are flat and jobs insecure. So you look to other sources of honor. You get no extra points for your race. You look to gender, but if you’re a man, you get no extra points for that either. If you are straight you are proud to be a married, heterosexual male, but that pride is now seen as a potential sign of homophobia – a source of dishonor. Regional honor? Not that either. You are often disparaged for the place you call home. As for the church, many look down on it, and the proportion of Americans outside any denomination has risen. You are old, but in America, attention is trained on the young. People like you – white, Christian, working and middle class – suffer this sense of fading honor demographically too, as this very group has declined in numbers.” (Hochschild 144-45)



## **Abstract**

This thesis sets out to explain why 2016 witnessed a resurgence of nativism, culminating in a Donald Trump presidency. In this way, the alleged uniqueness of Trump's unexpected victory on 8 November 2016 is challenged by embedding it in American history. Identity politics and a concurrent sense of belonging have been present in the United States from its very inception. During various moments of crisis, a protectionist sense of identity has come to the fore. At these instances, an in-group of white, native-born Protestants had to be defended against the threats emanating from various 'outsiders' – either immigrants or minorities. In this thesis, the Know Nothing Party, the Second Ku Klux Klan, and the Tea Party will be used as evidence of the meandering history of nativism in the United States. Turning to the contemporary situation, we will argue that 2016 has witnessed a new nativist outbreak due to the combination of changing demographics, rising economic inequality, globalization, and polarization. This cocktail culminated at the end of Barack Obama's presidency, as Trump skilfully capitalized on this situation by appealing to the disenfranchised white working class. By vowing to make 'their' America great again and keeping unwanted 'foreigners' out, nativism formed a significant part of his campaign. Signposting this nativist platform are his Muslim ban and Mexican wall.

*Keywords:* nativism; Donald Trump; Know Nothings; Second Ku Klux Klan; Tea Party





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(21.605 words)



# Introduction

Last fall, I had the opportunity to cover the 2016 US presidential election from the front row as an intern at the VRT. I still remember the various discussions focusing on the near impossibility of a Trump presidency, as his campaign had supposedly succeeded in alienating nearly every minority in the American electorate. Some even argued that we ought to prepare for the nation's first 'Madam President.' However, as the election results trickled in during the early hours of 9 November, the impossible became reality. Donald J. Trump became the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, winning the electoral college with 306 to Clinton's 232 votes. Stunned by this unexpected twist of events and determined to find an explanation, I set out to research and ultimately write this thesis. Maybe American history could explain Trump's ascendancy to power.

Could it be that something fundamental had changed in Western society? Only months earlier the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union thereby similarly confounding friend and foe. Because of this abrupt swing to the right in the Anglo-Saxon world, many feared for the outcome of several important elections in 2017. However, with the Dutch, French and Austrian election contests completed, sighs of relief heaved through Europe, as the far right allegedly did not sweep these countries as expected. Nevertheless, their ideology decisively pushed the tone and content of these various elections rightward. Therefore, it is of paramount importance to try to determine the underlying causes that enabled this populist right wing discourse to thrive in the so-called 'liberal' West. Could that shift be ascribed to the strength of the right wing ideology or was it primarily due to the liberal elite's failure to provide an inclusive sense of freedom that would benefit each and every one? In this thesis, we will lift a corner of the veil and examine some of the dynamics behind Donald Trump's triumph.

Once more, identity and a concurrent sense of belonging seem to have been relegated from the fringes to the centre of the public debate. While in Europe, identity formation has been a long and steady natural-grown process throughout time, the United States has not such 'long history' to fall back upon. After all, the American project was premised on discarding everything that had been and restarting with a clean slate. The Constitution was drafted to form the legal backbone on which the whole project could be based. This artificial construct, however, did not decisively settle who would or could be regarded as 'American.' Therefore, its interpretation would be key, while its artificialness rendered it apt to contestation. Since the majority of people living in the United States descend from immigrants, the US constantly defined and redefined its peculiar and particular sense of identity. This is most commonly achieved by referring to the main characteristics of the 'American way of life': a strict adherence to the rule of law, a focus on individualism and a sense of freedom inextricably linked to economic success.

However, during various moments of crisis – whether political, social or economic – the United States loses its firm sense of who it is. At these crossroads, two options unveil – either one opts to

accept this new situation or one chooses to hark back to a protectionist sense of identity. By appealing to the latter, different right wing movements have had the opportunity to come to the fore. In contrast to left wing forces, which try to broaden the group of beneficiaries, these movements are primarily concerned with preserving the status quo by curbing the loss of both status and clout (Lipset and Raab 19-24). As Rory McVeigh writes, a right-wing movement can be described as “a social movement that acts on behalf of relatively advantaged groups with the goal of preserving, restoring, and expanding the rights and privileges of its members and constituents. These movements also attempt to deny similar rights and privileges to other groups in society.” (32)

One of the recurring ways to try to allay people’s fears is by redefining the boundaries concerning who is to be included and who is to be excluded. It is here that nativism enters the conversation. As is the case with many ideological concepts, nativism has been variously defined and referenced throughout history. Therefore, we will provide several definitions in order to grasp the phenomenon as best as possible. One of the earliest scholars of nativism was John Higham. In his seminal work *Strangers in the Land* (1955), he described nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections” (4). If we consult the Oxford English Dictionary, nativism is described as “The attitude, practice, or policy of protecting the interests of native-born or existing inhabitants against those of immigrants” (“Nativism”). Even though Tyler Anbinder aligns himself with the dictionary definition of nativism, he also attests that various other scholars see nativism as “an ethnocentric ideology that seeks to maintain the racial, religious, and political status quo of the nation” (“Nativism and Prejudice” 177). Ultimately, Brian Fry comes closest to the way nativism will be used in this thesis, as he defines it as “*a collective attempt by self-identified natives to secure or retain prior or exclusive rights to valued resources against the challenges reputedly posed by resident or prospective populations on the basis of their perceived foreignness*” (10, emphasis in original). Hence, in essence, nativism is concerned with protecting an in-group of existing inhabitants against an out-group of ‘alien’ peoples by preserving the political, economic and social standing of the former at the expense of the latter.

This nativist stance is a recurring phenomenon in American political history, as numerous movements have appealed to this innate sense of identity in order to oppose the influx of immigrants and/or the increasing standing of minorities. To put it in Peter Schrag’s words, “To be that special creature, the American, there always had to be the Other” (26). By delineating a ‘deserving’ in-group from a threatening out-group, these movements offered a sense of collectivity and order (D. Bennett 11). After all, by blaming the outsider for any dire situation, there was no need to take responsibility themselves. Paradoxically enough, the United States is a country built on immigration, as the original indigenous population was all but wiped out by the initial settlers. Hence, nativism is an ironic term, since those who deem themselves to be ‘natives’ are mere descendants of earlier generations of immigrants. Trump’s campaign slogan ‘America First,’ perfectly captures his kinship with America’s longstanding search for identity. Therefore, the question begs itself as to whether he inscribes himself in this long tradition of nativism.

In this thesis, we have a twofold objective. First, we will try to describe what defines nativism by examining several historical examples. Second, we will consider the contemporary American political sphere. Could it be that we are witnessing a resurgence of nativism? If so, why has nativism resurfaced in the ‘new world,’ culminating in a Trump presidency?

In order to address these questions, we will determine the main characteristics of American nativism and highlight several groups that were not recognised as part of the ‘in-group.’ These findings will be illustrated by means of three nativist movements, which span the entire history of the United States: the 19<sup>th</sup> century Know Nothing Party, the 20<sup>th</sup> century Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and

the 21<sup>st</sup> century Tea Party movement. While we acknowledge that there have been many more nativist movements in the United States, we have opted to highlight these, as they had a nationwide appeal, espoused a particular nativist agenda, and illustrate the changing scope and considerations of this ideology. This part primarily serves as a broad introduction to frame the contemporary situation and Donald Trump's appeal, actions, and rhetoric.

The Know Nothing Party – subsequently changing its name to the American Party – flourished in-between 1854 and 1860, when the nation was on the brink of the Civil War. While the inability of the traditional parties to cope with the sectional conflict certainly increased its momentum, the Know Nothing Party was primarily concerned with the increasing tide of Catholic immigration undermining the Protestant nature and ideals of the United States (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* ix-xv). Therefore, it is not surprising that their rallying cry was that “Americans must rule America” (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 125). Hence, they tried to keep Catholic immigrants out of the political decision-making process (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 125).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, immediately following WW I, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan reawakened this nativist sentiment. For some, the rapid changes in society, due to the Second Industrial Revolution and the accompanying large-scale Catholic immigration were just too much (Lipset and Raab 114). After all, staunch anti-Catholicism has been present from the country's very inception. As Frank Bohn contends, “Any effort to understand the history of the American mind which does not take full cognizance of this element must be like a presentation of Hamlet with no reference at all to the ghost of Hamlet's father.” (392) Since these newcomers originated from Southern and Eastern Europe and, as such, were no longer part of the Anglo-Saxon stock, they were perceived as threatening the fundamental ‘American’ identity (Schrag 47-54). Even Jews, African Americans, and women, who greatly benefitted from the aforementioned swift economic changes, were part and parcel of the Klan's backlash (D. Bennett 216-17; McVeigh 51-59). In order to counter these rapid changes, the Klan framed itself as a “‘one-hundred percent American’ organization,” in favour of the white, native-born Protestant majority (McVeigh 3).

More recently, the Tea Party materialized as a vehement opposition to Barack Obama's elevation to the White House and the various consequences this first black presidency seemed to entail. Its main objective was to protect the true nature of the United States – a white Protestant male country (Parker and Barreto 3-11). As an op-ed piece in *The New York Times* put it:

The conjunction of a black president and a female speaker of the House [Nancy Pelosi] – topped off by a wise Latina on the Supreme Court [Sonia Sotomayor] and a powerful gay Congressional committee chairman [Barney Frank] – would sow fears of disenfranchisement among a dwindling and threatened minority in the country no matter what policies were in play. ... When you hear demonstrators chant the slogan ‘Take our country back!’, these are the people they want to take the country back from. (Rich)

Even though every movement had its own priorities and enemies, it is possible to distil many similarities in their rhetoric and course of action. Of course, all three movements espoused a slate of policies, but nativism formed an important part of their respective programs, one we will particularly focus on in our discussion.

Turning to the contemporary situation, we will investigate whether it is possible to describe 2016 as a new benchmark in America's nativist history. In essence, we will try to explain why nativism once again blossomed out in contemporary America. By describing Donald Trump's presidential bid and eventual win as the latest outburst of nativism, we would demonstrate that Trump's rhetoric is not new

at all. Nativism was only one of several issues propelling Trump's candidacy, but one with enormous influence.



# Chapter 1      What is American Nativism? Identity Politics and the Threatening ‘Outsider’

Since nativism stands out from right wing ideology more generally by its emphasis on identity politics, we will first describe the main characteristics of ‘the’ American identity. We will keep this very broad since the main scope of this paper rests with nativism and its influence in the 2016 election. Subsequently, we will try to highlight certain characteristics of the American brand of nativism and focus on the identity of the threatening immigrant/outsider. The next chapter will apply these findings to the three aforementioned historical movements (the Know Nothings, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and the Tea Party), while the final chapter will investigate whether and why these traits resound in Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and presidency.

## 1.1 American Identity

As we have already indicated, the US has constantly been preoccupied with the fundamental question as to who counts as an American?<sup>1</sup> Arguably, being considered ‘un-American’ poses the biggest threat to every American. As Elizabeth Theiss-Morse writes, “Whether a person is considered a prototypical, ‘true’ American or a marginalized American has serious implications for how they are treated by their fellow Americans” (3). Since any understanding of American identity is indispensable in order to frame a discussion on nativism, this section will try to sketch the issue very generally.

Due to its relatively short history, the US had to resort to other means to define its identity. That it was not decided beforehand becomes evident from the following description: “Americans were creating something out of a wilderness, a vast territory of great natural riches and beauty hidden from European civilization from the beginning of time, and now providentially revealed. Some thought that what the country was or would be was a given, but in fact Americans were making it up as they went along.” (Schrag 19)

Nonetheless, gradually there emerged some consensus as to what characterises ‘the American.’ One’s American identity would primarily be determined by one’s race/ethnicity, ideology and culture (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 12). Nevertheless, throughout the majority of American history, it was

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<sup>1</sup> Therefore, it is not at all surprising that Elizabeth Theiss-Morse’s book concerning American identity goes by this very title.

fundamentally narrowed to the racial/ethnic scope, as the leading question was “Who qualified as white” (Schrag 23-24)?

In contemporary society, a racial/ethnic definition of American identity has (largely) become taboo. From the 1970s onwards, after the Civil Rights Act, American identity was no longer determined by either race or ethnicity, at least in theory (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 12, 37-49, 59-75). Thus, only the cultural and ideological components remained. The former encompasses the following characteristics: the English language, Protestant values and religion, a strong work ethic, etc. Yet, according to some, even the American culture is under threat (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 12, 59-66).

Hence, in order to define American identity, the dominant scholarly consensus settled on certain traits peculiar to the United States. These are mostly referred to as ‘the American Creed,’ a term coined by Gunnar Myrdal in his book *An American Dilemma* (1944). The ‘American Creed’ centres primarily on liberty, individualism, and the rule of law (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 12, 37-49, 59-75). However, more and more people seem to doubt whether it is possible to unite a country by ideology alone (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 337-40).

