Inventing America's First Immigration Crisis

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CHAPTER 2

Culture War

_We find in many States, cities, and towns, an open war on the part of our Catholic fellow-citizens against the use of the Bible._

—Lewis D. Campbell, American Party rally speech, 1855

_The attempt to substitute for our Protestant Sabbath a Catholic holiday, to make it a day of parade and show and amusement, to accustom our children to its desecration, is only a part of the general attack upon our institutions._

—Charles B. Boynton, Address before the Citizens of Cincinnati, July 4, 1855

Many Americans reacted viscerally to instances in which immigrant groups challenged the status quo. Catholics remained primary targets, but an ensuing culture war circumscribed various immigrant customs that native-born Americans deemed culturally corrosive. Public schools served the interests of promoting nationalism and inducing assimilation during the era of westward expansion. Implicitly Protestant Christian school curricula, however, repelled Catholics, Germans, and Irish. Immigrant resistance to the use of the King James Bible in American public schools entailed a controversy reaching beyond the domains of pedagogy or theology. From the perspective of native-born Americans, the successful assimilation of Catholics and German and Irish immigrants was not a foregone conclusion. The mid-nineteenth-century school controversy directly motivated America’s first political nativist movement, which associated Protestant Christianity with American greatness and promoted the mandatory use of the King James Bible in schools as the primary way to convert Catholics, Germans, and Irish to American national values.

Likewise, Sunday regulations in the United States defined the requirements for national belonging. Local leaders utilized Sunday closing laws to prevent Catholic feasting and German-style recreation on the Lord’s Day. Immigrants of
all backgrounds and creeds, ironically enough, united politically against Sunday regulation. This process was most clearly observed in the urban West. Upon arrival, immigrants from distant provinces of the German Confederation discovered cultural bonds and political solidarity as German Americans.

Immigrants of various religious persuasions frequently rejected standard American curricula and Sunday regulations. Catholics, Germans, and Irish formed their own educational and cultural institutions to meet demand, and immigrant political solidarity expanded. Implicitly Protestant Christian biases repelled many Catholics and immigrants from the very institutions designed to induce their assimilation.

The Limits of “Nonsectarian” Education

The founders of the United States mandated public schools in order to prepare young pupils for exercising their American citizenship. They believed that universal literacy and basic knowledge formed the basis of a healthy, self-governing republic. In his “Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” Thomas Jefferson explained that the best way to foster representative government was through the meritorious selection of officeholders “without regard to wealth, birth or other accidental condition.” Education, rather than bloodlines or titles, he believed, could elevate the status of all men regardless of birth.

Jefferson proposed a three-tiered system of state-sponsored education in Virginia, including three years of state-funded primary schooling, free tuition for select boys at twenty regional academies, and even free tuition for undergraduates at the University of Virginia. The education of women was not in his purview. Legislatures repeatedly rejected Jefferson’s plans for education as well as similar plans drafted by the first six presidents of the United States—including George Washington, who bequeathed his own money for founding a national university in the District of Columbia—because many property owners objected to paying taxes for anything other than primary schools. Besides, those who could afford it preferred enrolling their children in status-affirming private academies.3

Public schools lacked funding and institutional standards. Many states and territories did not address this problem in full earnest until the 1840s. The Northwest and Southwest Ordinances of 1787 and 1790 mandated public schools in western districts, but westward expansion occurred at such a rapid rate during the early nineteenth century that school construction could not keep up with migrating populations. Immigration from Europe, moreover, added the complication of educating non-American and non-English-speaking
inhabitants in the territorial West, which fell under the U.S. government’s jurisdiction.

While state governments lagged behind, American religious organizations quickly took up the mantle of education in the West. Church-affiliated societies in the East raised enormous amounts of money for the development of Sunday schools in needy areas, raising over $200,000 by 1827. By 1830, Joshua Belden, a missionary in St. Louis, celebrated the Presbyterian Church’s mission “to establish Sunday Schools in every settlement in this valley, within the short space of two years.” For him, the education of westerners was “fraught with greater consequences to the Nation than any ever before adopted.” Not until 1840 did state-funded common schools begin to supplant Sunday schools, and even then only gradually and unevenly over the next couple of decades.

Due to the plurality of Protestant sects in America, educators typically adopted a policy of “religious civility,” by which Christians might put aside denominational differences and unite for the sake of making the illuminating light of knowledge available to all Americans. Public-school administrator and instructor Calvin Stowe (husband of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lyman Beecher’s daughter) believed “that notwithstanding the diversity of sects, there is common ground, on which the sincerely pious of all sects substantially agree.” The Western Literary Institute, founded in Cincinnati in 1831, vowed to educate students “of all climes and languages and religions under heaven.” American educational institutions frequently demonstrated a commitment to nonsectarianism, insofar as participants fell under the umbrella of Protestant Christianity. Numerous evangelical coalitions allied for the educational development of the West, including the American Sunday School Union, the American Bible Society, the American Education Society, the American Tract Society, the American Home Missionary Society, and the American Protestant Society. Some organizations were blunter about their designs, such as the Evangelical Alliance to Overthrow the Papacy.

In 1827 Mary Sibley and her husband, George, founded a Presbyterian academy for young women in St. Charles, a Missouri River town about thirty miles north of St. Louis. Together, the couple composed a living metaphor for American citizenship: Mary, a dedicated believer, represented the religious character of the republic; George, an avowed agnostic, represented the civil. Mary accommodated her students of different backgrounds by keeping her religious zeal at bay, and George promoted the Christian principles that supposedly supported American democracy. The original Lindenwood charter proposed a course of instruction “Intellectual, Moral and Domestic, based on the Settled principles of
the Christian Religion, and carefully adapted to those on which are founded the free institutions of our Country.”

Lindenwood School affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, but its official circular promised parents that teachers would not attempt to indoctrinate students in the theology of infant baptism and predestination; rather, the Sibleys guaranteed that all lessons would be nonsectarian, or at least broad enough to encompass the views of nearly all trinitarian Christian denominations in the region, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Presbyterians alike.

It was no secret to anyone that knew her: Mary Sibley was among the most avid of believers. Her Sunday activities included attending a morning Bible study and two separate sermons, one at her Presbyterian church at 11:00 A.M., and another at the local Methodist church at 2:30 P.M.; organizing prayer meetings in the late afternoon; and teaching a “Sabbath School for Slaves” in the evening. Sibley also ran a 9:00 A.M. Sunday school session for the Presbyterian church in the town, which maintained strong ties to St. Louis minister William Potts. During the week, she worked for the Female Benevolent Society disseminating Bibles and religious tracts. She ardently supported temperance and raised awareness of alcohol abuse once she finished her weekly duties for the local Bible club, the Foreign Mission Society, and the American Colonization Society. In her spare time Sibley wrote religious articles for Elijah Parish Lovejoy’s *St. Louis Observer*.

The same could not be said of her husband and Lindenwood School co-founder, George Sibley. Unlike his apparently pious wife, George remained “incredulous as to the truth of the Christian religion,” to use his own words from a letter he wrote to an acquaintance. He was for most of his life an avowed agnostic, a crucial factor, it would seem, in the decision of at least a few secularly minded southern gentlemen to send their daughters to Lindenwood School.

One concerned parent, William Russell, expressly requested that his daughter not waste any of her study time on religion nor her playtime on “revivals or night meetings,” which he believed were far “too exciting to the students.” The recent memory of his two nephews neglecting school in nearby Belleville, Illinois, to attend such revivals haunted him still. “I don’t know that there have been such meetings in St. Charles,” Russell told the Sibleys, “but I object to any youth under my charge going to them either day or night.” He called such revivals a “contagious disease,” the “wickedness of bigot makers,” and ultimately “a prostitution and straight forward service of the devil.”

George Sibley and his benefactors never renounced the teaching of Christian values, so long as they were not presented from a particular sectarian, or
denominational, point of view. This is why concerned parent Russell could rail against “night meetings,” rant about teachers who dare “to catechize or to lecture about matters of religion,” yet insist that his daughter attend “Church on Sunday, or, at an appropriate time, to read the Bible.”

