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CATHOLICS IN BEULAHLAND: THE CHURCH'S ENCOUNTER WITH ANTI-CATHOLICISM, NATIVISM, AND ANTI-ABOLITIONISM IN THE CAROLINAS AND GEORGIA, 1820-1845

by

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A THESIS RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

In July 1835, a northern anti-slavery society sent bundles of abolitionist literature through the United States postal service to the South. Arriving at South Carolina’s port city, the mailing became the focus of white Charlestonians’ fears of slave uprisings and those who might assist a servile insurrection. During an attack on the post office to destroy the papers, someone in the crowd shouted for the lynching of Charleston’s Catholic bishop and the destruction of the Catholic cathedral and surrounding buildings, including a parochial school for free black children.

Using the Charleston Post Office Raid as a backdrop, this study explores both the connections between anti-abolitionism, anti-Catholicism, and nativism in the antebellum South and the reaction to these pressures from southern Catholics, mostly recent immigrants, as they made a place for themselves in their new homeland. At the heart of the work is a consideration of the effects of the ethnic and racial stereotypes and cultural assumptions at play in the antebellum South.
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CHAPTER ONE

The Charleston Post Office Raid, 1835

About eight o'clock on Wednesday morning, July 29, 1835, the steam packet Columbia out of New York entered Charleston harbor with the tide and moored at the Cooper River docks. Word of the ship's arrival spread quickly throughout the city, for the Columbia was a regular feature of Charleston ship traffic and meant the arrival of mail from the North, including "the usual copious supply of Northern journals of the latest dates."\(^1\) This Wednesday's mail also included a batch of antislavery tracts that would incite a riot in which white Charlestonians lashed out at both real and imagined enemies of the southern social order. Whites' paranoid fear of servile insurrection—exacerbated by religious, ethnic, political, and class differences—threatened momentarily to fracture the bonds among a white minority that held a black majority enslaved. Native born Anglo-Americans looked with suspicion upon their

\(^1\) Charleston Courier, July 30, 1835. See also Charleston Mercury of the same date. Charleston newspapers routinely reported the arrival of ships, providing port of origin, time of arrival, and names of cargo recipients.
immigrant neighbors; the planter and merchant ruling elite distrusted the unpropertied and hence the potentially disloyal white laborers. Within this milieu, religious bigotry further divided the white community as Protestants threatened to vent their wrath and fear on their Catholic neighbors.

This study will argue that the assimilation of Catholics in the antebellum American South differed from that of Catholics in the northern states. While differences such as the smaller number of immigrants to the South and the agricultural economy of the South played a role in this assimilation, slavery was the main influence responsible for these differences. Little work has been done to suggest the links between slavery and the Protestant South’s reception of immigrant Catholics. This study seeks to make these connections through a careful consideration of primary and other sources regarding anti-abolitionism and anti-Catholicism in the antebellum South. The well-known Charleston 1835 Post Office Raid serves as a vignette when all or nearly all the factors in this linkage between perceptions of slavery and Catholicism were present. Beginning with this incident, in which southerners demonstrated their rejection of anti-slavery ideology, gives the modern reader an opportunity to examine the various causes and influences behind the southern responses to anti-slavery and nativist movements. These movements represented antebellum America’s two
greatest controversies until the slavery issue subsumed nativism in the last decade of the nation's fearful march towards civil war.

That Wednesday in July 1835, while sorting the mail that had arrived on the Columbia, Charleston post office employees discovered antislavery pamphlets sent by the New York Colonization Society and addressed to business, political, and religious leaders of South Carolina. Rather than deliver the pamphlets as addressed, Alfred Huger, postmaster of Charleston, ordered the antislavery materials collected and bagged separately from the other mail. He then telegraphed Washington for instructions.\(^2\) Before nightfall the city was alert to this newest threat from antislavery activists; white Charlestonians were both incensed and fearful. In the next morning's newspaper columns, Charleston's two major dailies carried an expression of outrage at this "monstrous abuse of the national convenience, that it should be converted into an instrument or means of assault on Southern Institutions...."\(^3\)

The 1835 mailing represented a new level and an intensification of effort by northern antislavery forces, which were now determined to inundate the South with their literature. On June 27, 1835, the

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\(^3\)Charleston Mercury and Charleston Courier, July 30, 1835.
Charleston Courier had reported from the meeting of the New York Colonization Society, at which the postal campaign was proposed and adopted. Over the next several weeks, the Charleston newspapers first covered the actions of the meeting and then worried about the impact of propaganda ostensibly aimed at white southern leaders but intended to incite slaves, encouraging subversion among them.⁴