Nowadays, the forces of globalization increasingly imperil a unified American identity, as Americanization no longer seems to be the main objective (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 137-45, 171-220, 257-58, 264-73). As Samuel Huntington writes,

So long as race and ethnicity were key components defining America, those who were not white and not northern European could challenge that definition only by seeming to be un-American. ‘Becoming white’ and ‘Anglo-conformity’ were the ways in which immigrants, blacks, and others made themselves Americans. With race and ethnicity formally exorcised, and culture downgraded, the way opened for minority groups to assert their own identities within a society now defined largely by its creed. No longer the means by which Americans differentiated themselves from other peoples, race, ethnicity, and, to some extent, culture became the grounds by which Americans differentiated themselves from others. (*Who Are We?* 144-45)

As a reaction, a substantial minority in the country harks back to the original definition of American identity and America as a white, native-born, English-speaking, Protestant country. This is in tune with what Theiss-Morse points out. She indicates that while the boundaries of national identity can change, the prototypical members remain the same (11-12). This ensures that “some Americans are more Americans than others” (Theiss-Morse 77). This recourse to the original core identity is something various scholars already predicted and is only further fuelled by the changing demographics (Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge” 41 and *Who Are We?* 295-316; Schrag 192, 202-03). As Huntington rightfully argues, for these people “to keep America America, it is necessary to keep America white” (*Who Are We?* 312).

## 1.2 What Characterises American Nativism?

Before elaborating upon the main parts constituting the typical American brand of nativism, it could be beneficial to recall the definitions already referred to above. While Higham defines nativism as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections” (4), the Oxford English Dictionary defines it as “The attitude, practice, or policy of protecting the interests of native-born or existing inhabitants against those of immigrants”

("Nativism"). Even though Anbinder favours a more limited approach to nativism, he points out that some scholars describe nativism as "an ethnocentric ideology that seeks to maintain the racial, religious, and political status quo of the nation" ("Nativism and Prejudice" 177). Still, arguably Fry's definition is the most comprehensive, as he weaves together several of nativism's main characteristics. According to him, nativism is "*a collective attempt by self-identified natives to secure or retain prior or exclusive rights to valued resources against the challenges reputedly posed by resident or prospective populations on the basis of their perceived foreignness*" (10, emphasis in original). In other words, nativists are concerned about protecting the 'indigenous' population – white Protestant natives – against the threats (either imaginary or real) emanating from outsiders – even if these are already settled in the United States, such as African Americans. Hence, while the prototypical American largely remains the same, the threatening 'outsider' changes according to which group forms the largest threat to the former's hegemony. Essentially, nativism is concerned with who is to be identified as 'American' and as such tries to preserve the political, social, cultural and economic status quo. As Uri Friedman points out, however, nativists themselves usually self-identify as patriots ("What Is a Nativist?").

Even though the United States always has been and still is 'a nation of immigrants,' nativism has been present from the very beginning and has arguably never gone away. This seemingly paradoxical situation lies at the very core of American society. As Schrag indicates, on the one hand, immigrants were needed to inhabit and work the virgin land, while, on the other hand, they were the first to receive the blame for all the nation's wrongs. Although nativism is hardly unique to the US, the clash between its purported ideals and the day-to-day reality is striking (Schrag 2, 6-7, 225-26). Thus, "The history of American attitudes about immigration and immigration policy has long been a spiral of ambivalence and inconsistency, a sort of double helix, with the strands of welcome and rejection wound tightly around one another" (Schrag 194). In this section, we will elaborate upon the main characteristics of American nativism, many of which are shared with right wing movements more generally.

At its core, nativism is concerned with identity and delineates the boundaries between who is to be included and who is to be excluded. Throughout American history, the white, native-born Protestant has continually signified the 'prototypical' American. As such, this group had to be protected from other groups, which could be excluded based on race, ethnicity, religion, ideology, etc. As Christopher Parker and Matt Barreto put it, these movements were "organized around the basic principle of defining and policing who and what counted as 'American'" (28). By focusing on the one true culture, nativism is the polar opposite of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. While the former encompasses people whose culture and identity derives 'from here,' the latter represents 'alien' and 'foreign' forces, which nonetheless can be favoured by an indigenous strand of the populace (Ostiguy and Roberts 30-31). As is evident from the list above, nativism could also be used to refer to alien ideologies, but this aspect largely remains outside the scope of this thesis.

This tendency to set boundaries is particularly powerful in times of crisis, whether political, economic, or social. At these particular points in time, nativist movements seemingly offered the collectivity and order many people found lacking in American society (D. Bennett 8-11). As David Bennett aptly puts it: "The 'chosen people' must be clearly defined so as to provide a shelter behind which the losers or battle weary in the competitive environment might find comfort. In 'true Americanism' there could be unity and community for all who needed authority in an amorphous social structure. In crusades against alien peoples or alien ideas, there could be fraternity for those who needed some sanctuary in times of troubles." (11)

Another recurring feature is nativism's preoccupation with a perceived or real sense of loss of clout, status, and power. To borrow a term from Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab, nativists are 'preservatist,' in the sense that they want to protect what they already have (19). Throughout American history, the demographic profile of this group of 'dispossessed' Americans has largely remained stable. In essence, they are white, (mostly) male, Christian (primarily Protestant), older, middle or working-class, native-born Anglo-Saxons. This group, which Lipset and Raab call "'the once-hads'" (23), tries to curb their loss by setting up strict boundaries between the 'real' Americans and the 'un-American' outsiders. According to them:

The fluidity of the American social structure – the fact that no group has enjoyed a status tenure in the style of European social classes – has meant that the problem of status displacement has been an enduring characteristic of American life. New areas, new industries, new migrant groups, new ethnic groups, have continually encroached upon the old as important and influential. On these occasions, various formerly entrenched American groups have felt disinherited. (Lipset and Raab 24)

The authors describe this situation with reference to right wing groups in general, but it also perfectly grasps the main preoccupation of every nativist movement in American history.

As Parker and Barreto point out, these people are more than simply conservatives, they are reactionary conservatives: "people who fear change of any kind – especially if it threatens to undermine their way of life" (6). While conventional conservatives are opposed to change, they acknowledge that, in order to ward off revolution, some kind of change has to be allowed. Reactionary conservatives, on the other hand, oppose all kinds of change and would rather return to the 'good old days,' when they were still in power and society bent to their wishes. While white middle-class Protestant values represent the forces of tradition, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and women symbolize modernity and change. Due to the latter's increasing status threatening the 'traditional' American way of life, the white middle-class Protestants increasingly feel victimized (Parker and Barreto 5-6, 30-31, 45). No wonder that Sarah Palin argued "to take our country back" (Reynolds), as these people more and more felt "as strangers in their own land," (Hochschild 140) longing to the past, in which their hegemony went virtually unchallenged.

As a result, nativist movements are inherently emotional. To put it in D. Bennett's terms, all of them can be described as "the party of fear" (3), since they feared that their country had fallen victim to certain conspiracies and was gradually slipping away (12-13). Higham's characterization of the nativist is revealing. "He believed – whether he was trembling at a Catholic menace to American liberty [or] fearing an invasion of pauper labor ... – that some influence originating abroad threatened the very life of the nation from within." (4) In essence, nativists give in to what Parker and Barreto describe as 'poor me paranoia.' This kind of paranoia blames outsiders for the victimization of the in-group. By diverting the blame, one does not have to take responsibility themselves and can retain his/her self-esteem (32).

Last but not least, arguably all nativist movements incorporate a populist tinge. In general, populism can be defined as pitting 'the people' against 'the elite' (Ostiguy and Roberts 25). Yet, as Friedman indicates, populism is often attached to a more encompassing ideology, such as socialism on the left or nationalism on the right ("What is a Populist?"). We will argue that right-wing populism could also be linked to nativism. As Pierre Ostiguy and Kenneth Roberts stress, right-wing populism contends that the outsider is unduly protected by the establishment. Hence, they argue that the power should be handed back to 'the people,' which are 'truly from here' – a clear nativist message (38-39). Cas Mudde similarly argues that "'the elite is considered to be corrupt because it works in the interest

of the non-natives or it undermines the native group” (Friedman, “What is a Nativist?”). Hence, nativists argue that they alone represent the in-group, which has been consistently ignored by the governmental elite and establishment. In addition, according to nativists, the various out-groups have gained too much power due to establishment support. This anti-elitist/anti-establishment tendency is regularly expressed in a disdain towards the traditional parties and their politicians. In essence, nativism argues that the out-group and the elite are joined in their cause to displace the people truly from here. This seems to be due to countervailing interests: the industry and elite, on the one hand, need immigrants to do the work and/or want to abide by the fundamental values enshrined in the nation’s founding documents. The nativist ‘common’ man, on the other hand, sees them as a threat to his/her future and job opportunities (Schrag 6-7, 21, 57, 108-109, 120, 214).

At this point, it should be noted that all people possess multiple identities simultaneously. As such, I could identify as Flemish, Belgian, or European, but also as a son, brother, and godfather. The salience of each and every identity depends on the particular occasion. As Huntington points out, from the 1960s onwards, deconstructionists and multiculturalists have challenged the primacy of American identity in favour of subnational identification. Moreover, people increasingly came to conceive of themselves as cosmopolitans. According to them, Americanization is no longer the main objective. In addition, various elites stressed the importance of affirmative action to right the past’s wrongs. These and similar contemplations exposed a yawning gap between the nation’s elite and the common American, for whom patriotism and identification with the US are of primary importance. As a result, people increasingly felt alienated from their leaders since they only further their own causes and do not represent ‘the American people’ (Huntington, *Who Are We?* 141-58, 171-77, 199-204, 264-76, 324-35).

Hence, it could be argued that these nativist Americans fight for a just cause, yet they are targeting the wrong people. Instead of trying to significantly influence the establishment and multinationals to change the rules of the game, they focus too much of their frustration on the immigrant newcomer. As Schrag describes it, “We can’t see the jobs that no longer exist or that were shipped overseas, but we can see the crowded schools and the Latinos waiting for day jobs in the parking lot at Home Depot” (10).

In conclusion, nativist movements in the USA focus on delineating an in-group of white, native-born Protestants from various ‘foreign’ out-groups, especially immigrants. By setting up these strict boundaries, they try to protect the former’s influence and power. Since these out-groups threaten the status quo with the aid of the country’s elite and establishment, nativists are prone to feel victimized.

### **1.3 The Threatening ‘Outsider’**

The fundamental element characterising nativism is its focus on who constitutes the ‘typical’ American while blaming the menacing outsider. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to answer the question as to who this threatening outsider was. Where did he come from? And especially, why was he perceived as a threat? While we do account for the hostility towards several groups, we have opted to highlight those that will be relevant for the remainder of this thesis.

As has been pointed out above, the ‘typical’ American had to be white, male, Christian, native-born and Anglo-Saxon. Therefore, nativism only took off when the United States was receiving more and more people who did not fit the mould.

In a first wave, these were primarily Catholic immigrants originating from Ireland and Germany. Since anti-Catholicism has deep roots in American society, the ensuing problems could be anticipated. As the quote from Bohn in the introduction already stressed, anti-Catholicism has been present in the United States from its very inception (392). It even predates the emergence of the United States, as England had already fought several battles in order to curb Catholicism. When transposed to the colonies in the New World, anti-Catholicism became even more tangible as these colonies were surrounded by the Catholic superpowers, France and Spain (Higham 5-6).

In the following decades, this anti-Catholic tide more or less lessened, but it still kept lingering beneath the surface. The newly independent United States considered their vision of democracy to be incompatible with Catholicism since Catholics were perceived to be accountable to the Pope only. Hence, when Catholic immigrants came to the United States, they were immediately considered un-American (Higham 5-6). As D. Bennett rightfully asks, “How could these strange ... people with a religion long denounced in native churches as un-American to the core ever be assimilated?” (9) What is more, the threat of a ‘papal conspiracy’ to take over the United States always lingered in the background (Hofstadter 19-23). As Lipset and Raab contend, “The Catholics ... provided a great foil for extremist purposes, because this visible body of ethnic immigrants was connected to images of secret, exotic, and conspiratorial institutions” (49).

However, as Higham points out, anti-Catholicism only turned into full-blown nativism, when Catholic immigrants were coming to the United States *en masse* (5). Hence, when from the 1830s onwards, more and more Irish came to the United States, impending conflict between Protestants and Catholics seemed inevitable. Foremost among the concerns was the fear that these people would take their customs with them and in this way change the peculiar nature of the ‘city upon a hill.’ As could be expected, heightened tension between native-born Protestants and Catholic immigrants propelled many nativist movements onto the political scene (D. Bennett 28-30, 35-47).

Nonetheless, Catholic immigration only reached its peak in the late 1840s-early 1850s, when the Old Continent was struck by one of the gravest potato famines in human history. As a result, even more Catholic Germans and Irish fled to ‘the Promised Land.’ This mass immigration coupled with the rampant anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States gave rise to the Know Nothing movement, which will be discussed more thoroughly in the following chapter (D. Bennett 61-79). Only after the bloody Civil War, in which both Irish and German immigrants served, were they accepted as full members of American society (Schrag 41-43).

Of course, not all immigrants coming to the United States originated from Ireland or Germany. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more and more Southern and Eastern Europeans reached the shores of the New World (Schrag 47). Once again, a large majority had Catholic roots. Thus, not surprisingly, they too were perceived as incompatible with the leading American values.

In addition, a major part of these new migrants had Jewish ancestry. These Jewish newcomers became victims of their own success, as anti-Semitism emerged targeting the stereotypical Jewish banker. So even if successful, immigrant groups were not immune from nativist backlash. The Jews’ success even gave way to rumours about a larger Jewish international conspiracy, since Jews and capitalism were seen as ‘partners in crime.’ However, anti-Semitism only fully complemented anti-Catholicism with the advent of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s (Lipset and Raab 92-95; Schrag 59-61).