Providing education in western Sunday schools initially functioned as a generic Christian charity for the “destitute.” In many places churches were the only organizations offering primary education to “many thousands of poor and vagrant children,” George Sibley observed. He believed that Sunday schools were also “anti-sectarian in [their] construction, object and tendency” because they aimed to teach children “the first rudiment of education” and inculcate them only in the “undisputed doctrines” of Christianity. According to his wife, Sunday schools generally received “the sanction of all the principal Protestant sects.” Local Germans of all creeds took advantage of free Sunday School lessons to learn rudimentary English. In the summer of 1832, Mary Sibley celebrated how the “cabin” in which she taught on Sundays housed “mostly Dutch children” (“Dutch” was a common moniker for “German”), although she complained in private about German Catholic children missing school when bishops from New Orleans visited St. Charles.

Although Mary Sibley promoted nonsectarian education as faithfully as her husband, she nevertheless possessed quite different reasons for it. She was sickened to see Presbyterians, Methodists, and other evangelical Christian groups in the area bickering over “doctrinal points which every sect admit not essential to Salvation.” Part of her disgust with Protestant infighting was that it distracted fellow educators from combating their common foe: the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic immigrants started arriving in the West in greater numbers during the 1820s. The Jesuit-run Saint Louis University, founded in 1818, had thrived in the city. And other Catholic schools quickly emerged there as well. German Catholics began to settle upriver in St. Charles. Sibley argued in an article for the St. Louis Observer that “the Jesuits and Romans are for the most part anything but Christians.” Furthermore, “Jesuits, Papists, and Infidels,” Mary warned, would be “united in the latter days against the Children of God to stop the progress of the Redeemer’s cause.” She recorded her growing disgust with Catholicism in her personal diary. When a Jesuit priest dropped by her residence requesting financial support for the construction of a new convent, Mary refused to greet him and stewed instead up in her room. George went outside, graciously received the priest, and even donated a couple of dollars to the cause. What could be more inimical to her vocation, she wondered in private, than the arrival of Catholic immigrants “under the influence of the Roman priest?”
Sibley documented her several attempts to convert the German Catholics in St. Charles. When one family refused to receive propaganda from the Female Benevolent Society, she slipped a tract into a book on their shelf anyways. Another time she sat for hours witnessing to a dying Catholic woman who was so ill she could hardly speak. Sibley regularly passed out German-language religious tracts to her students, prepared with the help of German translators within the St. Charles auxiliary of the American Tract Society. When Catholic passersby walked in and out of sight, she prayed silently “that God would enlighten the minds of all deluded persons.” She also admitted in her diary that she was most anxious to teach young ladies from New Orleans so “they may carry home some of those principles of the Christian religion which are so little known to the inhabitants of the Catholic districts of Louisiana.”

Mary Sibley believed that in order to convert European immigrants to the American worldview, educators must first rescue the Catholics in their midst “from the dark superstitions of the Romish Church.” One of the stories she wrote down in her diary is particularly revealing. In 1832 she promised one Mrs. Hunt, the Catholic mother of two new recruits to Lindenwood School named Theodosia and Julia, that she would not induce the girls “to abandon [their] religion.” But at one point she wrote a pointed letter to the mother expressing her concern that Theodosia’s Catholicism “will prevent her from progressing very rapidly in her studies.” The implication in the letter was that Protestantism was a system of thought completely compatible with critical intellectual development, while Catholicism was fundamentally opposed to free and open inquiry. Sibley claimed that the student’s Catholicism would do nothing more than to “secure her from the contamination of what you consider heretical opinion.” She wrote Mrs. Hunt also that her younger daughter, Julia, was an exception among Catholic students because she “has a mind that will lead her to demand the why’s and wherefore’s”; Julia, Sibley prodded, “will likewise be more apt to become a Protestant, if she ever turns her attention to the subject of religion.” How this minute encounter immediately affected Mrs. Hunt and her girls remains unknown, but it certainly did not stand alone. Mary Sibley’s exchange embodied the attitudes of many American educators in the region.

Presbyterian minister Elijah Parish Lovejoy first came to St. Louis in 1827 to found a day school and evangelize against Catholicism, which was “spreading in our country to an alarming degree, and this too entirely by foreign influence.” Reverend Lovejoy today is better known as the editor of the antislavery Alton Observer in Illinois and as the first “martyr of abolition,” but he devoted more time to mission efforts than politics. He served as the secretary of the Missouri
and Illinois Tract Society, which promoted Bible reading, tract distribution, temperance, and Sunday schools. As an editor of the *St. Louis Observer*, Lovejoy urged his fellow countrymen to guard against “the hordes of ignorant, uneducated, vicious foreigners who are now flocking to our shores, and who, under the guidance of Jesuit Priests, are calculated, fitted and intended to *subvert our liberties.*” He also condemned Protestant parents who sent their children to Catholic parochial schools since Catholic management of “schools, nunneries and colleges for the especial benefit of Protestants,” the reverend warned, was part of “a covert, crafty design.”

Like the Sibleys at Lindenwood, David Todd Stuart, Presbyterian minister and head of the Shelbyville Female College located thirty miles east of Louisville, Kentucky, described his academy as nonsectarian and admitted Catholic girls, although he believed “an institution should have some decided religious character.” One day he invited a reverend to address the “girls on the subject of Romish Female Schools.” Reverend Ropeter “requested our girls to form a society and make our school a life-member of the Evangelical Society,” Stuart wrote in his journal. He appointed several students to raise money for the Evangelical Society to combat Roman Catholicism in the West. This might have been awkward for the Catholic students in attendance, but “Lavinia Winchester—a Catholic,” Stuart mentioned in his journal, “took his remarks in good part.”

Catharine Beecher, the daughter of Lyman Beecher, raised funds for the Western Female Institute in Cincinnati for the explicit purpose of preventing Catholic convents from gaining control “of an ungoverned, ignorant, and unprincipled populace.” A fellow educator based in Philadelphia, Sarah Josepha Hale, raised alarm over the growing number of Catholic convents in the West. “Female education must be provided for,” she warned, “otherwise convents will increase, and Catholicism become permanently rooted in our country.” Good republican households required good Christian mothers, Hale argued, and Catholic convents corroded the ability of women to teach their children American republican values. Evangelical Christians who contributed to the surge of benevolence, voluntarism, and revival in the early nineteenth century generously sponsored educational initiatives in the West to ensure that people of all classes and creeds could read the Bible for themselves.

**The King James Bible as a Textbook**

Public schools performed the potentially vital function of teaching children American values. In order to promote unity over division in a religiously plural
nation, American educators committed themselves to “non-sectarian” education. Educators insisted that the Bible, without note or comment, was universal, like American values; the Bible transcended “sectarian” principles so that the only teachers guilty of undue sectarianism were those who used scripture to preach on specific doctrines. Because Americans insisted on using the King James Version of the Bible in public schools, however, pedagogical and theological disagreement between native-born Americans and immigrants became a national dilemma.