White Charlestonians' willingness to defy federal laws protecting the United States mail exemplifies the extreme political and social atmosphere of South Carolina's chief port. Indeed, one historian has argued that political developments between 1820 and 1836 created hysteria among South Carolina whites, who were determined to maintain slavery at all costs. The Nullification Crisis in 1832 and subsequent events including the antislavery mail campaign radicalized and unified South Carolina politics in a shrill defense of "Southern Institutions."⁵

Abolition threatened slavery, and with it, the South. After a remarkable period of patriotism and a sense of national unity following the War of 1812, an attack on slavery came in 1820 as the Missouri Compromise limited the expansion of slavery to the southern regions of

⁴Ibid., June 28, 1835. Additionally, the Charleston newspapers continued their coverage of the New York Anti-Slavery Society's proceedings on an almost daily basis through the convention week.

the western territories. This attempt to contain slavery was followed by a series of proposals and actions that worried southerners. Beginning about 1824 a program for gradual emancipation gained wide support in the North. While many southerners approaching the end of the eighteenth century had foreseen the eventual demise of slavery, in the wake of the 1793 invention of the cotton gin, their descendants found the South's peculiar institution essential to their rapidly expanding plantation economy. Calls to limit the expansion of slavery and plans for emancipation undermined the southern whites' dreams of cotton prosperity. Southerners were further alarmed to hear President John Quincy Adams's proposal to send delegates to a Panama Congress of Spanish American nations where delegates from the African American republic of Haiti were to be received on equal footing with white representatives. Then in 1827, the American Colonization Society, which purchased and freed slaves in a scheme to return blacks to Africa, sought congressional aid.

Finally, in 1830, the Senate debate between South Carolina's Robert Y. Hayne and New Hampshire's Daniel Webster focused directly on the issue of slavery as a threat to national unity. Although northern radical abolitionists in the 1820s lacked formal organization and remained on the fringe of the political spectrum, they influenced northern perceptions of slavery and the South. Abolitionist agitation prompted moderate groups, such as the Colonization Society, to intensify
their activities. In the last years of the antebellum period, radical abolitionists became increasingly strident in their ongoing struggle with moderate northern antislavery positions. More and more northerners came to support the limiting of and the eventual ending of slavery. The increased support for antislavery measures also saw radicals gaining strength in the numbers calling for an immediate end to slavery. In all this, southerners acutely felt the threat of antislavery ideology, even as the cotton kingdom's emergence created a new aristocracy and renewed the southern commitment to slavery.⁶

White southerners, believing a successful slave revolt could only lead to black rule and horror, roundly denounced abolition as a threat to their domestic tranquility. Nowhere was condemnation more vocal and more insistent than in South Carolina. The Palmetto State alone had a long record of a black majority population, and South Carolina politicians approached the confrontation over slavery from this unique historical experience. Indeed, as early as 1698, when the colony's population was roughly 7,500 whites and 8500 blacks, the legislature, meeting in Charleston, passed a bill calling for the importation of more white servants because the "great number of Negroes which of late have been imported in to this colony may endanger the safety thereof if speedy

⁶Ibid., 50-51.
care be not taken.' By 1715 South Carolina, with 6,250 whites and 
10,500 blacks, had the smallest white population and the second largest 
black of the thirteen British colonies that would become the United 
States. (Only Virginia, with 23,000 blacks and 72,000 whites, had a 
larger black population, and there whites far outnumbered blacks). This 
distribution of South Carolina population between the races continued, 
and in the lowcountry the gap widened so that by 1820 Charleston 
County's blacks outnumbered whites more than three to one. Population 
figures for 1820 reveal the county had 19,376 whites and 60,836 blacks 
and by 1830, 20,804 whites and 65,534 blacks. While the gap finally 
began to narrow beginning with the 1840 census, whites remained the 
minority race in antebellum Charleston County.8

South Carolina, particularly the lowcountry surrounding 
Charleston, was deeply anxious at the thought of millions of dollars 
worth of slave property that would be wiped out by abolition. More 
importantly, white Carolinians could not perceive of emancipation 
without a pursuant race war marked by monstrous scenes of plunder,

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rape, and murder. Lending credence to these fears, French refugees, fleeing the island of San Domingo after the 1791 slave insurrection, had brought woeful accounts of terror.\textsuperscript{9}