Still, what made these ‘new’ immigrants primarily objectionable was their particular origin. While all former immigrants – even though opposed at the time – still belonged to the ‘Anglo-Saxon stock,’ the Eastern and Southern European immigrants did not. In due course, this led many intellectuals to call for immigration restrictions. Some, such as sociologist Edward Ross, even feared for the future of the Anglo-Saxons and warned for a ‘race suicide.’ Hence, Anglo-Saxons were urged to produce more children in order to forestall this disastrous future. Madison Grant’s magnum opus *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) even argued for state-managed sterilization (Schrag 47-54, 65-76).

As already has been illustrated above, the immigrants’ customs and culture were perceived as threatening the fundamental aspects of American identity. Nonetheless, other evils in society were also linked to immigration. Throughout the ages, the objections towards these newcomers remained strikingly similar. Foremost amongst the concerns, were – and still are – the economic consequences. They not only take away the jobs by increasing the competition, but they also drive down the wages, since their standards are lower than those common amongst Americans. In addition, they also carry diseases, are more prone to commit crimes and be heavy drinkers, and only add a burden to the welfare system, because of their inferior intellectual capabilities. Finally, they benefit from government programs in a disproportionate way. Underlying all these claims is the assumption that immigrants distort the original American way of life.

Taking a leap in history, this image of threatening immigrants resonates with the contemporary rhetoric regarding Hispanic immigration. At first, Hispanics primarily came to the US as guest workers. Important in this regard is the Bracero program, which lasted from 1942 until 1964 to soften the labour shortage due to WW II. In the wake of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, more and more Hispanics originating from economically weak Central and Latin American societies kept coming to the United States (Schrag 156-57, 163-64). As an unintended by-product of this landmark legislation, illegal immigration started to become an issue (Young 226).

These illegal immigrants, which constitute nearly 25% of America’s foreign-born population, form the main thorn in the nativist’s flesh (López and Bialik). From 1990 until 2007, the number of illegal immigrants more than tripled from 3.5 to 12.2 million, before experiencing a temporary decline due to the Great Recession. From 2009 onwards, their number has largely remained stable. As of 2015, 11 million undocumented immigrants are living in the US, with the Mexican share gradually declining. However, this decline has been partly offset by an increase in illegal immigration from Central America and Asia (Passel and Cohn).

In his article “The Hispanic Challenge” (2004), Huntington warns for the dire influence this new flood of immigrants could have on American society. As he himself describes it: “In this new era, the single most immediate and most serious challenge to America’s traditional identity comes from the immense and continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to ... American natives.” (32) Huntington’s outcry is highly reminiscent of attitudes concerning earlier waves of immigrants discussed above. He is primarily concerned with the danger these immigrants pose to the fundamental traits of an English-speaking American society (“The Hispanic Challenge” 32-33).

In contrast to earlier waves of immigration, Hispanics do not have to cut all ties with their fellow compatriots, as they live just across the border. Their sheer number also pleads in their favour. What is more, large parts of these immigrants share the same language – Spanish. These and other considerations combined urge Huntington to profess that Hispanics are harder to assimilate than previous immigrants and thus threaten to transform the US into a bilingual and bicultural society (“The Hispanic Challenge” 33-45).

What ties all of these groups together is that they received the full blame for the dire circumstances, even though they were not its sole cause. Yet, their ‘outsider’ status rendered them an easy target.

However, even Barack Obama has engendered nativist backlash, as his landmark presidency has come to symbolize the forces haunting contemporary white Christian America. His watershed election propelled the first non-white President into office, openly exposing the whites’ reduced clout and the concurrent increasing influence of minorities. As could be expected, Obama was immediately targeted as ‘un-American’ on various counts, as he was rumoured to be a closet Muslim, born in Kenya and thus constitutionally barred from taking up the highest office (see Skocpol and Williamson 77-79; Parker and Barreto 197-201; Smith 114-116).

Obama’s portrayal as a Muslim ties in with the ever-increasing Islamophobia in the United States, starting on 9/11 and only further fuelled by the recent streak of ISIS attacks both in the US and in Western Europe. The main argument is that sharia law instructs Muslims to obey the Quran above all else, emblematic of their inability to adapt to American customs and ideas. Instead of denouncing terrorists as such, Muslims, in general, are deemed ‘un-American’ (Goldstein 65-69; Young 227-28). Islamophobia formed an important part of Trump’s campaign, as will be discussed below.



## **Chapter 2      Nativism throughout US History: From the Know Nothing Party to the Second Ku Klux Klan to the Tea Party**

In this chapter, we will focus on three prime examples of nativism throughout American history. We will start our discussion with the Know Nothing Party, which emerged on the brink of the Civil War. This party perceived the increasing immigration from Catholic countries as a threat to their cherished America. Shortly after WW I, the Second Ku Klux Klan tried to capitalize on the massive changes in society by warding off all threats to white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America. Finally, we will look at the contemporaneous phenomenon of the Tea Party, which occurred in the wake of Barack Obama's elevation to the White House. Tea Partiers were concerned they were losing their country due to illegal immigration and the gradual gains in potency and power of the various minorities.

While we admit that these movements stood for more than nativism alone, for the purposes of this thesis, we will restrict ourselves to a discussion of nativism as it meandered through American history.

### **2.1    The Know Nothing Party**

Before we start discussing the potency and impact of this political organization, a preliminary note on terminology is warranted. Throughout its short life span, the movement actually used two different denominations. Initially, it became known as the Know Nothing Party. Most historians tend to agree that this name derived from the members' vow to tell outsiders that they 'know nothing' regarding the secret order (see e.g. D. Bennett 111-12). However, when the movement tried to turn itself into a fully-fledged political party, it changed its name to the American Party. This coincided with the gradual rise of the pro-Union platform and the resultant downplaying of the nativist plank.

In order to avoid confusion, when talking about the movement as a whole, we will consistently refer to it as the Know Nothing Party. The American Party will only be explicitly referenced, if indispensable to understand the larger framework.

### **2.1.1 The Run-Up to the Rise of the Know Nothings: A Sweeping Catholic Tide of Immigration on Top of a Political Crisis**

Before delving into the specifics of the Know Nothing Party, it is important to consider the larger historical context. The party came to fruition during the onset of the Civil War, when tensions between the industrial North and the agrarian South seemed all but irresolvable. In this time of heightened crisis, many were dissatisfied with the way the traditional political parties – the Whigs and the Democrats – were tackling the issues of the day. Hence, a vacuum occurred for a third party to capitalize on this situation and attract a huge following in a very short time span. The ability to exploit the resultant strong anti-party feelings and the subsequent demise of the Whig Party ensured that the Know Nothings had a larger appeal than any previous nativist endeavour (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 95). By shifting focus to the figure of the threatening immigrant, the whole country could rally around a common cause and combat a common enemy (D. Bennett 97-98). As D. Bennett eloquently puts it, “A common crusade against the foreigner could cement broken institutions and warring people” (113). Or, to put it in John Bladec’s words: “The Know Nothings promised to replace one form of distinction with another, their version of ‘Americanism.’” (98)

On top of this escalating sectional strife, the country also experienced the onset of the First Industrial Revolution. As a result, the increasing urbanization and industrialization further unsettled the traditional agrarian American society (D. Bennett 98-101).

True to nativist ideology, the Know Nothings’ agenda was based on a strong anti-immigrant – in this case, anti-Catholic – rhetoric. Immigration to the United States has been as old as the country itself, but where these people came from and what they brought with them implied a lot about their subsequent reception. In the decades preceding the Civil War, more and more Irish and German Catholics set sail for the United States, as circumstances at home continued to deteriorate. The main catalyst for this migration pattern was the disastrous potato famine (D. Bennett 61-65). This new wave of immigrants differed measurably from their predecessors since they “were the most impoverished, destitute, unskilled group ever to arrive in the United States” (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 7). In eight years’ time, from 1847 until 1854, no less than 2.75 million immigrants flocked to the Promised Land (D. Bennett 62). No wonder that the ‘indigenous’ inhabitants were overwhelmed by this sweeping tide of immigration.

Their Catholic background only made matters worse, since anti-Catholicism has been a characteristic of American society from the early beginnings. After all, religious rigidity was the main reason people originally set sail for the New World. Towards mid-century, Catholics started to become more assertive on various levels, which added only more fuel to the fire. Some of these controversies were concerned with the realm of education. As such, Catholics wanted to receive government funding for their own parochial schools and opposed the mandatory use of the Protestant Bible. As a result, more and more people started to fear a Catholic overthrow of the American school system. Alongside the school controversy, there was an increasing debate as to who should own Catholic church property: while in Protestant circles this ownership usually was a shared endeavour, in Catholic eyes, it belonged solely to the bishop (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 24-26, 111-12).

These tensions were only further exacerbated by Papal Nuncio Gaetano Bedini’s prolonged visit to the United States, allegedly to settle some of the aforementioned conflicts. Since his visit lasted more than half a year, suspicions began to rise as to the underlying causes. Some argued that this was just the beginning of a Catholic plot to take over the country (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 27-29, 117).

Even on the political scene, Catholics seemed to gain ground. After all, President Franklin Pierce had appointed Catholic James Campbell as postmaster general. Moreover, the Catholic tendency towards bloc voting seemed to provide them with more clout than their actual numbers would warrant. Especially the Democratic Party benefitted from this and in due course, the party as a whole catered to the Catholic vote (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 30-31, 117; D. Bennett 76-77).

In addition to resisting assimilation, these newcomers also brought other problems in their wake. From the moment they set foot on US soil, diseases, which they had carried with them due to their perilous voyage, swept the coastal cities. While the destitute Irish settled in these cities only to fall victim to exploitation, severely limiting their possibilities of achieving the American dream, the more affluent German immigrants quickly travelled towards the interior in order to start their own ventures. The primarily Irish urban dwellers prolonged the welfare rolls and caused an upsurge in criminal activity. When these newcomers did succeed in finding employment, they were perceived as taking away the jobs from the native-born and driving down wages. Overall, these newcomers only exacerbated an already long list of social problems (D. Bennett 66-78; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 106-10).

All these forces combined led to the rise of the Know Nothings. The immigrants would carry the burden, as they were the wrong people at the wrong place at the wrong time. As D. Bennett aptly puts it, they were “both the symbol of the process of industrialization and the major evil that accompanied it” (83).

### **2.1.2 The Know Nothings Enter the Public Arena: Anti-Catholic Nativism on the Agenda**

The Know Nothing Party originated out of the back of the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, which was founded by Charles Allen in 1850's New York. At the time, it was only one of several flourishing fraternal organizations. After joining forces with an affiliated lodge, the Order of United Americans, the movement gradually started to gain traction. In the beginning, the Order primarily relied on its secrecy to attract its followers. Membership regulations were strict: only native-born twenty-one-year-old Protestants, who vowed to elect natives to office, were eligible (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 20-24).

In the course of 1854, the Know Nothing ranks gradually swelled to influential numbers, as more and more people decided to leave the defunct traditional parties. Both the Whigs and the Democrats were unable to offer guidance on the temperance issue and, more importantly, they failed to tackle the searing sectional conflict head on. The abhorred 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act could be seen as the crowning achievement of the traditional parties' inability to cope with the challenges of the day. To more and more people, the Know Nothings seemed to represent a viable alternative, which could provide both a solution to the increasing polarization and an outlet for their anti-party sentiment. By putting nativism on the agenda, people could unite against a common enemy (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 43-50; D. Bennett 97-98).

During the 1854 state elections, the Know Nothings were immediately successful, first only as a minor partner in the larger anti-Democratic opposition, but subsequently also as an independent political force. In the wake of the successful 1854 election cycle, the Know Nothings got rid of their vow of secrecy in order to reach yet a bigger audience. They also changed their name to the ‘American Party,’ since they promised to defend the traditional American values. Capitalizing on this rapid

success, some pundits even predicted an 1856 presidential victory (D. Bennett 115, 125; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 52-94, 101-03, 126).

Now, what were these traditional American values the Know Nothings vowed to protect? Note that even though we opt to discuss the Know Nothings as a national movement, we need to remind ourselves that the party represented different things to different people. Still, several talking points united nearly all Northern and Southern branches (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 103-04; Bladek 54-55).

For Know Nothing adherents, Protestantism lay at the very core of American values, such as democracy and individualism. Everything revolved around the notion of republicanism. In this democratic type of government, the power rests with the people. Their emphasis on these typical American values was emblazoned in their new name, the 'American' Party. However, due to their tendency towards bloc voting, the disdain for either assimilation or education, and the autocratic nature of their religion, Catholics undermined these traditional American values and ideals (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 104-06, 118-26).

In order to prolong the republican nature of the United States, the Know Nothings opted to target Catholics' political footprint, instead of favouring immigration restriction. Since these newcomers tended to vote in one bloc, they had gained too much clout. In addition, the traditional parties appeased these 'voting blocs' and neglected the 'common' native-born American. To tackle these issues, Know Nothings proposed a twenty-one-year probationary period before someone could become an American citizen and take part in the democratic process. Alongside this prolongation of the naturalization period, Know Nothings vowed to remove traditional politicians catering to the Catholic vote. In their place, they would elect native-born representatives vowing to keep foreigners out of office (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 104-06, 118-26; Bladek 78, 83-88). Hence, the party's creed that "Americans must rule America" (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 125).