Pedagogically, American educators generally agreed that the King James Bible should be included in American curricula, but as professor of American Studies Laurence Moore pointed out, they were confused about how exactly instructors should use scripture, whether as a textbook or devotional book. Moore identified “two distinguishable rationales for Bible reading”: the first stressed the various applications of biblical truths to other, secular areas of school instruction, while the second emphasized biblical studies as an extracurricular, devotional practice. Generally speaking, the educators in the Common School Revival of the 1840s and 1850s did not support the Bible as a textbook on its own but as a supplemental source for lessons in arithmetic, geography, grammar, history, and other subjects. Frequent pedagogical and theological disagreements between immigrants and Americans, Catholics and Protestants, and among Protestant Americans forged the transformation of the use of Bible from an applied source offering periodic instruction in general Christianity to a devotional source serving primarily civic purposes. The Bible increasingly served as a token of reverence for the supposed principles of the American nation, much like the pledge of allegiance ritual at the beginning of the school day.31

Theologically, Germans preferred to read Martin Luther’s German-language translation. Moreover, most Catholics refused to let their children read the King James Version because the Catholic Church had maintained a running ban on it since its publication in 1611. The Vatican also upheld bans on other “Protestant translations” prohibited by Pope Pius IV in the Index of the Council of Trent of 1559. Although Pius eventually gave his permission for vernacular translations of the Bible, he decreed that Catholics should read only translations approved by the holy office. Many Catholic leaders considered reading “Protestant” translations a grave sin that could potentially result in excommunication. They constantly turned away Bible tenders, tract evangelizers, Protestant ministers, and educators for this very reason. Catholic parents across the United States pleaded with state boards of education to allow their children to bring their own pope-approved Bibles to school. If not that, then they asked them to exempt
Catholic pupils from reading the King James Version in class. If no other option could be found, then they wanted to remove Bible study from common school curricula altogether. Americans took special umbrage with immigrants’ resistance to the King James Bible because to them it represented the Reformation, religious ingenuity, and freedom in the English-speaking world. First of all, Americans argued that the King James Version offered a more accurate English translation based on better Greek sources than the Roman Catholic Church–approved Douay-Rheims Version, which was based on St. Jerome’s fourth-century Latin translation, also known as the Vulgate. King James I’s English translation of the Bible, finally completed in 1611, replaced many of the old traditional interpretations and statements of Catholic dogma with new commentary. Furthermore, in keeping with German reformer Martin Luther, the scholars commissioned by King James rejected the canonicity of several Old Testament books. The Catholic Bible still includes six books that King James’s scholars expunged, including Tobit, Judith, First and Second Maccabees, the Wisdom of Solomon, and Baruch. Protestant theologians refer to these as the Apocrypha, or works of “dubious authenticity.”

The very ability to update translations of the Bible and adjust the canon became a significant part of Protestant American Christianity itself. “Nowhere did the marriage between Protestantism and the Enlightenment produce more lively offspring,” historical theologian Mark Noll has pointed out, “than in the American appropriation of the Bible.” Americans endorsed the “open Bible” concept. They assumed that the scriptures were perspicuous and that ordinary people could glean essential “truths” from passages without any theological commentary, reference tools, or clerical guidance. The particular hermeneutic of Bible reading in the United States implicitly entailed a narrative about American identity: that American citizens had the right to read the Bible for themselves, and that they should, lest they fail to practice what inspired their unique sense of independence in the first place. Most Americans associated reading the Protestant Bible with what one nativist writer later christened the country’s “holy principle”—that is, private judgment. Even as an agnostic, George Sibley defended Bible reading in schools because the “civil and religious rights to read and study and investigate its truth” undergirded the “national character” of the people of the United States. According to Presbyterian minister Nicholas Murray, a few basic components united America’s Christian denominations: “an open Bible, repentance towards God, [and] faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, without any intervening power between the individual soul and God.” According to Murray, “religion in this land is a personal matter—just what the Bible makes it.”
ability of individual citizens to access the Protestant Bible and interpret it themselves paralleled the independence of mind required in American civic life, while the mediation of priests, Murray claimed, seemed incompatible in principle with American democracy.  

While a public policy of implicitly Protestant Christian instruction might have placated most native-born Americans, immigrants presented a challenge. In addition to opposing the King James, many immigrants also expressed concern about exposing their children to the anti-European, anti-Catholic narratives in American textbooks. History texts in primary schools emphasized the “historical” tendency of Catholic Europe to produce ignorance and superstition, infidelity and bloodshed. One of the more widely used geography textbooks taught students, “In most Roman Catholic countries, the people are forbidden to read the Bible, and many other books; and while there is often a large number of learned men, the people are generally very ignorant.” Samuel Putnam’s 1828 Sequel to the Analytical Reader identified Protestant John Huss as “a zealous reformer from Popery. . . . He was bold and preserving; but at length, trusting himself to the deceitful Catholics, he was by them brought to trial, condemned as a heretic, and burnt at the stake.” An explicitly anti-Catholic textbook for youngsters became popular in Massachusetts, going through a total of seven editions between 1844 and 1850: The Trial of the Pope of Rome, the antichrist or Man of Sin described in the Bible, for high treason against the Son of God, before the Right Hon. Divine Revelation, the Hon. Justice Reason, and the Hon. Justice History. Catholic parents complained about biased history and geography texts in the common schools. One group in New York, for example, petitioned the Public School Society: “Many of the selections in their elementary reading lessons contain matter prejudicial to the Catholic name and character. . . . The term ‘POPERY’ is repeatedly found in them. This term is known and employed as one of insult and contempt towards the Catholic religion.”

Indeed, during the antebellum era, American public schools hardly ever embraced pure secularism. Americans typically agreed with educator Horace Bushnell that their public schools ought “to be Christian schools.” The American educational system, once reformed, could uphold “one school and one Christianity,” Bushnell explained, and thus “cement the generations to come in a closer unity.”

In most state-funded schools, passages from scripture formed the content basis of lessons in courses such as English grammar, French, geology, Greek, history, Latin, natural philosophy, reading, and spelling. Boards of education encouraged instructors to focus on passages from the Bible that reinforced American principles. Massachusetts educator Horace Mann campaigned relentlessly for
nationwide state-funded public education, with uniform curricula and facilities for immigrant and native-born Americans alike. Mann believed, in a manner not too far removed from Jefferson, that common schools for common people vindicated “all rational hopes respecting the future.” This vision built on what one historian called a “characteristic American faith” that common education would “ensure that public deliberation would begin at a sufficiently high level to be instructive in practice as well as theory.” Mann continued to mandate Bible-based curricula, during his campaign to enforce uniform standards and curricula nationwide. Thus, the Common School Revival established a public school system that scholars have since described as “openly Christian, avowedly nonsectarian, and implicitly Protestant.”

Boards of education in nearly every county mandated the use of the King James Bible, without note or comment, as required curriculum. Most American boards, after all, included Christian ministers. In St. Louis, for example, William Renshaw served as both the president of the Missouri Sunday School Union and of the Board of St. Louis Public Schools. At the same time in Cincinnati, William S. Ridgley, pastor of the city’s First Presbyterian Church and chairperson of the Young Men’s Bible Society of Cincinnati, also served on the board of public schools. James Young Scammon, founder of the New Jerusalem Church in Chicago, the first Swedenborgian church established in the area, presided as the president of the Board of Chicago Public Schools from 1843 to 1845. William Jones, Scammon’s co-member at the Chicago Lyceum and a brother at New Jerusalem, also served as president of Chicago’s school board twice, between 1840 and 1843 and again in 1851. Numerous other examples could be provided for almost every town in America.

Americans interpreted immigrant resistance to the King James Version as the undue influence of foreign clerics. They recalled the apparent effect of the availability of the Bible in sixteenth-century Europe. The Roman Catholic Church considered unapproved translations heretical, and Protestant reformers avidly read the Bible in the vernacular and used passages to condemn Catholic doctrines. Similarly, Americans in the nineteenth century believed an open Bible would compel Catholic citizens to challenge their church’s doctrines. Reverend Murray predicted in one of his widely read anti-Catholic books that “the circulation of the Bible will be the death of popery.” “Everything in the Bible is simple,” he claimed, and “not a word is said about popes, patriarchs, cardinals, metropolitans, prelates, or of the duty of implicit obedience to their authority.”

John A. Gurley promoted an open Bible in his Cincinnati newspaper, *Star in the West*, to annihilate the “superstition of Catholicism.”
Numerous Bible societies in the West received a steady stream of donations from benefactors in the East simply to make the scriptures available, without comment or note. Early organizations, such as the Rehoboth Society in Cincinnati, raised substantial funds to circulate Bibles for “the suppression of vice and immorality.” The Louisville and Vicinity Bible Society, founded as an auxiliary to the American Bible Society in 1836, distributed nearly 6,000 Bibles annually. The Young Men’s Bible Society of Cincinnati, also an auxiliary of the American Bible Society, distributed 30,610 copies in just two years (1842–44); at the time, Cincinnati’s entire population was approximately 50,000.