Heightening apprehension about potential race conflict, white Charlestonians discovered a slave plot to revolt in 1822. Reportedly led by a free black, Denmark Vesey, the planned rebellion was brutally crushed before the slaves could act. Only a timely warning from a loyal slave alerted whites to the danger. The threat of revolt spurred frightened whites to further restrict both slaves and free blacks, while paradoxically advancing the idea that slaves were content in their station. To ease their troubled minds, whites extolled the virtues of a happy, paternalistic plantation life while enforcing existing rules and promulgating harsher ones to control blacks and uphold slavery. At the same time, they strenuously resisted the dissemination of abolitionist propaganda and sought to stifle congressional debate on the issue.\textsuperscript{10}

By 1830 southern states resented the more populous northern states’ political leverage in Washington. The northern call for protective

\textsuperscript{8}Petty, \textit{Growth and Distribution of Population}, 24 for 1715 statistics and 226-27 for population figures from antebellum United States Census schedules.

\textsuperscript{9}Freehling, \textit{Prelude to Civil War}, 49-86 (particularly 53 and 58) and M. Foster Farley, “Fear of Negro Slave Revolts in South Carolina, 1690-1865,” \textit{Afro-American Studies}, 3 (1972): 199-207. See also Freehling, 307 for the influence of the San Domingo revolt on South Carolina thought.

\textsuperscript{10}Freehling, \textit{Prelude to Civil War}, 60.
tariffs, designed to stimulate northern industries while limiting European imports, further antagonized southerners who increasingly relied upon imported goods while devoting more acreage and resources to money crops. During the Nullification Crisis of 1832, South Carolina defied the new tariffs and the central government, but other southern states were unwilling to follow suit. Unheeded, South Carolina politicians prophesied a bitter future of regional dependence that other southerners dared not yet believe.\[11\]

Isolated from other southern politicians by their radical political views, South Carolina leaders were sharply divided over the question of nullification. Nullifiers were clearly in the majority, but Unionists were not without influence. The northern antislavery movement supplied Nullifiers and Unionists with a common cause and galvanized South Carolina resistance to outside interference. One historian, with some hyperbole, noted "abolition developed just in time to confirm and magnify all the evils of the nullification controversy. From 1832 to 1860 South Carolina was in effect not so much a part of the country as a dissatisfied ally, for the last thirteen years of the period only awaiting a

favorable opportunity to dissolve the alliance."\textsuperscript{12} The abolitionist threat from outside promoted white unity within South Carolina politics and society as whites rallied in defense of their "peculiar institution."\textsuperscript{13}

Fearing slave revolt within their communities and facing growing opposition to slavery from northerners, South Carolinians defended their way of life through political extremism and radical social action. The arrival of antislavery literature at the Charleston Post Office in July 1835 reiterated the threat to South Carolina's peace from the potential alliance of northern abolitionism and slave insurrection. Preoccupied with the defense of slavery and paranoid about the escalation of the antislavery crusade, white Charlestonians were ill disposed to allow the assault through the mail to go unchallenged.

On the night of July 29, according to the Charleston \textit{Mercury}, "a crowd of two or three hundred citizens assembled ... for the purpose of seizing and destroying ... the papers." The city guard, commanded that evening by Lieutenant Brown, met and dispersed the crowd as it approached the Exchange Building. Undaunted, some in the group returned to the Exchange after the night had again grown quiet. The \textit{Courier} noted that:


\textsuperscript{13}Barnwell, \textit{Love of Order}, 35-36.
Between the hours of 10 and 11 o'clock ... a number of persons assembled about the Exchange, and, without any noise or disturbance, but on the contrary, with coolness and deliberation, made a forcible entry into the Post Office by wrenching open one of its windows and carried off the packages containing the incendiary matter.

As the vigilantes forced their way into the post office, these southerners demonstrated their desire to protect slavery and to go to any lengths to strike out at the enemies of what they euphemistically called their "domestic" or "peculiar" institution.¹⁴

The city's Anglo-American leadership, with their worldview rooted in colonial experiences, adhered to a biracial social construct generally accepted by Charleston's white community. In antebellum Charleston the prevailing social structure was developed by a Protestant, mostly native-born, slaveholding white elite, who saw themselves at the apex of their society, virtuous republicans responsible for the economic and political institutions of South Carolina and southern society. In other areas of the south, including Georgia, North Carolina, and the South Carolina upcountry, where class structure was more flexible than in the lowcountry, non-elite whites benefited from opportunities that allowed them to assume places of honor and dignity within their communities. Proving the most resistant to the economic and social advancement of lower-class whites, the South Carolina lowcountry planter elite cherished its worldview more dearly and maintained its socio-economic position
much longer than others of the South's colonial and post-colonial ruling class.\textsuperscript{15}