Even though the Know Nothings were primarily a Northern phenomenon, their energy almost immediately spread to the South, where they made up the largest opposition to the Democrats overnight. Notwithstanding the South's minor immigrant population, the Know Nothings found fertile territory there, as these immigrants only added to the North's clout and as such were portrayed as hostile to the 'Southern way of life' and its 'peculiar institution' (Bladek 3, 23, 47, 65-68; D. Bennett 141-42).

In short, according to the Know Nothings, outsiders were slowly taking charge of the nation's destiny by diminishing the power and liberties of the native-born. As such, they were the very first party to place nativism at the core of their agenda (Bladek 58-59, 65, 96). In order to counter this threat, the northern party's platform was based on a condemnation of "rum, Romanism, and slavery" as the three evils cursing the nation" (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 106). Therefore, slavery and Catholic potency were opposed, while limitations on liquor consumption were advocated. Slavery, however, would prove to be detrimental in the long haul.

### **2.1.3 The Demise of the Nativist Alternative: Slavery Eclipses Everything Else**

The party's downfall began when the Know Nothings tried to provide a nationwide alternative to the two party system for the upcoming 1856 presidential election. Even though a significant part of the agenda was shared across sectional lines, the inability to reach a consensus on the slavery issue was a clear liability and eventually destroyed the party from within.

At the gathering of the National Council in Philadelphia in June 1855, these lingering tensions surfaced, as the party was unable to unify behind a common slavery plank. Eventually, the Southern version calling for an end to the slavery debate was adopted, enraging a significant part of the North (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 165-71; Bladek 146-50).

Still, the upcoming Speaker election in Congress could repair the damage. If this would go as planned and a Know Nothing would be swiftly elected, the party could reunite after the disastrous convention. Unfortunately for the Know Nothings, this turned out to be the longest speakership contest ever, only further exposing the tensions between the Southern and Northern party members. Eventually, one of them got elected Speaker, but the party had lost almost all of its viability and to make matters even worse, Nathaniel Banks' election was perceived by the public as a Republican success, as he had strong anti-slavery credentials. This deadlocked contest convinced most, if not all, Know Nothings that theirs was a foregone conclusion (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 196-202; Bladek 174-84).

What remained of the party was only a tiny shell from the original, focussing all its energy on the perpetuation of the union. Even though they still succeeded in nominating Millard Fillmore for the Presidency, he only carried one state, Maryland, by capturing a dismal 21 percent of the popular vote (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 202-26, 243; Bladek 185-268).

Hence, the circumstances that had propelled the movement onto the political scene seemed to have become detrimental in the long haul and by 1856, the viability of this new party seemed to be over. As D. Bennett argues, "The war unified North and South around issues more pressing and more tangible than found in any nativist broadside" (155). Still, the party huffed and puffed in several states until 1860 (D. Bennett 152; Bladek 270-73). Eventually, the Know Nothings were largely swallowed up by the Republican Party and because the GOP made almost no concessions to their nativism, their ideology was doomed to linger in the background (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 246-70).

In short, anti-Catholic nativism, anti-party sentiment and an urge to settle the searing sectional conflict all combined in the rise of the Know Nothing Party. Without these additional characteristics, it is fair to assume that the party would never have gained the momentum it eventually reached (Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery* 51). Still, the Know Nothings were the very first party to place identity politics and nativism at the centre of their message (Bladek 58-59). In the end, their decision to try to unite the party along sectional lines proved to be ill-advised.

## **2.2 The Second Ku Klux Klan**

The Ku Klux Klan has had various incarnations throughout American history. The KKK originally emerged in the wake of the Civil War in order to curb the new freedoms and opportunities granted to former slaves. Once white supremacy was re-established through segregation, the Klan vanished. In the 1960s, the Klan witnessed a second reincarnation. This time, the Klan targeted the Civil Rights Movement striving for more rights for African Americans. Even to this very day, the Klan is still around, albeit on the fringes of American society. Nonetheless, David Duke and the likes ardently supported Donald Trump's presidential candidacy.

However, the largest Ku Klux Klan flourished in the course of the 1920s. This time, immigrants would be the main targets.

### **2.2.1 Societal Turmoil: A New, Markedly Different Wave of Immigrants and the Onset of the Second Industrial Revolution**

From the 1880s onwards, a new wave of immigrants came to the United States. Highly reminiscent of their Irish counterparts some decades earlier, these refugees were destitute and lacked the essential skills to start their own ventures. Hence, the majority settled in the cities, where they were able to find low-paid employment (D. Bennett 163-69, 179).

Once again, this new wave of immigrants was considered a threat to the American way of life and anathema to the values Americans hold dear. After all, most immigrants came from Catholic countries. Their presence also elicited a host of social problems: from disease to crime, from alcohol abuse to prostitution. Even Jews who managed to capitalize on the American dream were not immune to other, vicious stereotypes. In the eyes of many, they were inadvertently linked to the detested capitalists and bankers (D. Bennett 169-70, 217-18; MacLean 84; Lipset and Raab 98).

In contrast to earlier waves, a majority of these newcomers originated from Southern and Eastern Europe and, hence, did not belong to the Anglo-Saxon race. Since their ethnic background set this new wave of immigrants apart, Klan members and Americans more generally resorted to 'scientific' explanations and Social Darwinism to substantiate the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon stock. After all, this was the heyday of eugenics. As they were quickly being outnumbered, Anglo-Saxons had to halt their race suicide by producing more offspring (D. Bennett 163-69, 179; MacLean 132-34; Bohn 405-07).

The outbreak of the First World War only further exacerbated the tensions already present in the United States. Since most of the 'white boys' served in the war, they had to be replaced in the workforce. As a result, both African Americans and women experienced decisive material gains in a very short time span. In addition, a significant share of African Americans participated in the fight for the American cause abroad. Hence, when the boys did return from the war, those who had made new inroads in American society were not eager on quietly moving back to their prior positions.

After all, the onset of the Second Industrial Revolution had set the scene for a full-scale capitalist economy. This societal makeover clearly upset the American 'common' man, as his economic and political power increasingly flowed towards the industrial elite. Since this new economic system primarily relied on unskilled workers, the native-born had to endure increased competition. Alongside the majority of the immigrants, African Americans and women were also competing for the same type of jobs (D. Bennett 164-66; McVeigh 51-59).

All the above combined seemed to be too much for the 'common' American. From the very start of the American 'project,' they had been told that they were the best and that God would always be on their side. However, for the Klan, it seemed that this utopian system finally had caught up with reality. The war had proven to be an eye-opener and now a plethora of forces combined to haunt them. As a result, many Americans were struck by anger and fear (Bohn 401-05). Immigrants would once again carry the burden for this larger societal breakdown (D. Bennett 164-66; McVeigh 53-55).

### **2.2.2 The Rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan: Nativism Tops the Agenda**

Shortly after the First World War, in 1915, William Simmons resuscitated the Ku Klux Klan in Atlanta, Georgia, due to the occurrence of two seemingly unrelated events. First, there was the vicious rape and murder of a fourteen-year-old girl, for which her Jewish employer, Leo Frank, was convicted. When his death sentence was commuted, a ferocious mob lynched him to death. Additionally, the new

Klan could capitalize on the success of D.W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), telling a romanticized version of the Reconstruction Klan. Nevertheless, these events provided the Klan with only some initial success (McVeigh 19-21; MacLean 12-13).

Only when Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler took over the recruiting process in 1920 did the Klan start to gain traction. With membership up to one million, the Klan became a national organization. Clarke and Tyler changed the scope from an initial racist fraternal organization to a larger nativist framework vowing to protect 'pure Americanism.' In addition to African Americans, Jews and Catholics became the primary threats to be dealt with. The KKK reached its all-time high in 1924-25 when it could boast up to five million members (D. Bennett 209-11; MacLean 5-6, 10, 177).

At heart, the Klan was concerned with who could be regarded as a true American. This American had to be white, native-born and Protestant since the Klan was a "'one-hundred percent American' organization'" (McVeigh 3). Alongside African Americans, Jews, Catholics, and all other aliens were assaulted as un-American outsiders imperilling the country's future. Also, other societal changes, due to the Second Industrial Revolution and the onset of modernity, had to be curtailed. As the post-war years demonstrated, America was increasingly becoming a pluralistic society, harbouring multiple ethnicities, religions, and cultures. The Klan tried to offer a counterweight to this rapidly shifting landscape. After all, in addition to diminishing the natives' economic and political power, these alterations also threatened their status in society (D. Bennett 214-16; McVeigh 25, 39-48, 140; MacLean 127-35; Pegram 11). Thus, as McVeigh puts it, "the Klan tried to be all things to all people – at least for people who were native-born, white, and Protestant" (29).

As the Klan agenda was centred on a commitment to protect the white Protestant nature of the United States, white supremacy was championed. African Americans stood no chance to be identified as 'American,' since they were still considered inferior in 1920s America. Yet, Southern and Eastern Europeans did not escape this racial understanding of American society. Even though they were recognised as 'white,' the Klan argued that their whiteness was from a different, inferior sort than that of Anglo-Saxons. Eugenics thus substantiated white Anglo-Saxon Protestant supremacy (Pegram 47-53, 59-62; MacLean 125-35).

The newcomers' religion constituted a concurrent threat to American society. After all, Catholics were the only group that to a certain degree could compete with white native-born Protestants. After some initial waves of Catholic immigration, the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century once again witnessed huge swarms of Catholics washing ashore in the United States. Their numerical strength and white complexion provided them with a significant advantage vis-à-vis other minorities. Yet, as the United States has been hostile to Catholicism since its very inception, these new Catholic waves were similarly regarded as anathema to American ideas and ideals (Pegram 69-72).

Moreover, Jews did not escape the Klan's nativist backlash. Not only were they portrayed as unwilling to assimilate, they also seemingly benefited the most from the switch to large-scale capitalism. What is more, the Jewish hold on the financial system seemed just to be the beginning of an emerging international Jewish conspiracy (D. Bennett 204-06, 216-17; MacLean 135-38).

Overall, the Klan primarily was a lower middle-class movement, catering to the so-called 'petite bourgeoisie.' Trapped in-between the elite and the working class, this group was particularly vulnerable to economic fluctuation. Contrary to the hegemonic view of 'the Roaring Twenties,' the era was characterized by huge inequality. Due to industrialization, economic power increasingly coalesced around the industrial elite. In addition, immigrants, women, and African Americans competed for the same type of jobs as the native-born population. As a result, white middle-class Protestants witnessed a devaluation of their economic power. To remedy the situation, the Klan proposed to curtail the influx of new immigrants and to keep both African Americans and women in check. Moreover, to strengthen

their economic position, the Klan would unite under the banner of ‘vocational Klannishness.’ As such, Klansmen vowed to boycott outsiders by solely trading with and employing other Klan members (MacLean 52-74; McVeigh 51-62, 66-76, 79-84).

On the political level, the Klansmen’s clout diminished due to the lengthening of the voting rolls because of increasing immigration and women’s suffrage. To balance this out, the Klan argued for immigration restriction and a harsher nationalization process. Moreover, to strengthen their own vote, the Klan would unite as one large voting bloc, forming a swing vote by throwing their weight and influence behind the ticket that aligned most closely with their priorities, instead of supporting a particular party. According to them, the GOP was too concerned with big business, while the Democratic Party had fallen victim to internal factionalism due to the support of immigrants (McVeigh 65-69, 89-108, 183-85; MacLean 140-41). None of the traditional parties thus vouched for the ‘traditional’ American values (Pegram 196).

Nonetheless, the Klan’s political influence was rather meagre, as they only succeeded in electing a few governors and sending some representatives to Congress. As was the case with the Know Nothings, their primary strength lay in state politics. What is more, once in office, most Klan-affiliated politicians proved to be inept to implement the Klan agenda (Schaefer 149; McVeigh 25-29; Pegram 186, 198-212).

On the surface, it seems remarkable that a nativist backlash could have emerged during the ‘Roaring Twenties,’ when everything seemed to go well and America experienced an unprecedented economic growth. Mass consumption was rampant and almost everyone benefitted from this economic high tide. However, for some, the speed of change was just too much and they abhorred what this was doing to America. All seemed to be up for grabs and the traditional borders and boundaries seemed to be under threat from everywhere (D. Bennett 199-204).

Those who were left behind or those for whom these massive changes in society were just too much united to advocate tradition and combat modernity. To these people, the Klan offered order in an age of flux (D. Bennett 204, 221). As D. Bennett aptly considers:

It was the Roaring Twenties, and as mores changed, as traditional social arrangements were overturned, as skirts went up and speakeasies flourished, as the movies and radio made their mark with Tin Pan Alley songs popularized by so many show business celebrities, the Klan found a way of identifying these disturbing developments in an antialien context, of standing up for America by assailing yet another band of un-Americans. (217)

Even though the Klan was a national movement, it did not prosper equally in all sections of American society. A segment of the population even blatantly rejected them. While the KKK flourished primarily in the South and the Midwest, it did not make much headway in the Northeast. Nonetheless, the organization was equally present in the cities as in the more rural parts of the American landscape (D. Bennett 223-33; McVeigh 7, 13-18, 167).

### **2.2.3 The Klan’s Rapid Demise**

As was the case with the Know Nothings, the Klan came to a halt as quickly and abruptly as it had swept onto the political scene. Some argue that this was due to internal crises and misbehaviour. After all, internal factionalism and scandals were rampant and the majority of the leadership was truly incompetent. Still, these issues were already present from the very start. What precipitated the Klan’s demise was the United States’ ability to recover quickly from its state of turmoil. As a result, the



viability of the Klan imminently subsided. Moreover, in 1924 a new immigration law was passed, decisively limiting the influx of new immigrants (MacLean 184-86; Lipset and Raab 144). As Nancy MacLean writes, “Without extreme conditions, extreme measures enjoyed less legitimacy” (186).