Distributing agents made special efforts to press King James Bibles on Catholics. When one agent came upon such a household in Louisville in 1839, the man told him he wanted “no Protestant Bible.” Seeing that the householder’s daughter was eager for a copy, the agent “handed her a New Testament.” Her father then remarked, “When we lived in New Albany, Iowa, this girl went to the Presbyterian Sunday School, and now she cannot be content without a Testament … poor thing, let her have one anyhow, it will not hurt her.” The Louisville and Vicinity Bible Society counted this a major victory against the degenerating influence of Catholicism in the city.

It had to be the King James, Reverend Edward P. Humphrey told his congregation in 1852, because Catholic versions included extensive commentary, or “Jesuitical” sophistry, as he put it. Humphrey acted as the chairman of the Board of Domestic Missions of the Presbyterian Church. Catholics had been trained, he insisted, to relinquish individual common sense and reason to the discretion of their priestly authorities. Before even attempting to read their Bible, Humphrey claimed, parishioners were instructed to “study the acts of Councils in thirty-one folio volumes, consulting carefully the Papal Bulls in eight volumes, and the Decretals in ten volumes, … ‘the unanimous consent of the fathers’ through their thirty-five volumes; then study diligently the acts and doings of the saints, in fifty-one volumes; then, after you have read, learned and inwardly digested the solid contents of these one hundred and thirty-five mortal folios—all in canonical Latin and Greek—go up and down the earth, chasing the phantoms of apostolical and ecclesiastical traditions, and thus you ascertain what is the truth of God.” A rule of interpretation such as this, argued Reverend Humphrey, confounded the meaning of the scriptures and “set up the clergy as the authoritative expounders of God’s word.”

Not only did Catholic immigrants resist the use of the King James Version, but many also refused to matriculate in American schools altogether. In A Plea for the West, Beecher argued that the Catholic clergy induced the “aversion to
instruction from book, tract, or Bible” as part of their design “to prevent assimilation and perpetuate the principles of a powerful cast.” He believed Catholic parents withheld their children from American public schools to avoid “the ordeal of an enlightened public sentiment” and “the searching inspection of the public eye.” If only these immigrants “mingled in our schools,” Beecher bemoaned, “the republican atmosphere would impregnate their minds.” If they could read the Bible, then “their darkened intellect would brighten.” If they could “think for themselves” and cut ties with the Pope, then “we might trust to time and circumstances to mitigate their ascendancy and produce assimilation.”

Beecher believed only American education would properly assimilate foreigners in the West. Primary schools and colleges, he told the faculty and students of Miami University in Cincinnati, functioned as “the guardians of liberty and equality.” To remove the King James Bible from American schools, Beecher warned, “is as anti-republican as it is unchristian.”

Father Edward Purcell, brother of Bishop John Baptist Purcell of Cincinnati, offered full responses in the Catholic Telegraph, the official organ of the Archdioceses of Cincinnati and Louisville. First of all, the priest pointed out that the distribution of the King James Bible in particular was “offensive to the Catholics” because the church considered it “an erroneous translation, particularly in several doctrinal points.” He could scarcely conceive of an act “of more imprudent insolence than that of an individual in the capacity of a Bible distributor intruding on the privacy of the domestic Catholic circle for the purpose of soliciting their perusal of a work which they deem spurious.” Furthermore, Purcell criticized “the right of privately interpreting” scriptures as untenable because there was no conceivable end to individual interpretations, and private judgment alone seemed powerless to condemn “false” interpretations of the Bible. Here, he cited the “radical” sects of the Millerites and Mormons. According to Purcell, the church’s teaching authority helped unite Catholics against many “errors,” while Protestant denominations succumbed to factionalism and infighting.

He argued it was fitting for ordained priests to interpret scripture because they typically received more exegetical training than the average layman. Ultimately, he believed priests received a special charism from God to interpret his Word. In a letter to the editor, Phebe Daugherty, a Catholic educator who at the time raised funds for a new convent for the Sisters of Visitation in Lancaster, Ohio, cited Malachi 2:7 to justify clerical oversight: “the lips of the priests shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth.”

According to Purcell, Catholics could freely choose whether or not to read the Bible or to abide by Catholic doctrines. Actually, most Douay-Rheims Bibles
included a 1778 letter by Pope Pius VI, which stated, in part: “[Scriptures] are the most abundant sources which ought to be left open to everyone, to draw from them purity of morals and of doctrines—to eradicate the errors which are so widely disseminated in these corrupt times.” Purcell took special offense at the purported mission of Cincinnati’s Western Protestant Association to deliver Catholic immigrants from clerical oversight. In one of their meetings in 1843, “much was said about the opposition of Catholicity to human freedom,” he reported. “We were all charged with a desire to destroy the liberties of the country; it was said that we were enemies of the Bible, lovers of ignorance, hostile to the institutions of the United States and inimical to the principle of toleration.” Purcell retorted that Catholics did not want to attend Protestant worship services, not because they were afraid of priests, but because they thought such ceremonies were ridiculous: “Attend Protestant worship! Listen to some man make a speech and a prayer and call that worship! Resign all pretension to Truth and follow the innumerable doctrines of Protestantism, all contradicting each other as if God was a Liar!” Numerous Catholic immigrants in Cincinnati wrote the Catholic Telegraph to express their approval of Purcell’s sentiments, and a group of laymen even organized monthly protests against the Western Protestant Association.

Cincinnati’s Catholic Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge ridiculed apparent Protestant divisiveness along the lines Purcell laid out in his newspaper. In 1840 one tract circulating in the city taught a didactic lesson in which a man expecting to enter heaven approached Jesus on the Day of Judgment. Christ asks him, “Hast thou given ear to the teaching of that church which I established?” The man responds, “Lord, that church fell into gross errors, and corruptions, and damnable idolatry: and I would not believe its doctrines, but protested against them.” Jesus and the “protesting Christian” exchange several more lines, and Christ accuses him of being “faithless” for failing to trust his promise to preserve the church (Matthew 16:18). The tract cites the Douay-Rheims translation of 1 Timothy 3:15: “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Catholic Education

For the most part, Catholic educators in the region focused on retaining coreligionists more than converting western inhabitants. Church leaders did not have the grip on their charges that Anglo-American Protestants often assumed. Initially, Catholic leaders struggled to reign in a confused, decentralized, and occasionally rebellious network of clergymen. Bishop Chabrat of Bardstown,
Kentucky, constantly complained of insubordinate priests and unfit teachers. Addressing Bishop Rosati of St. Louis, he lamented, “you well know that there are in Kentucky some clergymen who have very curious ideas concerning Episcopal authority.” In another letter he declared, “it is high time to make some of our clergymen here understand what is meant by *promitto obedientam* [pledge of obedience].” In 1826 Bishop DuBourg became so fed up with intransigent French Catholic clergy and dissidents that he resigned his post. Vatican administrators divided DuBourg’s archdiocese into two dioceses, one based in New Orleans and the other in St. Louis, appointing Rosati as first bishop of the latter. They offered him the bishopric of New Orleans, but he refused.

Catholic institutions in the Mississippi Valley also faced a chronic shortage of resources. As evangelical societies in the East poured funds into education projects in the West, the bishops of Cincinnati and St. Louis requested funds from international benefactors, particularly from Austria’s Leopold Foundation and the Propagation of the Gospel in America, founded in 1829. Aid arrived, but in the smallest of sums. Samuel Morse nevertheless exploited the connection as his chief example of an Austrian-led, Roman Catholic conspiracy to subvert U.S. sovereignty in the West. Catholic institutions relied primarily on local wealthy benefactors, such as philanthropist John Mullanphy, whose generous contributions enabled the construction of the first Catholic hospital west of the Mississippi in St. Louis. Over time they drew a steady stream of donations from middle- and working-class German and Irish Catholic immigrants as well.