Yet, with population shifts to the upcountry and the resultant changing dynamics of South Carolina politics, even the lowcountry planters were forced to take seriously the threat to their oligarchic lifestyle. As opportunities of upward mobility presented themselves to low-born talented men, the old-fashioned ideals of deference and \textit{noblesse oblige}, which had survived the Revolution, were now challenged by an expanding democratization unleashed by the very war that had confirmed the lowcountry planters' world of republican elitism.\textsuperscript{16}

From this perspective, the city's population, regardless of the varying determinants affecting social status, could be divided between a superior race of free whites and an inferior race of enslaved blacks. The white elite's view of their community—in Charleston and elsewhere in the South—defined a social system tethering racial identity to economics and citizenship. Of course, the truth of southern society was always more

\textsuperscript{14}Charleston \textit{Mercury} and Charleston \textit{Courier}, July 31, 1835.


\textsuperscript{16}Gordon S. Wood, \textit{The Radicalism of the American Revolution} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992) discusses the shifts in American society wrought by the American Revolution. According to Wood, the Revolutionary War must be understood as a beginning to the Revolution that was not completed until the advent of the common man in the Jacksonian Era.
diverse than this free white/enslaved black model, by which white southerners long attempted to measure and rule their world. Several groups within the community, obviously free blacks for example, challenged this construct by their mere existence. Poor immigrant European Catholics, competing for jobs with free blacks and even taking jobs deemed unsuitable or too dangerous for slaves, also proved a difficult fit in this prescribed social order.

Hardly new to antebellum Charleston, anti-Catholicism had been an integral part of colonial American society. Although it somewhat dissipated during an era of tolerance and sectarian harmony in the early days of the Republic, religious prejudice resurfaced with fresh vigor in the early nineteenth century. The influx of Catholic immigrants challenged the homogeneity of Protestant American culture as well as the public's commitment to the newly achieved constitutional right to religious freedom. Fear and prejudice were evidenced throughout the nation. While the South received only a fraction of the immigrants who flocked to the United States after 1815, a significant number, especially the Irish who generally found work in shipyards or in the construction of canals and railways, came to the South. The majority of immigrants to the South settled in port cities and in river and rail centers. Thus,

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Charleston and other towns had a significant contingent of Irishmen within their populations.¹⁸

While Charleston's antebellum Catholics included Germans, San Domingan French, and other ethnic groups, the Irish were a clear majority within the church community. Regardless of their ethnicity or socio-economic status or cultural background, American Catholics, within their new homeland, encountered the transplanted anti-Catholicism endemic to American culture. Anti-Catholicism, which had been muted in the Revolutionary War era, experienced a new lease on life as Catholic immigrants began to arrive in large numbers following the War of 1812. Interestingly, the revival of American Anti-Catholicism coincided with the development of sectionalism in American politics and the growing controversy surrounding slavery.¹⁹


¹⁹While recognizing anti-Catholicism in American culture as a bias first transplanted to the New World by European Protestants, historians have disagreed about the intensity of anti-Catholic sentiment over time. Although Ira M. Leonard and Robert D. Parment, American Nativism, 1830-1860 (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1971), 17-25 hold that there was no real lessening of anti-Catholicism in the revolutionary and early republic periods followed by a renewed intensity in the antebellum period, Ray Allen Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism (Chicago, 1962), 1-32 argues that there was a lessening of animosity and that the revival of anti-Catholicism had its beginnings in the late 1820s. Billington's account squares with the perceptions of Catholic writers of the period, including Jeremiah J. O'Connell, Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History (Sadlier, 1879. Reprint, Westminster, Md.: Ars Sacra, 1964).
Charleston Irishmen and other Catholics were only too aware of the pervasive and increasingly vocal anti-Catholicism that marked the antebellum period. The potential for violence against Catholics in antebellum America had been clearly demonstrated the year before the Charleston Post Office Raid, when a nativist mob of mostly unskilled laborers and teen-aged boys attacked and burned the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts. The New England incident, which is covered in more detail in the fourth chapter, had followed several weeks of anti-Catholic sermons preached in Boston area pulpits and the release of Rebecca Reed’s purportedly autobiographical tale of abuse within the Charlestown convent. All but one of the accused was acquitted in trials during June 1835, just a month before the unrest in South Carolina.20