Still, Al Smith’s nomination as the Democratic contender for the 1928 election could be the spark the KKK so desperately needed. After all, what would happen if a Catholic would take up the highest office? However, this turned out to be a short-lived renaissance, since the Klan aligned itself with the winner as Herbert Hoover easily defeated Smith in a landslide (McVeigh 194-95). As McVeigh puts it: “Who needs a ‘100 percent American’ social movement when a ‘100 percent American’ president resides in the White House?” (195)

Nonetheless, the organization was able to survive, albeit in a largely diminished form, until 1944, when its inability to pay a large sum of back taxes led to its official dissolution (Schaefer 150-1). Once more, a nativist movement disintegrated in a very short time span, consigning anti-immigrant nativism to linger in the background.

## **2.3 The Tea Party Movement**

If we fast-forward towards more contemporary history, 2009 witnessed the advent of the Tea Party movement. On the surface, this organization seemed to advocate core Republican ideals, such as limited government interference, fiscal responsibility, and fewer taxes. Hence, ‘tea’ was an acronym for ‘Taxed Enough Already.’

However, this organization truly wanted to turn back to an age when white Protestant middle-class Americans still were hegemonic in America. After all, within the foreseeable future whites will become a minority themselves. As such, Tea Partiers severely oppose the increasing assertiveness of the various minorities and the continuing influx of illegal immigrants.

### **2.3.1 The Tea Party Emerges: Obama As Catalyst for a New Nativist Outbreak**

Out of the back of the Grand Old Party, this new movement burst onto the political scene only several weeks into the Obama presidency. Their name derives from CNBC reporter Rick Santelli’s February 19, 2009, rant against Obama’s bailout plan for the banks, during which Santelli called for a ‘Chicago Tea Party.’ The reference to the 1773 Boston Tea Party could hardly be missed, clearly exposing the underlying message. These people, just as the Bostonians several centuries earlier, not only opposed taxes, but they also wanted to retake control of their country. When Fox News decided to capitalize on this unleashed energy, the Tea Party movement took off. After their massive rally in Washington, D.C. on September 12, 2009, the Tea Party came into the political limelight. However, it was their opposition to Obamacare that earned them their fame (Skocpol and Williamson 7-8; Parker and Barreto 194-97).

Yet, the movement’s roots can be traced back even further, to the moment Republican nominee John McCain picked Sarah Palin as his running mate for the 2008 presidential election. Despite their devastating loss on Election Day, Palin was emblematic of the forces forming to take over the Republican Party from the inside.

Still, the question begs itself as to what the Tea Party is and whom it represents. According to Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, the Tea Party consists of three interconnected forces: the very core of the movement is made up of grassroots organizations. Advocacy groups try to channel this grassroots energy into political potency. Thirdly, a group of conservative radio hosts and Fox News television anchors serves as the Tea Party's mouthpiece. Both social conservatives and libertarians fill the Tea Party ranks, with the former setting the majority of the agenda (Skocpol and Williamson 12-13, 34-40). As Robert Horwitz summarizes, "the Tea Party displays characteristics of a collection of generally like-minded, enraged groups rather than a tightly controlled political movement" (181). In general, "the Tea Party was not so much an official political group as a culture, a way of seeing and feeling about a place and its people" (Hochschild 19).

According to Parker and Barreto, the movement could boost up to 45 million sympathizers in 2011 (162). The majority of those are situated in the South and in the West, with the former harbouring up to 41% of Tea Party members. By contrast, their representation in the Northeast and the Midwest is rather small (Horwitz 170; Burghart and Zeskind).

In essence, the Tea Party is concerned with the question of inclusion and exclusion. Just as the previously discussed movements, the Tea Party focuses on what constitutes a 'real' American. For them, the United States should be a country for older, well-educated, middle-class, white, heterosexual, Protestant males. All those who do not fit this mould would be targeted: from African Americans to Hispanics, from illegal immigrants to the gay community. Hence, Tea Partiers are ideologically very conservative, forming the right wing of the Republican Party. They belong to relatively advantaged groups who opposed what they saw as Obama's progressive agenda threatening their way of life. In this way, they were part of 'the oppressed middle' (Skocpol and Williamson 20-32; Parker and Barreto 3-6, 15, 68-69, 78-81; Horwitz 171). Hence, as Sarah Palin most ardently argues, "'It's time to take our country back'" (Reynolds). As the Tea Party also includes an aversion to elites and experts, Horwitz describes their brand of conservatism as 'anti-establishment conservatism' (vi).

After all, Tea Partiers seem primarily opposed as to the direction their country is taking. The increasing globalization and ethnic diversity just seem too much to bear for hard-line conservatives. Immigrants and young people are only two of the many forces symbolizing this larger societal decline. Tea Party conservatives would love to return to the past when their hegemony went unchallenged (Skocpol and Williamson 74-77, 82; Parker and Barreto 3). On his website, Patrick Buchanan aptly summarizes how Tea Partiers perceive contemporary society:

In their lifetimes, they have seen their Christian faith purged from schools ... and mocked in movies and on TV. They have seen their factories shuttered in the thousands ... and their jobs outsourced in the millions to Mexico and China. They have seen trillions of tax dollars go for Great Society programs, but have seen no Great Society, only rising crime, illegitimacy, drug use and dropout rates.

They watch on cable TV as illegal aliens walk into their country, are rewarded with free educations and health care, and take jobs at lower pay than American families can live on [and] then carry Mexican flags in American cities and demand U.S. citizenship.

They see Wall Street banks bailed out as they sweat their next paycheck, then read that bank profits are soaring, and the big bonuses for the brilliant bankers are back. Neither they nor their kids ever benefited from affirmative action, unlike Barack and Michelle Obama.

They see a government in Washington that cannot balance its books, win our wars or protect our borders. ....

America was once their country. They sense they are losing it. And they are right.  
("Alienated & Radicalized")

All their fears and frustrations seemed to coalesce around the figure of Barack Hussein Obama. As the first African American president, he came to symbolize everything Tea Partiers dreaded the most: more government interference (Obamacare), liberalism, and the increasing influence of minorities. In essence, Obama was deemed 'un-American' on various counts (Skocpol and Williamson 77-81). As such, he was "the Devil incarnate" (Skocpol and Williamson 28). Since he exposed their declining status in American society, his tenure as President motivated white native-born Americans to support the Tea Party (Parker and Barreto 97-100). This combination of fear, anger, and anxiety due to Obama's elevation to office can be described as "Obamaphobia," as Tea Partiers think Obama is out to destroy their country (Parker and Barreto 191).

A strong undercurrent in the Tea Party, the so-called Birther movement, even alleged that Obama was constitutionally barred from becoming president, as he was not born in the United States. To support their case, they even published a book – Jerome Corsi's *Where's the Birth Certificate?* (2011). Even after Obama disclosed all documentation, these rumours still did not subside (Parker and Barreto 198-200; Choi 56-57; Wiepjes 11). As Brett Wiepjes writes, "Many have disregarded this movement as a lunatic, paranoid fringe movement from its beginning; however, irrespective of how one views the Birthers, their impact on contemporary American culture is undeniable" (12). After all, it was here that Trump laid the seeds for his successful presidential bid several years later.

In addition to its opposition to President Obama, Tea Party antipathy also targets various minority groups, particularly immigrants. Their resistance to illegal immigration is most visibly manifested in the push to change the Fourteenth Amendment in order to deny citizenship status to the children of those who entered the country illegally. Alongside the old sore of illegal immigration, Tea Partiers argue for more comprehensive immigration restriction (Parker and Barreto 164-72, 182-84).

Too much government interference is another strapline of Tea Party rhetoric. Aversion to big government is emblematic of the United States. However, for the Tea Party, it all seems to depend on who would be the main beneficiaries of particular programs. Government assistance aimed at the 'deserving,' such as Medicare and Social Security, is favoured, while welfare benefits for the 'undeserving' freeloaders, such as minorities, illegal immigrants, and young people, are severely opposed. In essence, programs from which Tea Partiers stand to benefit are approved, while those who advance other groups, primarily other ethnicities, are disputed (Skocpol and Williamson 54-74).

### **2.3.2 Tea Party Politics**

At heart, Tea Partiers want to take their country back. Therefore, they also need political leverage. To achieve this end, they urged the GOP to oppose Barack Obama's every move by whatever means necessary. In this way, they only further increased party polarization (Skocpol and Williamson 173; Parker and Barreto 14).

In addition to its fierce opposition to the Democrats and President Obama in particular, the Tea Party also targeted mainstream establishment Republicans. According to them, these 'RINO's' – Republican In Name Only – were completely out of touch with the average American. Hence, during the 2010 primaries, the Tea Party vowed to oust every Republican politician who did not support their cause. Their vigorous energy certainly contributed to the massive Republican win during the midterms. Only two years prior, a majority of the political pundits had foretold the end of the traditional GOP after the Obama landslide. Now, they took the majority in the House by gaining 63

seats and sent 6 additional senators to Washington. In addition, 6 more governors and an astonishing 700 extra state delegates were swept into office (Skocpol and Williamson 158-63).

To capitalize on their electoral success, a group of Tea Party adherents united in the Tea Party Caucus, which at its height numbered no less than 60 representatives, forming a key swing vote (Travis). Hence, Skocpol and Williamson contend that Dick Armey, the leader of one of the advocacy groups supporting the Tea Party, could be seen as “the shadow Speaker of the House” (174).

The Tea Party’s phenomenal influence becomes painstakingly clear when one considers the ideological build-up of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress – in session between 2011 and 2013. Not only are those Republicans who stayed in office significantly more conservative than the Democrats, the newly elected Republicans are even more conservative than all their predecessors. Hence, the House experienced a significant swing to the right. The Tea Party has been enormously successful in ousting most, if not all, moderate Republicans – although some, such as Senators Lindsay Graham (R., S. Carolina) and John McCain (R., Arizona), are still around (Skocpol and Williamson 168-71; Choi 81-82).

During the 2012 Presidential election, Tea Party forces similarly influenced the Republican nomination contest. Even though the establishment Republican Mitt Romney emerged victoriously, he could not neglect the Tea Partiers within his own electorate. Hence, his rhetoric and actions increasingly moved to the right. By picking Tea Party darling Paul Ryan as his running mate, he tried to remove the last opposition to his candidacy. Although Romney was unable to oust Obama, the Tea Party did not back down and would continue to influence the party in the years to come (Skocpol and Williamson 210-17; Parker and Barreto 258-60).

### **2.3.3 Tea Party: Asset or Liability?**

Although some, such as Albert Choi, have argued that the Tea Party increasingly became a liability for the Republican Party, we will argue the opposite. According to them, the Tea Party’s uncompromising stance increasingly alienated both more moderate establishment Republicans and business elites. Choi argues that the government shutdown in 2013 when Tea Partiers refused to compromise on a new budget to fund Obamacare was the turning point. However, this government shutdown was one of the prime moments for the Tea Party, as it exposed their influence in stalling legislation. Even though the establishment Republicans vowed to take action to silence these extreme voices in their ranks, the 2013 surprise ousting of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor by a hitherto unknown Tea Partier only strengthened their fear mongering and influence in the party. Still, Choi contends that due to the increasing aversion towards the movement and the opposition by both moderates and business elites, either the Tea Party would fade into obscurity or it would take over the GOP and therefore render the Republican Party too extreme to be electable (85-102).

Since the Obama presidency propelled the Tea Party onto the political scene, Christopher Parker states that its impact certainly would diminish when Obama left office (25-26). Nonetheless, the feelings underpinning the Tea Party would definitively linger, prompting “a Tea Party by another name” (Parker 27).

Even though nowadays the Tea Party has completely disappeared under the radar, this does not mean that the movement has ceased to exist. As late as 2015, Devin Burghart and Leonard Zeskind emphasized the Tea Party’s continuing scope and clout. According to them, “the Tea Party movement remains a powerful foe that poses a great danger to equality and democracy, but the last chapter on this movement has not yet been written” (Burghart and Zeskind). On the contrary, nowadays they are

pulling the strings in the House Freedom Caucus. This group of some thirty-six Republican House members is credited with ousting Republican Speaker John Boehner and forms an important swing vote since without their support Republicans lose their majority (Desilver). Even after the 2016 election, they still hold their clout, as was evident in the debacle surrounding Trump's first shot at replacing Obamacare.

The Tea Party's lingering influence was especially visible during the 2016 presidential election – already predicted by Dave Weigel in his article “The Tea Party and the 2016 Nomination.” A significant slate of the prime contenders for the Republican nomination had previously been tied to the Tea Party. Eventual nominee Donald Trump was one of them, as he had fanned the Birther conspiracy.

Hence, only three years after some predicted the GOP to become unelectable, Tea Party favourite and Republican nominee Donald Trump was elevated to the White House, running on a platform that was primarily a maturation of former Tea Party proposals.

## **2.4 What Does the Past Tell Us about the Future?**

If one compares the three historical examples, a consistent picture emerges: every time a group of ‘real’ Americans – white, native-born Christians – feels victimized by threats from ‘outsiders’ living in the country or migrating to the United States – Catholics in the case of the Know Nothings, Southern and Eastern Europeans and African Americans for the Second Ku Klux Klan, and minorities and illegal immigrants for the Tea Party. While the in-group only gradually widens, the out-group changes according to which group constitutes the most visible threat to the former's hegemony. These recourses to nativism particularly come to the fore at the time of intense societal change, during which a significant part of the population resorts to a protectionist sense of identity. We have only referenced three examples, but other similar endeavours are commonplace throughout American history.