In 1830 Bishop Edward Fenwick of Cincinnati started a campaign to raise funds for Catholic schools to serve the “superabundant population of ancient Europe” streaming into the United States. He urged his colleagues to “make haste; the moments are precious.” The bishop contemplated that “America may one day become the centre of civilization” and asked, “shall truth or error establish there its empire?” He further worried, “If the Protestant sects are beforehand with us, it will be difficult to destroy their influence.” In only four years’ time, the competition seemed to intensify. Fenwick’s successor as bishop, John Baptist Purcell, noted with alarm how many Catholic children had taken to attending Protestant-managed schools. “So many little children are perverted,” he fretted, “in consequence of their parents sending them to Presbyterian Schools” while the “Bigots [are] growing fierce in their opposition to Popery.” Upon Bishop Purcell’s recommendation, clergymen urged parents to send their children to Catholic schools, if they could.

Bishop Rosati of St. Louis revitalized the floundering Saint Louis College, founded by Bishop DuBourg in 1818, by inviting Jesuit seminarians to run the
school. The Jesuit Order experienced a small revival in the Americas beginning in 1814 after decades of suppression.\textsuperscript{72} Officially chartered in 1832, Saint Louis University became the second-largest Jesuit university in the United States.\textsuperscript{73} With Rosati’s help, the school’s first Jesuit president, Father Peter J. Verhaegen, oversaw the education of hundreds of pupils each semester. In 1832 Father Pierre Jean DeSmet secured the shipment of numerous texts from Belgium, which formed the foundation of the university’s world-class library. Four years later Jesuits founded a school of medicine, which soon conferred the first medical degree west of the Mississippi. At Bishop Rosati’s request in 1827, the Sacred Heart nuns, under Mother Rose Philippine Duchesne, transferred from Florissant, Missouri, to open a girls’ school in St. Louis. Many of the city’s wealthiest Catholics sent their daughters to Sacred Heart for their education.\textsuperscript{74}

While Saint Louis University thrived, seven Catholic churches offered tutoring for pay and several seminaries that educated young students. The city at the time claimed nine public schools “free-of-charge,” yet St. Louis Catholics also managed to offer free private education on a temporary basis. By 1845, there were four “Catholic free schools.” One was attached to St. Francis Xavier Church on Saint Louis University’s campus; another was apparently privately run by a charity. The Sisters of Charity also taught a free school for girls, and the Convent of the Sacred Heart hosted another.\textsuperscript{75}

Despite ministers’ warnings, it was not uncommon for well-to-do Protestants to send their boys and girls to Catholic academies. In the West private Catholic colleges especially enjoyed the reputation of being among the premier higher-learning institutions. In the spring of 1844, former governor of Missouri William Carr Lane, for example, sent his son Victor to Saint Louis University. The young man consoled his mother, who had grown anxious after reading accounts of Jesuit conspiracies in the news, that the priests were devout and pleasant. “You can see me,” Victor Lane joked, “without thinking that the old priests are watching you through a keyhole or crack.” He related one slightly disturbing detail, however: a Catholic boy had borrowed a Bible and taken it to mass on Sunday, and “afterwards they gave him a penance for that; now what you think of that!” At that same mass during the homily, Father Farrell condemned Catholic parents “who allowed their children to go where there was a chance of their hearing the Syren voice of heresy.” Saint Louis University maintained a relatively high reputation, and Catholic schools in the region continued to serve as a viable alternative to public schools.\textsuperscript{76} Catholic education in the West intensified the mid-nineteenth-century school controversy and fomented a national debate about the compatibility of Catholicism with American democracy.\textsuperscript{77}
Sunday Observance & Ethnicity

As with the reading of the King James Bible, Americans equated Sunday observance to civic duty. Although federal and local courts completed the legal disestablishment of any one organized religion by 1833, local Sunday laws enabled native-born Americans to enforce a specific set of doctrinal beliefs and practices regarding the Sabbath.78 Immigrants of all backgrounds and creeds, however, resisted Sunday regulations. Americans repeatedly cast immigrants who challenged these traditional ways of observing the Sabbath as the “other” – regardless of whether they were Catholic, Protestant, atheist, Irish, or German. “Ethnicity” is a social construction by which the dominant culture assigns certain people groups nondominant, or minority, status.79 Ethnicity serves as an invisible and shifting line between the dominant culture and the “others” whose “foreign” customs reveal where the boundaries of the dominant culture end.80 In this way native-born Americans and immigrants both contributed to the “dual construction of ethnicity.” Immigrant communities discovered new ways to negotiate the “ethnicity” to which Americans relegated them.81 The social conflict over Sunday regulation in St. Louis, with its large population of immigrants from the German Confederation, provides a striking illustration of this phenomenon.

When the Fourth of July happened to fall on a Sunday in 1852, St. Louis authorities postponed all public celebrations of the national holiday until Monday, July 5, to avoid violating the Sabbath. On July 4, however, several thousand German immigrants paraded three miles outside the city and celebrated Independence Day the German way. Their ringleader, Heinrich Börnstein, was a self-proclaimed “freethinker” who had immigrated to St. Louis in 1848. In his local German-language newspaper, the Anzeiger des Westens (Advertiser of the West), he promoted the “great popular festival with song, music and dancing, games, enjoyments and fireworks.”82 Fearing retaliation, German militia companies in the parade kept “their weapons loaded and cocked,” and members of German societies carried revolvers and Bowie knives. Those men who “could not lay hands on a weapon” armed themselves with “at least two pounds of hard gravel packed in a stocking.” Beginning at six o’clock in the morning, the German crowd, wearing the colors of the American flag, marched silently to avoid disturbing Sunday church services. They arrived outside the city two hours later. “When we finally left the city limits,” remembered Börnstein, “the bands struck up stirring triumphal marches [and] every person felt that Germans had won a great victory and overawed our opponents.” The celebration lasted until the
break of dawn on Monday morning, “precisely when the Americans were commencing their celebration of the Fourth of July—on the fifth.”

Although the day passed without violence, many Anglo-Americans condemned this German American Independence Day parade as a desecration of the Sabbath and the nation. One local observer accused them of parading “not so much to celebrate the anniversary of our National Independence, as to have a frolic on a leisure day.” Local residents demanded the criminal prosecution of the participants under the Sunday laws. These laws were binding, a writer in the *St. Louis Republican* reminded readers, even when the Fourth of July fell on Sunday. He cited Missouri state law, which assigned the crime of a misdemeanor to “every person who shall willfully, maliciously, or contemptuously disquiet or disturb any congregation or assembly of people, met for religious worship.” He also cited a broader city ordinance, which declared it unlawful “for any Military Company, or any procession, or any body of persons to march or pass through the streets of the city on Sunday, accompanied by the sound of music.” A third commentator demanded that the Germans “desist hereafter from all such attempts to do violence to public opinion.”

Not all German immigrants agreed with Börnstein’s radical positions on politics and religion, but the parade’s symbolism resonated with a broader cross-section of the city’s German Americans. It demonstrated their general distaste for Sunday regulation and marked the transformation of such resentment into popular protest. When German immigrants flooded the United States in the 1840s and 1850s, the deep cultural differences between them and native-born Anglo-Americans became obvious on Sundays. Simply put by one journalist, “In Germany, Sunday is kept in one way and in the United States in another.” He explained, “Natives of Continental Europe—whether Protestants of Catholics, it matters not, invariably regard Sunday as a day of pleasure, recreation, and enjoyment.” On the other hand, “an immense majority of the [Anglo-American] people” honored the Sabbath “as a day of rest, of religious exercise, and of abstinence from labor and public diversions of every kind.” As historian Steven Rowan has argued, “Most Germans probably felt more concern about pressure against their German life-style than about political restrictions, and it was easy to get a crowd together to protest temperance laws or restrictions on Sunday entertainment.”