Rebecca Reed, *Six Months in a Convent: or a Narrative of Rebecca Theresa Reed, Who was under the influence of the Roman Catholics about two years, and an Inmate of the Ursuline Convent on Mount Benedict, Charlestown, Mass., nearly six months, in the years 1831-32* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne and Metcalf, 1835). See also Charleston *Courier* and Charleston *Mercury* for June and July 1835. Charleston booksellers in both newspapers featured the Reed book in almost daily advertisements for several weeks prior to the post office raid at the end of July 1835.
During the post office raid, Irish Catholics in the crowd heard shouts go up calling for the lynching of Bishop John England and the destruction of the Catholic seminary, cathedral, convent, and school. Running the five blocks down Broad Street, a couple of Irishmen carried the alarm to the bishop. Others roused fellow Irishmen to form ranks of their company of the city's militia to provide a guard for their bishop and the church property.

Bishop England related the story the following winter in a letter to his friend Paul Cullen, Rector of the Irish College in Rome and later Cardinal Archbishop of Dublin. England remembered deciding, "[a]fter a short deliberation and prayer in the church ... that if we should be attacked we had better resist than allow the Church, and the Convent of the Ursulines, and the Seminary, and ourselves, to be destroyed."

Hoping to avoid trouble but determined to save church property, the bishop warned the members of the Irish Volunteers, who gathered at the cathedral, "that I would use their aid if necessary, provided they pledged themselves to obey me and would invest me with the command." With the militiamen's acquiescence, Bishop England took control of the unit. Proving rather knowledgeable of military deployment, England "stationed sentinels, and showed the officers the best points of defence for the whole of our possessions; charging them if any assault were made, not to have a shot fired until I would give directions." Taking further precaution, the prelate had some of the men go "out into the streets, and
the intimation was soon privately conveyed through the city that we were
prepared." With the Irish Volunteers poised to defend themselves, their
bishop, and their church, all remained quiet toward the west end of
Broad Street around the cathedral. Satisfied with having captured the
"incendiary papers," the raiders of the Exchange Building at the east end
of Broad retired for the night. 21

The following night, Thursday evening, Charlestonians gathered on
the parade grounds fronting the city's arsenal in Marion Square at the
north edge of town. There they gleefully watched as the antislavery
papers were committed to flames. Effigies of leading northern
abolitionists—William Lloyd Garrison, Lewis and Arthur Tappan, and
others—were burned hanging over the bonfire of pamphlets.
Parenthetically, Garrison undoubtedly is the best remembered of the
abolitionists from the 1830s, but there were others, including the Tappan
brothers of New York City. In fact, Lewis Tappan proposed the anti-
slavery mailing campaign that led to the Charleston Post Office Raid. 22

21 John England to Paul Cullen, February 23, 1836, see Peter Guilday,
The Life and Times of John England, First Bishop of Charleston (1786–1842) (2

22 Charleston Courier and Charleston Mercury, July 31, 1835. Freehling,
Prelude to Civil War, 340-41 lists the effigies burned as those of Garrison, the
Tappans, "and other northern 'fanatics'." Fraser, Charleston! Charleston! 213,
quoting Jacob Schirmer, writes that the crowd "also burnt in Effigy the leading
...[abolitionists] of the North viz., Garrison, Cox, and Tappan." See also John
Ashworth, Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic (New
York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), vol. 1, Commerce and Compromise,
1820–1850, 125-29, especially 128.
While the hanging effigies of northern abolitionists burned above the embers that had been the anti-slavery papers, Bishop England and the Irish Volunteers continued their vigil to protect the Catholic properties clustered along Friend Street between Broad and Queen. Again no mob disturbed the Catholics. Finally on Friday, two days after the arrival of the Columbia, Charleston's leaders offered the mantle of their protection to the Irish Catholics. "On the second day," wrote Bishop England, "several of the most respectable citizens of all religions sent to have their names enrolled on our guard; and the city officers said they were ready with their whole force to come to us should we need their assistance." 23

By Friday, hysteria was subsiding and white Charlestonians, while still very upset, approached the abolitionist threat more rationally. One newspaper opined:

The only regret, we feel, in relation to this affair, arises from the fact, that arrangements had been made at the Post Office in this city, to arrest the circulation of the incendiary matter, until instructions could be received from the Post Office Department at Washington. It might, perhaps, have been better to have awaited the result of the application of instructions, before proceeding to extremities. 24


24 Charleston Courier, July 31, 1835.
The public demonstration at the citadel on Marion Square helped ease tensions within Charleston. Some of the anxiety and fear felt by the city's white residents was consumed in the bonfire that destroyed the antislavery papers and the effigies of abolitionists. With passions cooling, officials moved to gain control of the situation. While motivated in part by their respect for religion and their personal relationships with Bishop England, the city fathers' public support for the Irish Catholics' defense of the cathedral and other buildings probably was spurred on also by their conviction of the sacredness of property rights and their fear for their own properties, which might be destroyed by a wind-spread wildfire should the Catholic enclave be put to the torch.