Therefore, Donald Trump could tap into a long history of nativist rhetoric and thought during his 2016 presidential campaign. Nonetheless, he was able to garner enough support to advocate his agenda from within the White House. Hence, the prevailing questions seem to be why nativism once again became front and centre in the 2016 election and how Trump succeeded in winning a majority in the electoral college. These and similar questions will be examined in the last chapter.



## **Chapter 3      The Resurgence of Nativism Culminating in Donald Trump’s Presidency**

Having sketched the main characteristics of nativism and some historical precursors, this chapter will point out why nativism once again became front and centre during the 2016 election, culminating in a Trump presidency. Hence, alongside the now common denominators of Trump the populist or Trump the nationalist, we will argue for a third alternative – Trump the nativist.

### **3.1 Why 2016 Witnessed a Resurgence of the Nativist Attitude**

Pinpointing the exact forces giving rise to a new wave of nativist thought is a challenging endeavour, especially because the past still is very fresh. Nonetheless, in this section, we will attempt to provide some explanations, which arguably caused nativism to blossom out. Instead of ascribing this nativist resurgence to one particular phenomenon, we will invoke Carl Jung’s concept of synchronicity (see Jung’s *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (1952)), as several seemingly unrelated phenomena have coalesced to once again bring nativism to the fore.

Contemporary society is witnessing the gradual decline of the once dominant white native-born Protestant middle and working-class culture. After setting the agenda for some 250 years, these people have the sense that they are losing out in favour of minorities, immigrants and the undeserving poor, which are backed by government assistance from the liberal elite. This decline can be ascribed to various causes.

First off, the United States is currently witnessing a massive demographic change. As of 2016, just 61% of all Americans were non-Hispanic white, down from 75% in 1996 (Kolko; U.S. Census Bureau). According to several projections, the United States is destined to become a ‘majority-minority’ country, as whites will become a minority in the near future – according to the Pew Research Center, this will happen in 2055, while the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 2044 will be the tipping point (“Modern Immigration Wave” 10; Colby and Ortman 1).

This changing ethnic make-up challenges the image of the United States as a white Protestant country since the once-dominant white Christian culture no longer solely determines the American agenda. As Robert Jones points out, during most of American history, white Christian culture formed the cultural pivot around which the whole country turned. However, more recently, its influence has waned significantly. From 2014 onwards, white Christians no longer constitute a majority, as only 47% identify as such, while they were still comfortably in the majority as recently as the 1990s. The

same applies to Protestantism, as 2008 was the last year Protestants as a whole (both white and non-white) constituted a majority. The decline has been strongest with regard to white Protestants, as they tumbled from 51 percent in 1993 to 32 percent in 2014. Nonetheless, even more than their declining numbers, the loss of their once hegemonic culture is particularly troublesome. Emblematic of their loss of influence has been the elevation of the nation's first African American President and the Supreme Court's lack of a single Protestant judge on the bench. Alongside these significant landmarks, more and more Americans are turning their backs towards religion (Jones, *The End* 38-56). Hence, Jones offers a rather bleak picture of the current climate in the United States:

There have been other times in our history when the fabric of American identity was stretched in similar ways – the Civil War, heightened levels of immigration at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the cultural upheavals of the 1960s.

But during these eras, white Christians were still secure as a demographic and cultural majority in the nation. The question at stake was whether they were going to make room for new groups at a table they still owned. Typically, a group would gain its seat in exchange for assimilation to the majority culture. But as white Christians have slipped from the majority over the past decade, this familiar strategy is no longer viable.

White Christians are today struggling to face a new reality: the inevitable surrender of table ownership in exchange for an equal seat. And it's this new higher-stakes challenge that is fueling the great partisan reorientation we are witnessing today. ("The Collapse")

To this very day, the United States continues to be the favourite destination of the world's immigrants, harbouring a stunning 20% of the global total (Connor and López). In 2015, the US foreign-born population reached a record height of 43.2 million people or 13.4% of its total population. Each year about 1 million new immigrants resettle in the United States (López and Bialik). New immigrants, their children and grandchildren hugely contribute to the changing demographics, as they accounted for 55% of the total population growth in-between 1965 and 2015. From 1965 onwards, after the passage of the landmark Immigration and Nationality Act, the American ethnic composition has significantly altered as more and more immigrants from Latin America and Asia flocked to 'the new world.' Their descendants will drive the growth in the US population for the 50 years to come (Pew Research Center, "Modern Immigration Wave" 7-9, 23-33).

Because of this changing demographic landscape, many whites believe that they are the victim of so-called 'reverse racism,' in which they are discriminated against by various minorities and the government (Bartlett 2-3). As Michael Norton and Samuel Sommers's study indicates, whites contend that they are now more regularly discriminated against than African Americans. The authors argue that whites perceive discrimination as a zero-sum game. When prejudice against African Americans is declining, discrimination against whites has to be increasing (Norton and Sommers 215-18). Moreover, as another study indicates, the increasing status of various minorities seems to be linked to the upsurge in anti-white bias perceived by those who favour white hegemony (Wilkins and Kaiser 439-46).

Several studies point out that whites are severely troubled by seeing their once dominant position imperilled: as H. Robert Outten and others point out, this increasing diversity strengthens whites' in-group feeling and the hostility towards ethnic minorities (14-25). Moreover, another study argues that this demographic change causes whites to endorse more conservative positions (Craig and Richeson 1189-97). Felix Danbold and Yuen Huo further contend that whites feel threatened by what the changing demographics will do to the hegemonic view of the United States as a white country (210-18). Finally, Deborah Schildkraut attests that the changing demographics, coupled with anti-white



discrimination, lead whites to adapt a more cohesive in-group identity and favour political representation by their ilk (84-106). Hence, we agree with James Dobbins and Judith Skillings' assessment that white privilege could be regarded as an addiction, as whites vociferously try to maintain their privileged status in society (14-27).

Secondly, while several groups have made decisive gains in the last decades, the white middle class/working class definitively is not one of them. As Erin Keane remarks, the lower and middle echelons of American society have experienced little to no increase in net income since the 1980s, while the upper 1% continues to thrive ("It's the Wealth Gap"). As Justin Gest argues, not so long ago, working-class whites constituted the middle of American society. More recently, however, they have been relegated to the fringes, as the middle class and upper class increasingly widened the gap (vii-3). A recent Pew Research Center publication finds that the American middle class no longer constitutes a majority, a position they held for more than 40 consecutive years. This demographic decline has been a long time coming, as from the 1970s onwards the share of the middle class has gradually dropped. In this same period, the inequality between the middle and upper tiers has also increased significantly. What is more, polarization is characteristic of the economic make-up of the US, as the highest and lowest ends of the spectrum are the fastest-growing. Americans without a college degree stand out as the ones that have lost the most ground, economically speaking (Pew Research Center, "The American Middle Class" 4-17, 35-49). Hence, as Mahamat Dodo indicates, the ability of working class people to rise up in society and achieve the American Dream by becoming middle class has all but dissipated (599-600). After all, not that long ago, blue-collar jobs still led to middle-class status.

However, as several groups in society are worse off than non-college educated whites, it is paramount to consider the subjective point of view, since, as Keane attests, it is all about perception ("It's the Wealth Gap"). Stephen Rose explains this seemingly paradoxical situation by referring to Samuel Stouffer's concept of relative deprivation, which argues that one is apt to compare one's situation to that of similar groups in society. While previously, non-college educated whites were eligible to hold top positions, this is no longer the case today as educational attainment has soared, opening up these positions to a variety of groups, including a larger share of minorities, yet excluding non-college educated whites. Hence, while their forefathers held these higher status positions, these possibilities have now largely dried up for their descendants (Rose 5-7). As Thomas Edsall writes, "For many men without college degrees, the scaffolding that underpinned their fathers' lives has been torn down" ("The Increasing Significance").

Thirdly, globalization and increasing robotization have also severely affected American society. More and more former blue-collar jobs are being outsourced to China, India and the likes, leading the United States to become what Robert Samuelson describes as a 'postindustrial society' ("America Sings"). On the other hand, the companies that remain opt to use robots to do jobs previously done by people. "A World without Work," as Derek Thompson's article is aptly titled, is no longer just a science fictional fantasy. As Thompson indicates, until now, all industrial revolutions have significantly shifted the economy, but always increased the amount of jobs. What is looming now is the possibility of a world without jobs, as artificial intelligence and computers take over ("A World without Work"). As work constitutes a key part of one's identity, this 'world without work' forms an existential threat.

At the same time, the increasing polarization in American society contributes to nativism's new dawn. Nowadays, people increasingly retreat into their 'ideological bubble' via their personalized Facebook and Twitter feed – what Bente Kalsnes describes as 'filter bubbles' or a "personal ecosystem of information that has been catered by algorithms, such as Google or Facebook. This way, the users are presented with information that confirms and strengthens their own cultural or ideological

bubbles” (79). As a result, their ideological outlook only hardens. As the Wall Street Journal aptly demonstrates, it is possible to discern a ‘Blue Feed’ and a ‘Red Feed’ (“Blue Feed, Red Feed”). However, social media are not the only icons of polarization. Just a generation ago, the evening news largely carried the same message no matter which channel you were tuning in to. Now, however, by watching Fox News or MSNBC, one is able to only hear messages reinforcing one’s core beliefs. Alternatively, one could also simply choose not to watch the news. Hence, the partisan media seem to strengthen the extremes, while hollowing out the middle (Levendusky).

This societal trend is mirrored in the American political landscape. A study by the Pew Research Center indicates that the Democrats and the Republicans are moving ever further apart. While the Democratic Party is becoming more ethnically diverse, better educated and less religious than the country as a whole, the GOP is moving in the opposite direction, as it becomes less diverse, more religious and lower educated than the national average. In addition, older voters increasingly turn towards the GOP, while the young flock towards the Democrats (“The Parties” 1). Moreover, while the Democratic Party favours cultural pluralism, the GOP wants to abide by white Christian America’s erstwhile hegemony (Jones, “The Collapse”). When David Wasserman investigated the 2016 voting behaviour by county, he found that less than 10 percent – a mere 303 out of 3,113 counties – could be described as ‘close contests,’ counties with less than 10% in-between Clinton and Trump. By contrast, more than a third of all counties were decided by a Trump or Clinton landslide – with more than 50% difference between both (“Purple America”). Victor Hanson aptly summarizes this polarized American landscape:

The United States is dividing as rarely before. Half the country, mostly liberal America, is concentrated in 146 of the nation’s more than 3,000 counties – in an area that collectively represents less than 10 percent of the U.S. land mass. The other half, the conservative Red states of the interior of America, is geographically, culturally, economically, politically, and socially at odds with Blue-state America, which resides mostly on the two coasts.

The two Americas watch different news. They read very different books, listen to different music, and watch different television shows. Increasingly, they now live lives according to two widely different traditions. (“Can a Divided America Survive?”)

Arlie Hochschild describes this ideological gridlock between the two extremes of a polarized society as an ‘empathy wall’ – “an obstacle to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those who hold different beliefs or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances” (5). As a result, ignorance is continually growing as the two extremes move ever further apart.

Hochschild perfectly captures the fear and anger of those left behind by contemporary society: Throughout American history, white Christian males have always been situated in the middle, waiting in line in order to achieve their American Dream. However, what they are witnessing in the last couple of years is that instead of gradually moving forward, they are falling behind step by step, since they have not seen any increase in their wages in the last decades. Thus, it seems that the American Dream has stopped working for them and only benefits those at the top. Further strengthening this downward movement are people who previously stood behind them cutting in line and bypassing these white Christian males – from African Americans to women to immigrants. What is more, liberal elites demand that they should feel sorry for these groups, while in reality, they are displacing the once hegemonic white Christian culture. While their plight is ignored or ridiculed in Hollywood blockbusters, these minority groups are aided by the federal government (Hochschild 135-144).

Hence, it should come as no surprise that these people start to “feel as strangers in their own land” (Hochschild 140):

You are a stranger in your own land. You do not recognize yourself in how others see you. It is a struggle to feel seen and honored. And to feel honored you have to feel – and feel seen as – moving forward. But through no fault of your own, and in ways that are hidden, you are slipping backward.

You turn to your workplace for respect – but wages are flat and jobs insecure. So you look to other sources of honor. You get no extra points for your race. You look to gender, but if you’re a man, you get no extra points for that either. If you are straight you are proud to be a married, heterosexual male, but that pride is now seen as a potential sign of homophobia – a source of dishonor. Regional honor? Not that either. You are often disparaged for the place you call home. As for the church, many look down on it, and the proportion of Americans outside any denomination has risen. You are old, but in America, attention is trained on the young. People like you – white, Christian, working and middle class – suffer this sense of fading honor demographically too, as this very group has declined in numbers. (Hochschild 144-45)

Even though Hochschild focused on Tea Party adherents, this very same anger and frustration clearly underpin Donald Trump’s rise to prominence. After all, Trump represents a mere maturation of Tea Party ideas and ideals.

Last but not least, as Dodo indicates, the high days of American economic supremacy are long gone, as China and other countries increasingly take up a larger share of the global economic pie. Additionally, American pre-eminence has largely become defunct, as the US no longer gets its way in international affairs as it used to several decades ago (Dodo 601-602, 606-607).