Historian Stanley Nadel has argued that the most important political issue for German Americans was “the defense of their right to recreation.” The “staples of German-American life,” he explained, were “beer and Sunday social activities.” In his book *Memoirs of a Nobody*, Börnstein observed that politicians risked losing the “entire German vote” if they advocated the prohibition of alcohol on
the Sabbath.\textsuperscript{91} For these immigrants, celebrating the Lord’s Day in their own way came to mean assimilating on their own terms. Sunday observance thus became a symbol of both resistance to dominant American culture and solidarity among the German American minority.\textsuperscript{92}

To explain why the dispute over Sunday regulation contributed to the forging of German American identity in the mid-nineteenth century, one must first understand the differences between penitential English Sabbatarian forms of Sunday observance and Continental feasting traditions. Catholics and Protestants in Europe upheld Sunday as a crucial part of the religious and social rhythm of life, and almost everyone celebrated Sunday as a feast day. This meant that the first day of the week was a church-sanctioned, leisurely celebration with generous servings of food, beer, and wine. By the 1580s, however, English Calvinists, called “Puritans,” had come to view Sunday as more than just a holy day mandated by the Church of England but rather a divine and perpetual institution wholly consistent with the Jewish Sabbath. Anglicans called those Puritans who supported Sunday absolutism “Sabbatarians” to distinguish them as a rebellious reform group within the Church of England. Sabbatarians strictly observed Sunday through penitential and somber inactivity to more closely reflect Jewish observance of the holy day in remembrance of the seventh day of creation, when God rested. Sabbatarianism became an especially formative doctrine among the Puritans and other English Protestant sects who settled in the American colonies.\textsuperscript{93} In short, the majority of Anglo-American Protestants frequently observed Sunday through personal, quiet, and sober reflection, while almost everyone else in the Christian world celebrated the day communally.

State Sunday laws, or “blue laws” as they were called, codified American Sabbatarianism in the legal system.\textsuperscript{94} Every state in the American republic held strict laws, some dating back to the colonial period, that were specifically designed to ensure the honoring of the Lord’s Day. Upon its admittance to statehood in 1820, Missouri’s government followed suit by prohibiting on Sunday the disturbance of religious assemblies, labor, horseracing, cockfighting, playing cards or games, and the sale of alcohol. These statutes carefully referred to Sunday as the “Sabbath.” The state’s Sunday laws conformed with the American Sabbatarian view that both labor and play violated the Christian day of rest.\textsuperscript{95}

Despite flares of opposition and even federal intervention, the Sunday laws endured because the majority of native-born Americans identified with a common Sabbatarian strand. In 1810 the first American Sabbatarian campaign of the nineteenth century erupted in response to a federal law that forced the postal service to remain open on Sunday, despite state legislation that prohibited labor
on that day. The evangelical Christian group behind the effort identified themselves as Sabbatarian reformers. In their view the federal government risked “divine displeasure” by disrupting strict Sabbath observance. Invoking the biblical commandment to “remember the Sabbath day” and “keep it holy,” these reformers reaffirmed the “transcendent reality of sacred time.” Through the 1830s and 1840s, as the Second Great Awakening swept Americans into churches, the postal issue continued to unite many Christian denominations in a moral crusade for Sunday reform. Although they did not succeed in forcing the federal government to close the post on Sundays, moral reformers were successful at regulating other Sunday activities at the local level.

For most German immigrants, the mere existence of Sunday laws in the United States did not surprise them as much as their strictness and the local attitudes that encouraged their enforcement. In most provinces of the German Confederation, the state prohibited selling alcohol during church-service times, but “Sabbath-breaking” was a charge reserved for those who missed church to drink and publicans who kept their taverns open illegally during those hours. Unlike their American counterparts, the German laws did not prohibit Sunday drinking. Entire congregations visited drinking establishments regularly on Sunday afternoons and special feast days during the week. Many families devoted their free hours on the weekends to the church and the tavern, the culture of which was primarily one of leisure.

Although German temperance advocates condemned drunkenness in Trinkliteratur (drinking literature), they rarely rejected drinking or tavern going entirely, unlike mid-nineteenth-century teetotalers in England and the United States. Actually, taverns were important meeting places in which German families celebrated special religious occasions, men demonstrated their manliness, publicans extended hospitality, and citizens discussed politics and socialized. Tavern culture was generally the main arbiter of social engagement, both in rural and urban communities. The social status of drinking places ranged from exclusive gentlemen’s clubs to courser working-class locales. Many public taverns served a variety of social groups; masters could be found drinking with their apprentices, householders with their servants, and patricians with artisans. Since the authorities considered alcohol a crucial part of public life, they rarely charged taverngoers with the crime of drunkenness. “The problem was not that drunkenness laws were not enforceable,” explained one historian, “but that they were not enforced.” The middling artisans who fled the potato rot and the political turmoil in Germany for America in the 1840s had experienced Sunday reform efforts that focused on moderation, not abstention. They took for granted that
a leisurely visit to the local tavern after Sunday church services was a customary part of the weekly cycle of life and that official policies on drunkenness were unlikely to be enforced.100

American pietists, including evangelicals, Sabbatarians, and temperance advocates, found it difficult to understand why German immigrant ritualists, Lutheran as well as Catholic, cared so deeply about the freedom to drink and socialize on Sundays. Even German evangelical Christians supported Sunday drinking. The moral campaigns of Sabbatarian and temperance reformers actually worked to unify various immigrant factions against Sunday regulations.101

For Germans in America, Continental religious traditions formed a more powerful unifying force than denominational affiliation with Anglo-American groups. They “were not about to abandon their traditions of imbibing,” explained historian John Bodnar, because Sunday rituals “involved ways of life.”102 Ultimately at stake was the very rhythm of life, the weekly cycle upon which people ordered their days into sacred and secular periods of work, worship, penance, and play.103

German-managed breweries and taverns became integral parts of immigrant life in American cities. Germans owned fifteen of St. Louis’s sixteen breweries in 1850. The Seventh Census of St. Louis showed that the First Ward, which included Soulard in South St. Louis, included 8,832 German immigrants out of a total 13,677 residents. German heritage thus accounted for 64.6 percent of the ward’s population.104 “There was no lack of taverns” in Soulard, remarked Ernst D. Kargau. During the work week, taverners would “ring a bell or strike a Chinese gong to announce that lunch was being served.” When a new keg arrived, “work was dropped in order to get a fresh glass of the new tapping.”105 The northern St. Louis district of New Bremen was also well known for its German character. In 1850 the Fifth and Sixth Wards, which included New Bremen, had an ethnic German population of 31.5 percent and 31.9 percent respectively. The taverns in both were just as busy on Sundays as any other day.106

To avoid conflicts with local authorities, many urban-dwelling Germans frequently traveled outside city limits to observe Sunday their traditional way. Chicago, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis saw a mass exodus of Germans on Sundays to recreational beer gardens and festival grounds. Although the German Confederation had a custom of retreat to the countryside on the Lord’s Day, nothing on the American scale had ever been seen there. This exodus represented not only a retreat from the urban environment but also an escape from the city’s Sunday laws. German immigrants experienced Sunday drinking and socializing outside the city, therefore, as a figurative and literal escape from
American culture. “In the good old times,” Kargau reminisced, the beer gardens on the outskirts of St. Louis “were the rendezvous for German families.” One of these suburban retreats was directly west of downtown in the Prairie des Noyers, another north in New Bremen, and a third south of the Soulard District of Carondelet. They were initially unclaimed public grounds where Germans could dance, drink beer, eat sausages, sing, and enjoy theatrical performances. Some of these gardens eventually became public parks, but German farmers and businessmen eventually owned most of them. In 1852 Börnstein’s Fourth of July coterie held its Sunday festival in a clearing called Lindell’s Grove, now the site of Saint Louis University. These suburban gardens, explained Kargau, allowed Germans “to enjoy life in their own way.” Anglo-Americans rarely participated, for the “German concept of entertainment and amusement” seemed “extremely strange” to them. “Many years passed before one saw an American in our summer gardens,” observed Kargau, “no matter whether on Sunday or week days.”

St. Louis Germans also spent Sundays at nearby vineyards. This trend of escaping to suburban spaces on Sundays occurred in most major cities with concentrated immigrant populations and eventually became an institution of German American life. Kargau believed these Sunday observances contributed to the “Germanization of our Anglo-American fellow citizens.”

A writer from Cincinnati reported that it had become customary for German Catholic glee clubs, “accompanied by a crowd of others,” to travel “out of the city by steamboats and carriages, to a place called Bald Hill.” There, a large crowd regularly drank alcohol, played music, and sang along. In 1844 one New York journalist remarked on the stark contrast between Boston’s “Puritan character” of Sunday observance and New York’s Germanic influences. “At least twenty thousand people,” he estimated, “pass the Sabbath in the fields,” and “drinking places in all directions in the suburbs have overflowing custom on that day.”