In short, the once-dominant white Protestant identity is gradually disappearing due to a combination of several forces. Whites are being outnumbered in demographics, while they experience more and more competition on the labour market. Globalization and polarization only increase this alienation. As a result, a significant share resorts to nativism in order to blame the outsider for these massive changes in society.

Still, the question remains as to why 2016 was the turning point, as all of the aforementioned changes were already well underway before and during Barack Obama’s presidency. Alongside the conventional wisdom that in every face-off between two contenders, a significant part of the electorate votes out of opposition to one of both, arguably, two key developments of Obama’s presidency could provide part of the answer.

Firstly, as the official representative and face of the nation, Obama clearly exposed the declining influence of the once hegemonic white native-born Protestant culture (see Skocpol and Williamson 77-81; Parker and Barreto 97-100). After all, for the first time ever a non-white President was elevated to the White House, due to the overwhelming support of various minorities – Obama gained 80% of the minority vote both in 2008 and 2012 (Pew Research Center, “Changing Face of America”). As such, the opposition of a majority of the white electorate was nullified – Obama only got 43% of the white tally in 2008 and a dismal 39% in 2012 (Lopez and Taylor iv; Pew Research Center, “Changing Face of America”). As Michael Tesler argues, Obama’s racial background set the stage for the salience of identity issues in the 2016 election (“Views about Race”).

Secondly, during Obama’s presidency and before Trump became the Republican contender, whites were already flocking towards the GOP, primarily those with lower educational levels (Sides 5-6). As Tesler contends, “Trump clearly did not create these patterns. But he effectively exploited them” (“How Racially Resentful”). Trump’s ability to rake up even larger swaths of the white working class ultimately gave him the edge. While Obama received a minority of the total white vote, his message

still resonated with a significant part of working-class whites. As Nate Cohn indicates, Obama was able to frame his position as that of the protector of the working class, with his message of change in 2008 and his opposition to Romney's campaign catering to the wealthy in 2012 ("Why the Election Is Close"). However, after eight years of Obama-led progressive politics, many white middle and working-class families have experienced no real change. Hence, the liberal focus on identity politics did not succeed in incorporating white middle and working-class Protestants. Therefore, they opted to change tack and gave Donald Trump a shot at being their champion, as he acknowledged their anger and despair. According to exit poll data, Trump outperformed Clinton 67 to 28% regarding non-college educated whites (Tyson and Maniam). Hence, "Democrats have to grapple with the fact that they lost this election because millions of white working-class voters across the United States voted for Obama and then switched to Trump" (Cohn and Monkovic).

Squaring the circle of voters deflecting from Obama to Trump can be ascribed to the salience of particular issues. As Jamelle Bouie contends, during the 2008 and 2012 races, a significant part of working-class whites sided with Obama as they prioritized economic over identity issues. After all, neither McCain nor Romney ran an explicitly prejudicial campaign, rendering the choice primarily an economic one. Trump, however, simultaneously appealed to their economic and identity position, ensuring that they no longer had to prioritize one over the other ("Why Obama Voters Defected"). After all, identity politics and immigration were more salient during the 2016 campaign as compared with previous elections (Sides 12). As Bouie writes: "[I]n the case of the Obama/Trump voter, all we have is a case of simple preference order. When the choice was between Obama and a conventional Republican, these voters chose Obama. But when the choice was between Obama's flawed successor and a man who promised to restore their greatness, Trump won." ("Why Did Some White Obama Voters Go for Trump?") After eight years of Obama's liberal policies, the stage had been set for a return to the values of the white American heartland, most prominently expressed in the vote of the Rustbelt.

Hence, during the 2016 election, these aforementioned cleavages in society found their outlet in the campaign of Donald Trump or as Hochschild puts it, "the scene had been set for Trump's rise like kindling before a match is lit" (221). After all, as Peter Bloom argues, the United States "had seemed to run out of answers to its most pressing economic, social and political problems" (100). Trump's solution was to return to the core white Protestant culture by truly 'making America great again.' In the end, Trump proved to be the right person at the right place at the right time.

### **3.2 Why Trump? Nativism and Identity Politics Undergirding Trump's Agenda**

Before delving into the specifics of Trump's campaign in order to try to explain why his message resounded and ultimately elevated him to the White House, it is important to point out that while Trump convincingly swept the electoral college (306 vs. Clinton's 232 votes), Clinton won the popular vote, outnumbering Trump by nearly 3 million (Wasserman, "2016 Popular Vote"). Hence, the system handed Trump the presidency and not the American electorate. After all, a mere 75,000 votes in former Democratic strongholds Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Wisconsin elevated Trump to the White House (Wasserman, "2016 Popular Vote").

Throughout the electoral season, Trump was continually underestimated as the political pundits and mainstream media seemed unable to grasp the underlying forces propelling him to the fore. Even after Trump's nomination, no one seemed to give him a real shot at the presidency. After all, without any political experience whatsoever, Trump, the political outsider, was pitched against Hillary Clinton, arguably in possession of one of the best resumes for the highest office ever. Moreover, Trump seemed to stumble from one controversy to the next, uttering remarks, which in previous elections would have ensured utter defeat at the polls. His love-hate relationship with the Republican establishment similarly did not plead in his favour. Still, on 8 November, Trump became 'the leader of the Free World.' In this section, we will try to offer some insights as to why he got there in the first place. Instead of pinpointing one main reason, we will highlight several interconnected forces that ultimately provided us with President Trump.

As already has been pointed out above, Trump first entered the political scene by fanning the Birtherist claims, alleging that Barack Obama was not born in the United States and, thus, constitutionally barred from taking up the highest office. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the platform he ran on during the 2016 election could be seen as a maturation of Tea Party ideas and ideals. What is more, as Charles Blow indicates, Trump's whole political career seems to be focused on erasing all of Obama's accomplishments. Ultimately, "For Trump, the mark of being a successful president is the degree to which he can expunge Obama's presidency" ("Trump's Obama Obsession"). Therefore, it could be argued that without President Obama there would not have been a President Trump.

First of all, Trump provided the white Protestant middle and working class with a voice, which they were denied for a long time, as the governmental establishment looked the other way. This neglect was due to both the Republican establishment and the Democrats. As Friedman contends, "Leaders of liberal democracies are accustomed to discussing the rights of minorities, not the rights of majorities" ("What Is a Nativist?"). Mohammed Cherkaoui describes this resentment as "a 'working-class' rebellion movement against the Republican elite and the 'failing' policies of the Obama administration" (4). The former has consistently favoured capitalist elites and big business, while refusing to touch base with their adherents (Cherkaoui 9). The Democrats, on the other hand, did not include the white Protestant middle and working class in their broad identity-based multiculturalism, by allocating most if not all of their attention to various minorities living in the urban liberal landscape (Persaud). In this way, as Bloom contends, the governmental elite gradually lost touch with the real concerns of those it supposedly represents. Trump skilfully tapped in this seething anti-establishment outrage in order to frame his message (Bloom 100). After all, Trump promised to 'drain the swamp' and how better to start than ensuring that Clinton, 'the ultimate insider,' did not receive the keys to the White House (W. Bennett 98).

What is more, as Hochschild argues, the right wanted to liberate themselves from the 'politically correct behaviour' imposed upon them by the dominant left. As such, they ought to feel for refugees, gay people, etc. If they refused to comply, liberals consistently painted them as utter bigots (15-16). Clinton unintentionally fanned this sentiment, when she uttered the following statement during one of her fundraisers: "You know, to just be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? The racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that. And he [Trump] has lifted them up." (Chozik)

By openly addressing the concerns of the white Protestant middle and working class on important issues such as free trade, immigration, and terrorism, Trump quickly became their mouthpiece. Even his uproarious rhetoric targeting huge swarms of American society did not hurt his bid. By contrast,

his supporters saw him as an authentic voice defying the imposed political correctness. As Richard Perloff contends, even though Trump espoused many falsehoods, he still exuded credibility because of his authentic, unpolished speech, while Clinton's refined rhetoric was defunct of all credibility (61). As his supporters argue, "Trump tells it like it is and calls problems by their name" (Van Aelst 16).

Trump promised to bring back working-class jobs and white Protestant culture, by returning the country to the good old days, offering an alluring illusion to those left behind. Hence, he portrayed himself as "a 'savior with a time machine'" (Burnham). The outsourcing of millions of blue-collar jobs, such as the mining and the automobile industry, had left huge swarms of the country utterly devastated. As one of Alexander Zaitchik's interviewees puts it, "Without the coal mines, we don't have no economy" (41). By promising to turn the clock back, Trump's campaign offered an alluring alternative to Clinton's status quo (Cosgrove 27). His campaign slogans 'Make America Great Again' and 'America First' resounded with the prevailing sentiment of a large part of the country left behind by swift changes in globalized society. Moreover, as Hochschild points out, he succeeded in reigniting those people's pride and sense of purpose. Thanks to Trump, "*they are no longer strangers in their own land*" (225, emphasis in original). Perloff aptly summarizes Trump's appeal:

Trump's narrative resonated with the white working class because it addressed the powerlessness and frustration many workers felt in the midst of crushing technological and economic change, experienced tangibly in communities facing joblessness and attendant social decay, manifest in drug addiction and marital strife. He tapped into real fears Americans had, offering policy alternatives that Republican elites had conveniently elided, telling people who felt they were at the bottom of the heap that their needs mattered. He was their blue-collar billionaire. (61)

Trump seemingly offered these people a last chance at turning the odds in their favour (Perloff 61). As one of Zaitchik's interviewees puts it, "Here is our last chance. If we don't do it now, we're going to go to our grave and it's never going to happen." (34) Thus, by appealing to the emotions of a significant share of the American electorate – the so-called 'silent majority' – Trump emerged victorious (Cosgrove 27). As Hochschild describes it, "Trump is an 'emotions candidate.' More than any other presidential candidate in decades, Trump focuses on eliciting and praising emotional responses from his fans rather than on detailed policy prescriptions" (225). In the end, it did not matter whether Trump's promises had almost no bearing in reality, what mattered was that he addressed the concerns of those left behind. After all, "in a smackdown between emotion and evidence, emotion always wins" (Hermida 76).

Trump's campaign significantly focused on identity politics and the related issues of inclusion and exclusion. As such, he continually insulted minorities and immigrants on the campaign trail. As Deborah Gabriel argues, an important part of his campaign was punctuated by the othering of non-whites, in accordance with the Tea Party claim to 'take their country back.' As the American population continues to diversify, more and more whites have banded together in the Republican camp and now found their white supremacist champion in Donald Trump (Gabriel 62). With his focus on identity issues, Trump succeeded in unifying all whites who had fallen victim to the aforementioned 'line cutters' and feared the demographic change threatening 'their' country and culture (Hochschild 226). After all, a psychological investigation revealed that reminding a white audience supportive of white hegemony about their looming minority status, significantly increased their likelihood of endorsing Trump and his anti-immigrant rhetoric (Major et al. 1-10). As Hochschild puts it, "Trump was the identity politics candidate for white men" (230). Or, to put it in Cherkaoui's words, Trumpism is "a defense of the whiteness of America" (3).

Hence, as is evident from the aforementioned disclosure, ‘racial anxiety’ and ‘economic anxiety’ are linked in several ways. Firstly, people tend to view gains and losses in relative numbers and not in absolutes. Secondly, Trump blamed racial minorities for the losses of the white working class. Thirdly, recession breeds tribalism, as people want to protect what they already have. Hence, when the economy is down, racism and nativism come to the fore (Thompson, “Donald Trump”).

By adding the white working class to the various groups consistently voting Republican, Trump succeeded in raking up just enough support to be elevated to the White House. Ostiguy and Roberts summarize the Trump phenomenon as follows: “The solution many see is a decisive leader who can ‘make (‘true’) America great again,’ and not only stop trade, immigration, Muslims, and other outside threats, but also ‘be like us’ (but better) and ‘stand up for us’ against establishment elites who do not share the heartland’s values.” (45) As such, nativism significantly undergirded Trump’s agenda, as white identity politics formed the backbone to much of Trump’s platform, something we will explore in more detail in the following section.

### **3.3 Trump the Nativist: Muslim Ban and Mexican Wall**

As has already been referred to above, undergirding Trump’s campaign was his message of America as a threatened white paradise, which should be protected from ‘the enemies at the gates.’ Or, as Julia Young states, “Throughout the campaign, ... Trump and his surrogates argued that one key problem has been preventing the America of today from being sufficiently ‘great.’ That problem is immigration” (218). Therefore, this section will further elaborate on the nativist aspects of Trump’s campaign and presidency, by focusing on two of his most tangible nativist proposals: constructing a wall on the Mexican border and implementing a Muslim ban. In this way, we will strengthen our claim for regarding Trump not only as a populist or a nationalist but also as a nativist. As Jared Goldstein contends, “the United States elected the first president in decades who espouses bluntly nativist views and who has given every indication that he plans to implement a nativist agenda” (59).

In his speech announcing his presidential bid, Trump immediately revealed what would become one of the key planks of his platform, as he painted a bleak picture of Mexican immigrants. Trump insisted that “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. .... They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people.” (“Presidential Announcement Speech”) According to Trump, open borders and the concurrent unchecked immigration have significantly contributed to the decline in American standards. The singling out of Mexicans and Hispanics, more generally, is not surprising as they represent the largest and most visible group of newcomers during the last decades. As of 2014, the United States harbours 55 million Hispanics, of which 64% trace their roots back to Mexico (Stepler and Brown).