These suburban retreats offered a compromise between German Americans who desired to transfer their traditional Sunday customs and Anglo-Americans who wished to preserve the American Sabbath in the cities. As Harper’s Weekly observed, “Nothing prevents [Germans] going to the country on Sunday and drinking lager beer, and giving and going to concerts or shows among their own people.” The beer gardens became more sophisticated by the end of the 1850s, as benefactors transformed them into botanical gardens. In 1859 one writer celebrated the fact that these gardens now rivaled “anything of the kind in Germany” and could be found “in the suburbs of almost any American city.” Those that commonly surrounded “all the cities” were typically maintained by German farmers, while richer families from the cities paid “for the privilege of
enjoying its walks and breathing the fragrance of its flowers.” The benefactors of the gardens regularly sponsored balls, dances, theater, sports, and served beer on Sunday.\textsuperscript{113}

Exponential urban growth and the concentration of immigrants in almost entirely German-speaking neighborhoods heightened the culture war. German newcomers increasingly gravitated toward St. Louis for work instead of braving settlements in its hinterlands. Even those who sought refuge in the countryside found the growing city difficult to avoid. St. Louis grew from a total population of 16,469 in 1840 to 77,860 in 1850. Between 1848 and 1850 alone, 34,418 German immigrants arrived in the city.\textsuperscript{114} One who settled in Belleville, Illinois, explained: “Here in the West, St. Louis must be considered the central gathering place of the Germans. This is the immigrant’s first destination; from here he makes scouting trips out into the country to search for a place to settle; he returns to this city time and again.”\textsuperscript{115}

German artisans seeking temporary jobs in St. Louis in the hope of settling elsewhere found it difficult to migrate, and the expanding metropolis incorporated its immediate surroundings systematically through the mid-nineteenth century. The city absorbed German immigrants who had deliberately elected to settle outside its limits during a series of annexations. In one of the first of these additions, in 1841, the city annexed the French and German community of Soulard, about two miles south of downtown. As a direct result, German Americans became new eligible voters with a stake in city politics.\textsuperscript{116} The extraordinary experience of Emil Mallinckrodt, an immigrant from the province of Dortmund who purchased a thirty-nine-acre farm just north of St. Louis in 1840, illustrates how newly settled German communities rapidly succumbed to urban sprawl. In the spring of that year, Mallinckrodt worked tirelessly to cultivate everything needed for subsistence: cabbages, carrots, wheat, melons, onions, potatoes, a variety of fruits, and grapes for wine. He also planted a row of tree seedlings that he had lugged across the Atlantic. Later that year Mallinckrodt wrote his brother in Dortmund that “the Metropolis St. Louis, is building itself around us, and in a few years we shall be living in a reliable city.” The following spring he informed his brother that the city limits were merely “within a distance of five minutes from our place.” His land had suddenly become valuable, and he quickly sold one lot for $300 in the fall of 1841. In the winter of 1844, Mallinckrodt reported to his brother that he had sold more land to a porcelain-and-starch factory and rented lots to ten families. That same year the city annexed the rest of his neighborhood. In the summer of 1846, Main Street ran through Mallinckrodt’s property, and he sold fifteen more building lots. So, within a decade Mallinckrodt
and his family had become integrated into St. Louis and its bustling economy. In 1855 the city incorporated the rest of the German district to the north, which locals called New Bremen due to its many settlers from the free German Confederation city of Bremen.\textsuperscript{117}

Increasing American opposition to German Sunday recreation in St. Louis compelled Börnstein to build a coalition against the blue laws. After having failed to purchase a farm in central Missouri, he returned to St. Louis to become the chief editor of the popular \textit{Anzeiger des Westens}. Börnstein, who considered himself a member of the “free-thinking” bourgeoisie, formerly had tried to avoid “public places and taverns” because, he opined, “the mean, raw tone prevailing there repelled me.”\textsuperscript{118} As an atheist he criticized German Christians and virulently opposed Roman Catholicism, which could be readily observed in his anti-Catholic novel, \textit{The Mysteries of St. Louis} (1852), modeled after Parisian Eugene Sue’s “big city horror novel,” \textit{The Mysteries of Paris} (1843). Börnstein supported “German Sunday” as a “day of joy,” unlike “the American Sunday of the Puritans.” If German Sunday was “wholly and totally at home in America,” he wrote in \textit{Mysteries of St. Louis}, then “bigotry, false devoted-ness and sacred hypocrisy would soon quit and much in this country would be better.” German radical Friedrich Münch, Missouri state senator and translator of the only English edition of Börnstein’s \textit{Mysteries}, pointed out that “the village tavern is the most common rendezvous for the people,” not for “intemperance, riot and murder,” but “to discuss their private matters, their village affairs, the politics of the country, nay, even to criticize the last sermon of their village preacher.” In Germany one “walks through the far-spread fields and meadow grounds” where the people “are merry indeed, in spite of their hard every day’s work,” but in America, Münch lamented, “Sunday is silent death.”\textsuperscript{119}

Like Börnstein, Münch spent his political career emphasizing the positive aspects of “German nationality” that supposedly connected all Germans in the West to the fatherland. Münch declared in 1859, “The German nationality has already planted itself so deeply in the western states of the Union that the traces of German blood, German industry, and German spirit can never be obliterated.” Even so, he believed that the old culture would diminish over time, “especially if there is no continuing pressure of immigration to maintain an inner spiritual link with the Mother Country that refreshes our Germanity.” Two years before the outbreak of the Civil War, Münch forecast the future separation of the Union into four distinct parts—the Northeast, the South, the “states along the Mississippi valley,” and the Far West. “St. Louis will someday be the capital of an empire of fifty million free people,” he mused. “It lies in the Germans’ power to
make this coming Mississippi Union essentially German, so that it could reach a helping hand across the ocean to a coming German Republic.”

Radicals like Börnstein and Münch invoked the ire of the majority of fellow immigrants for their anticlerical views, but they found great success in promoting German culture and building a political coalition against Sunday regulation. On July 4, 1852, as Börnstein led his parade through St. Louis, German societies in several other cities, such as Cincinnati, Milwaukee, and New York, also organized Sunday parades to feign the solidarity of the German American population. In addition to running the Anzeiger newspaper, Börnstein eventually came to own “three large beerhalls leased to tavernkeepers,” a beer garden, and a brewery. He also kept a saloon on the first floor of the Anzeiger press, which remained open on Sunday. Kargau remembered this tavern as being “one of the favorite gathering places for the German citizens.” On Sunday evenings “a great many people came” for the concerts and good beer from Eimer’s brewery in Belleville, Illinois. By 1859, Börnstein’s Philodramatische Gesellschaft (Philodramatic Society) performed theatrical plays in saloons as well as vacant churches.

While numerous German American groups met on Sundays, not a single Anglo-American society advertised Sabbath meetings. In St. Louis the German Benevolent Society, German Roman Catholic Benevolent Society, and St. Vincent’s German Orphan Association, for example, congregated on Sunday afternoons. The German Turner Societies met “on Sundays to harden their bodies by playing ball, exercising and swimming,” these Turnervereine officially resolving to oppose “all prohibition laws” and all politicians who “identified with any nativistic organization or party.” The founding convention of the Allgemeine Arbeiterbund (General Workers’ League) in Philadelphia in October 1850, which included delegates from St. Louis, demanded the repeal of all Sabattarian laws.

Native-born Americans reasoned that, in demanding the repeal of Sunday laws, Germans pushed toleration to its limit. Congregationalist minister Boynton in Cincinnati called German Sunday “a general attack upon our institutions.” He hailed the “Protestant Sabbath” as “one of the mightiest instruments in Christian civilization.” He opposed any immigrant who attempted “to substitute it for a Catholic holiday, to make it a day of parade and show and amusement, to accustom our children to its desecration.” According to Boynton, German Protestants who feasted on Sundays unwittingly transferred Catholic culture to America. Even non-Catholic immigrants from Europe, nativist Alfred B. Ely argued, could transmit Catholicized “habits of mind.”

European immigrants presented Americans with the special dilemma of effectively enforcing Sunday legislation, especially the prohibition on Sunday
liquor sales. Native-born observers often objected to the lax enforcement of the Sunday laws in western cities. While touring the West, one proponent of the Puritan Sunday tradition noted the German affinity for “bringing the customs of their Faderland with them.” On Sundays in St. Louis, the “Lager bier gardens [were] in full blast,” which to him were “rather strange doings, that to a Puritan.” Another observer from the East discovered on his first Sunday morning in St. Louis that “this was not a Puritan town.” He noted that “the saloons were all open on Sunday, and some theatres,” and that German “customs as to Sunday observance had much influence on the whole city.”

St. Louis city authorities began to crack down in the 1850s. Between 1850 and 1853, the criminal court saw an unprecedented 484 cases of selling liquor on Sundays, by far the most commonly enforced blue law, in which approximately 50 percent of defendants had surnames of Germanic origin. Still, the professional police force at the time was hopelessly incapable of adequately enforcing the Sunday closing laws. In 1850 the population of St. Louis had reached roughly 80,000 people, but the police force consisted of only thirty full-time officers and thirty or so ad hoc volunteers. On October 14 Mayor Luther M. Kennett declared, “something is necessary for the suburbs, beyond our jurisdiction—where the dishonest and disorderly prowl about without fear of interruption, and even maltreat, with impunity, in broad day, and especially on the Sabbath, such quiet and well disposed citizens, as they may chance to encounter.” He wanted to “give the city police power to keep order and make arrests throughout the county.” The number of cases of illegal liquor sales on Sunday continued to rise in the following years as city administrators expanded the police force.

Börnstein’s open opposition to Sunday regulation brought the Anzeiger under the scrutiny of a St. Louis grand jury in 1853. Börnstein recounted the semiannual session as being “so cleverly packed against the Germans that temperance men and Sabbath-bats had the majority.” On September 9 the criminal court accused him of advertising illegal Sunday events in his newspaper. Most German immigrants accused of selling liquor on Sundays pled guilty and paid the fine of five to ten dollars, plus legal fees. But Börnstein refused to take the oath, and the jury charged him with contempt of court. “In the Matter of Henry Boernstein,” the court clerk remarked on September 9 in the Criminal Record books, “Contumacious Witness before the Grand Jury.” The next day the court discharged him from prison because no other German-language readers were willing to testify against him.

Similar crackdowns occurred in Chicago, Cincinnati, and Louisville. The Sunday issue came to a head in 1855, once the American Party gained political
offices. As historian Tyler Anbinder has shown, Sabbatarians and temperance advocates aligned with the American Party in the mid-1850s because they all opposed immigrants drinking on Sundays. In 1855 the newly elected Know-Nothing mayor of St. Louis, Washington King, dramatically increased the city’s police force to both combat street violence and more effectively enforce the Sunday laws. According to Richard Edwards’s history of the city, King “was the first mayor who put in effectual force the Prohibitory Sunday Liquor Law.” Although previous mayors had periodically enforced this prohibition, King developed a reputation for tenaciously restraining the “indecorum which had so long desecrated the Sabbath.” Börnstein recalled the King administration thus: “Crass nativism and intolerant temperance oppressed the entire population with an iron hand” as “trial followed trial against German tavern-keepers and against any use of publican establishments on Sunday.” These measures forced several establishments to shutter their windows on Sunday, but private parties continued to serve alcoholic beverages in secret. Some taverns defiantly kept their back doors open. These renewed drives for enforcement occasioned “much bitterness,” according to Kargau, “even brutal attacks and bloody fights.”

Although political and religious disagreements fragmented German American communities, immigrants shared a Continental orientation toward certain recreational customs, which became especially significant in building ethnic and political solidarity for Germans within American culture. Despite apparent ideological differences, the ensuing Sunday dispute continued to unite German communities against the American Sabbath. Through social meetings in taverns, cultural celebrations in beer gardens, and political resistance to Sunday laws, immigrants from various provinces in the German Confederation forged a lasting ethnic identity in the United States.

Language

Language difference presented an additional barrier between native-born Americans and immigrants. The prevalence of the German language in the Mississippi Valley seemed to reinforce cultural differences. During the mid-nineteenth century, immigrants settling in the West created a vast network of German-language institutions. These people attended German-language church services and followed developments in German-language newspapers. Many parents enrolled their children in German-language schools, which used Luther’s translation of the Bible. German-language societies, like the Turnervereine, were tremendously popular throughout the region.
In Cincinnati German-language speakers concentrated in a district of the city known as “Over-the-Rhine.” In Chicago, German immigrants settled in a northern district known as “German Broadway.” In Louisville German and Irish immigrants lived in “Butchertown.” According to Kargau, in many portions of South St. Louis one “could imagine himself transplanted to Germany, for one heard only German spoken here.” One could travel from Chouteau Avenue in midtown about eleven miles south to where Jefferson Barracks is presently located “without hearing anything else than German.” In the New Bremen district, “one often imagines one is in Germany,” Mallinckrodt observed, “when one hears low German and the patter of wooden shoes clattering on the streets.”

Americans considered English-language acquisition the mark of assimilation. Nativists argued further that fluency in English should be a requirement for voting. It was the opinion of Willis L. Williams, a land attorney in Missouri, that residents unable to speak English could not rightly understand American politics and should not vote. “Feller citizens!” Williams addressed residents of Hillsboro, Missouri, in an impromptu speech:

Will any man in this krowd tell me that a Dutchman [German] ought to vote? No: there a’nt a man here who will say so. As I cum down here from Saint Lew the other day, I cum up to a house and called out to the man that I wanted some buttermilk, and dog on’t, if he could understand what I sed. Nix furs tey [“they Know-Nothing”]. Couldn’t say buttermilk. A Dutchman who don’t know what buttermilk is! I say no foriner should have a right to vote; if should I wish I may be cut. (Great applause and shouts of hurrah for “buster”).

German Americans criticized the nativist claim that immigrants needed to acquire fluency in English to properly understand American politics. They also took offense at the nativist policy of a twenty-one-year residency requirement for citizenship. Such Americans “believe they are the ones who have received the mind of God,” wrote an anonymous author of a German-language pamphlet circulating in Ohio in 1849. “The nativists maintain that the German immigrant, although still diligent in school in Germany, nonetheless knows nothing more than the newborn American child, and that he even will need as much time to understand as an American child to grow into a man.”

American nativists grew especially alarmed when German-language speakers united for political purposes. Not only did German immigrants protest cherished Anglo-American institutions, such as public schools, the King James Bible,
and Sunday closing laws, but they did it in German. The German language facilitated the political solidarity of immigrants in America.

Conclusion

Political nativists included teaching the Bible in common schools and preserving the American Sabbath in their party platforms. One official Know-Nothing platform from 1854, for example, among other things called for:

- A pure American Common School system.
- War to the hilt on political Romanism.
- Hostility to all Papal influences, when brought to bear against the Republic.
- The amplest protection to Protestant Interests.

In depicting Catholic and immigrant resistance to the reading of the King James Version of the Bible in public schools as an assault on American freedom, the nativist movement crystallized the accepted wisdom of Protestant Americans into a political ideology. They weaponized significant elements of American culture to serve their own nationalist agenda.

Antebellum political nativism ironically set the stage for the creation of the very hybrid ethnic-American political identities they had feared. These activists announced the “ethnic” boundaries against which German and Irish immigrants felt compelled to resist. Initially, immigrants from various parts of the German Confederation did not necessarily have strong national attachments to one another. German Protestants disliked German Catholics as much as in any other ethnicity or nationality. The heightened intensity of disagreement between native-born Americans and immigrants, however, welded together German immigrants of all sorts so that, by the mid-1850s, one could witness even German Catholic priests joining with German freethinkers as fellow German Americans in common cause against American nativism. Those pressing for Protestant Christian curricula and Sabbatarianism actually repelled immigrants from the very institutions they purported to be necessary for Americanization.