His nativist rhetoric targeting Mexicans ultimately culminated in his claim to construct a wall on the Mexican border – paid for by the Mexicans – in order to keep illegal immigrants and Mexican criminals out and ensure the safety of those within. Even though most pundits consider this to be a mere symbolic promise, as the wall would drain the federal budget, it nonetheless clearly illuminates Trump’s nativism, as it highlights his intention to keep unwarranted immigrants out to protect the safety and security, but also the identity and culture of a white Protestant United States. As Marc

Hooghe and Sofie Marien contend, the wall symbolizes an ideal society, closing off the United States from intrusion by hostile forces. After all, “Has there ever been a more powerful symbol for closure than a wall?” (44) Initial reports seem to indicate that Trump’s harsh crack-down on immigration is working in deterring prospective immigrants of coming to the United States (Santiago and Kravarik).

Another nativist policy, which kept reappearing throughout Trump’s campaign, was his proposal to instigate a temporary shutdown of all immigration from several Muslim-majority countries. When in office, Trump did not back down on his campaign pledge and during his very first week – on 27 January to be precise – he immediately put the ban into effect, temporarily barring immigrants from seven predominantly Muslim nations: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen (Executive Order 13769). However, only several days later the ban was challenged in court and temporarily stayed. Nonetheless, Trump persisted and several weeks later, on 6 March, issued a second revised executive order, which ought to withstand further scrutiny (Executive Order 13780). Nonetheless, this second version met with the same fate, as it too was stayed in court. However, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of June, the Supreme Court issued a temporary verdict, allowing the majority of the ban to go into effect before it would consider the case in full (*Trump v. International Refugee Assistance Project and Trump v. Hawaii*). Hence, the ban went into effect on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June (Fang and Frej).

In essence, this ban keeps Muslims out of the country, since Trump links their religion to terrorism, one of the main threats to contemporary Western society. Since 9/11, Muslims are increasingly singled out as possible terrorists. The recent surge of ISIS attacks in the Western world has only caused further alienation in the American public. Trump’s rhetoric and travel ban blame all Muslims for the actions of a tiny minority. After all, Trump himself stated that “Islam hates us” (Schleifer). In this way, Trump aligns himself with what Huntington has described as a ‘clash of civilizations’ (see Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*). As Goldstein points out, Trump’s Muslim ban signifies that Islam is hostile to the American Constitution. Hence, Trump inscribes himself in a long nativist tradition of barring ‘aliens’ for their supposed incompatibility with this founding document (Goldstein 3-4). In essence, however, this ban is about portraying Muslims as un-American (Goldstein 72). As Young indicates, the nativist rhetoric portrays Muslims as posing a threat to the Christian identity and culture of ‘Uncle Sam’ (228).

Taken together, these two policies show that Trump blames the outsider (in this case Muslims and illegal immigrants) for the many ills in contemporary America. As Jamie Winders puts it, “Trump positioned immigrants as causing the losses that large swaths of the US have experienced and, perhaps most frighteningly, as fixing those feelings of marginalization by their absence – making America great again by removing immigrants from it” (42). Hence, nativism has once again become front and centre in American politics. As Young writes, “Today’s nativists ... have an outlet that earlier generations did not: a president who not only seems to agree with many of their arguments, but who also stokes the flames of this nativism so explicitly and aggressively” (228).



## Conclusion

As this thesis has shown, identity politics and a concurrent sense of belonging have been fundamental aspects of American society from its very inception. Since the nation is founded on an artificial construct – the Constitution – the United States has constantly struggled to define and redefine its sense of identity. After all, artificial constructs are more apt to contestation than a naturally grown identity, as is the case in Europe. When society was thriving, the US stood firm in its identification as a society built on individualism, adherence to the rule of law and a sense of freedom expressed in economic terms – commonly referred to as ‘the American creed.’ During periods of rapid social, economic and cultural change, however, identity politics were relegated to the centre of the conversation, as part of the population was struck by fear as to the destination their country was taking. Since they felt left behind by these rapid changes in society, these dispossessed tried to find solace by attempting to return to the ‘good old days,’ when everything was going fine and white Anglo-Saxon Protestant hegemony went virtually unchallenged. Sensing their country slipping away and their status diminishing, these people were thus especially apt to give in to nativist sentiment. By re-establishing and policing the boundaries between a ‘deserving’ in-group and the undeserving ‘outsiders,’ nativist movements vowed to allay their fears. As such, these recourses to nativism provided a sense of order and stability. Throughout American history, the belonging in-group has largely remained the same – white native-born Christians – while those deemed ‘un-American’ have changed according to the diversifying migration patterns and the increasing assertiveness of various minorities. Immigrants continually stood out as the easiest target, since their presence visibly changed the make-up of American society. After all, immigration always has been a double-edged sword: on the one hand, they were needed to work the ‘virgin land’ and to populate the New World, on the other hand, ‘the American’ has periodically felt threatened by their presence and lashed out at them as they were deemed responsible for the natives’ declining status. Catholics, Jews, and illegal Hispanic immigrants were only some of the groups that have fallen victim to this nativist backlash.

In the course of the 1850s-1860s, the United States witnessed nativism’s first large-scale outbreak, as the country was receiving large waves of destitute Catholics, primarily from Ireland and Germany. Eclipsing economic and safety concerns, these immigrants’ religion caused a powerful nativist backlash, as Catholicism was deemed incompatible with the Constitution and leading American values. After all, the United States was originally founded as a ‘safe haven’ for those who had fled the Old Continent’s strict religious conformity – the same rigidity these Catholic immigrants were supposedly bringing with them to the United States. Know Nothings felt that Catholics were harvesting too much influence, as even seasoned politicians and whole political parties started to cater to their vote. To combat this sense of deprivation and to keep Catholics in check, they vowed to solely elect native-born to office and to lengthen the naturalization process to twenty-one years. However, the movement quickly disintegrated as the Civil War gave way to an even more fundamental cleavage

in American society, as two radically different visions of America were pitted against each other. The internal battle between the Northern industrial centre and the Southern agrarian economy would settle once and for all who would determine what it meant to be American – America’s real revolution.

In the wake of the First World War, the Second Ku Klux Klan reignited this nativist sentiment, as the war had exposed several far-ranging alterations in American society. Due to the Second Industrial Revolution, America was gradually changing into an urbanized industrial economy. While the ‘boys’ set out to serve in the war, they had to be replaced in the domestic labour force. As such, both African Americans and women had witnessed decisive material gains. In the course of these swift societal changes, a new wave of immigrants had reached the ‘New World.’ Once again, Catholicism was brought to the American shores. However, in addition to this religious element, there was an equally important racial/ethnic element. No longer Anglo-Saxon by stock, these Southern and Eastern Europeans were seen as racially inferior. Some intellectuals even feared for a ‘race suicide.’ Even successful Jewish bankers were not immune to this fierce nativist backlash. With these new groups gaining prominence in society, white native-born Protestants experienced dispossession on multiple levels simultaneously. To combat this sense of victimization, the Klan promised to protect white native-born Protestant culture by warding off the combined forces of modernity and change. Nonetheless, the Klan never really succeeded in converting their agenda into tangible policy proposals. With the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act in 1924, setting quota to stall the country’s increasing diversification and with a ‘100 percent American president’ Herbert Hoover swiftly elected in 1928, the Klan gradually disappeared from the political scene.

Fast forward to 2009, when Barack Obama’s ascendancy resulted in a new ardent outbreak of nativism under the banner of the Tea Party. This movement vowed to take their country back, as Obama came to symbolize all that was wrong with America: progressive politics (Obamacare), liberal elitism and the increasing assertiveness of various minorities. These policies all ran counter to the nativist agenda, which wanted America to return to a time when white native-born Protestant culture still was hegemonic. With the first non-white President in office, their declining clout was most visibly exposed. By opposing Obama’s each and every move and targeting every Republican politician who did not cater to their vote, the Tea Party has been extremely influential in fanning anti-establishment politics and causing a dissatisfaction with politics as usual. While some have argued that the Tea Partiers increasingly became a liability for the GOP, only several years later the Republican playing field for the 2016 nomination was almost exclusively made up of former adherents, with ‘Birtherist’ Donald Trump emerging victorious.

With this historical contextualization in mind, we turned to the contemporary situation to argue that by 2016 the stage had been set for a nativist to be elevated to the Oval Office. After all, the white native-born Christian culture’s hegemony that had determined the agenda for the last 250 years was coming to an end. The sheer number of immigrants threatened to fundamentally alter the core of American society, as Hispanics who poured across the border started to form their own enclaves. Numbering up to 40 million or 13% of America’s total population, the foreign-born posed a visible threat to America’s core culture. Additionally, the white middle and working classes increasingly felt left behind by the rapidly changing globalized society. Their wages have remained stagnant since the backend of the ‘80s and a significant share of their jobs have been outsourced to China, India, and other low-wage countries where multinationals were able to make a larger profit. While previous Industrial Revolutions changed how the work was done, today’s Cognitive Industrial Revolution poses an existential threat to the human being, as computers and robots are rendering us obsolete. On top of these fundamental changes, Washington’s political establishment has turned a wary eye on those left behind. After all, these people were seen as mere ‘deplorables’ – dixit Clinton – unable to cope with

the ever-changing requirements of a globalized society. While trying to right the past's wrongs by advocating governmental intervention on behalf of African Americans and other minorities, the liberal elite conveniently forgot to include white working-class constituents in their calculations. Contemporary America's increasing self-segregation in like-minded enclaves possibly contributed to this situation, since it only deepens the ignorance and mutual misunderstanding. The United States' domestic uncertainty is also mirrored on the global scene, as Uncle Sam no longer gets its bidding as it used to several decades ago.

Alongside these structural strains, 2016 witnessed the end of Barack Obama's landmark presidency, a perfect time to radically reset the clock and try to wind back as many of his achievements as possible. After all, the nation's first non-white President had come to symbolize the declining clout of white native-born America. By heightening the salience of identity issues and drawing an even larger share of the white electorate into the Republican camp, nativism could once more come to the fore.

Along came Donald Trump who successfully tapped into this seething mix of fear and dispossession by promising to listen to what the white working class was saying and, even more importantly, to once again provide them with a voice. By vowing to bring back their jobs and former hegemony, Trump envisioned himself as their 'blue-collar billionaire.' Out went the politically correct behaviour and adherence to liberal values and elite conventions; in came a vision of the United States that harked back to the 1950s, when America – read white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America – was truly great. To 'make America great again' could better be read as to 'make white America great again.'

In Trump's eyes, unchecked immigration significantly contributed to the decline of the white working class. Throughout his campaign, Mexicans and Muslims stood out as the main threats to be dealt with. To combat the endless flow of immigrants pouring across the southern border and to keep the 'bad hombres' out, Trump proposed to build his Mexican wall. Even though it is very doubtful whether this wall ever will be built, since it would drain the American budget, it is hard to think of a more fitting symbol to stress his intention to curtail access to the United States. Initial reports seem to indicate that his harsh rhetoric and crack-down on illegal immigration is working to discourage prospective immigrants from attempting to start a new life in the United States.

Trump's Muslim ban forms the second cornerstone of his larger nativist agenda. Even though the proposal has aroused a lot of criticism and been repeatedly stalled in various courts, the Supreme Court granted Trump a temporary victory, allowing the ban to take effect before it would hear the case in full. Although the ban still is temporary, it is hard to miss its underlying message. By singling out several Muslim-majority countries, Trump clearly signals his belief that Muslims pose an inherent threat to the well-being of the United States.

Thus, why has nativism resurfaced in the New World? In essence, we contend that 2016 constituted a new benchmark due to the synchronous occurrence of various far-reaching changes and alterations culminating at the end of the Obama-era. The changing demographic landscape and growing economic inequality were sustained by globalization and polarization along ideological lines. Taken together, Trump skilfully capitalized on this volatile cocktail by heightening the salience of identity issues and, hence, drawing an additional share of the white working class into the Republican camp. As such, we have argued that a strong argument could be made to perceive Trump not only as a populist or as a nationalist, but also, and perhaps more fundamentally, as a nativist trying to protect the core of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America. In this way, we could discredit the multiple claims of Trump's uniqueness by placing him in a larger historical context. As my supervisor would say, 'everything changes while everything stays the same.' Even though halting and reversing imminent change is a

mere illusion, Trump was able to convince a large enough share of the electorate in order to advocate this nativist agenda from inside the White House. In the end, he proved to be the right person at the right place at the right time.

At this point, it is still unclear what the future could bring. Even though it is impossible to halt globalization and increasing diversification – the US is destined to become a majority-minority country in the near future – American society is conservative at heart and the white native-born Christian share of the population could set the majority of the agenda for a long time to come. After all, the American electoral system has several built-in protections for powerful minorities and partisan gerrymandering could further provide an embattled ‘minority’ with disproportionate power. Hence, a lot will depend on how this ‘new minority’ chooses to deal with these consequential changes.

Yet, since only several 10,000 votes in some key states have determined the electoral outcome, it is fair to assume that the pendulum could just as easily swing back in the opposite direction. For this to happen, however, the Democrats need to change their message and go back to basics by addressing the real problems of everyday Americans, instead of trying to flesh out what role Russia played in the 2016 election. In the end, 2016 has proven to be conducive for extreme voices in both parties, as Bernie Sanders all but single-handedly deprived Clinton of the Democratic nomination.

At long last, the only viable solution lies in breaching the empathy gap and increasing one’s awareness of ‘how the other half lives.’ In this way, ‘Know Somethingness’ could replace ‘Know Nothingness’ and the US could gradually build towards ‘a more perfect union.’ Until then, it is fair to assume that new nativist outbreaks are destined to occur in the future. As such, this story is definitively to be continued ...

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