Although the threatened violence against the bishop and Catholic properties never materialized and the immediate crisis faded, controversy was far from resolved. The anti-Catholic threats made at the post office on the evening of the raid were rooted in ethnic and religious bigotry that could potentially divide whites. The tensions revealed in the crisis of July 1835 were not easily assuaged in the resolutions passed and the actions taken in the wake of the arrival of the pamphlets on the Columbia.

The Post Office Raid's threats against the bishop and church property in July 1835 form the first of three episodes of apparent anti-Catholic bias played out in the public arena in antebellum Charleston. Yet the later events—one involving a small bit of vandalism in turning
over a stone in front of the Hibernian Hall following a fundraising campaign on behalf of Potato Famine victims and the other involving ugly rumors and hate mongering in an 1850s election featuring a Catholic candidate during the heyday of the Know-Nothing Party—did not involve the threat of violence against either person or property and do not reveal the connection between anti-abolitionism and anti-Catholicism. In the first of the two it is not even possible to know the motives of those responsible for knocking over the stone. While the timing of the event would suggest anti-Irish bias on the part of perpetrators, history has not recorded the identity of the vandals or their state of mind at the time of the mischief. Only the threats made at the 1835 Post Office Raid reveal the connection between the forces of anti-abolitionism and the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant bias of the day. Yet, it is this linking of social movements and ideologies that may provide a better understanding of Catholic assimilation in the antebellum South.

In retrospect, several points in the story of the Charleston post office raid strike the reader. Why did someone in an anti-abolitionist crowd draw a connection between the northern anti-slavery societies and the local bishop and other Irish Catholics? Why single out the Irish Catholics, among a number of ethnic groups within the city's Catholic community? What had Catholics in Charleston done to appear supportive of abolitionism, thereby representing a threat to the South's way of life? Given the small number of Catholics in the city, if
Charleston's white Protestants suspected Catholics of abolitionist sympathies, why did they not attack the group gathered in defense of the cathedral and the bishop? In attempting to answer these questions, the following chapters will explore the history of Catholicism in the antebellum Carolinas and Georgia, the immigrant background of the region's Catholics, the southern Protestant world in which Charleston's Catholics lived, and the influence of Catholics on Protestant America's perceptions of Catholicism. Through the study of these separate but closely related lines of inquiry, an understanding of the dynamics behind anti-Catholic rhetoric of the anti-abolitionist Post Office Raid will emerge.

In the second chapter, the story turns to the institutional history of southern Catholicism, providing a historical sketch of Catholicism in the Carolinas and Georgia before the antebellum period and a brief biographical treatment of the early life of John England, the remarkable prelate who served as Charleston's first bishop. The unique history of the region and the personal experiences of Bishop England influenced the development of the antebellum Church in the Deep South. The chapter closes with an examination of the work done in establishing diocesan and parish institutions amid a host of difficulties that had to be met and overcome.

Chapter Three investigates the origins and migration patterns of immigrant Catholics to the Old South. Using census reports, extant immigration records, and other sources, the study pieces together a
composite view of immigration and of the Catholic Church in antebellum Charleston and its three-state diocese. The chapter also delineates the immigrant's place in society in terms of his percentage of the population and his socio-economic status.

The fourth chapter explores the Carolina and Georgia milieu in which the events of late July 1835 transpired. The social attitudes of the region's ruling class emerge as the narrative examines the influences that wrought a Protestant world in the antebellum Deep South. Within Georgia and the Carolinas, few outside the cities of Charleston and Savannah would have seen a Catholic, yet anti-Catholicism permeated southern culture, much as it did American culture in general. In the coastal cities, where a wide variety of ethnicities and cultures mingled, anti-Catholicism and Anglo-American ethnic prejudices helped shape the Protestant reception of the immigrants who established Catholicism in the Deep South.

In Chapter Five the study looks at the influence that Catholics, both in and outside the South, had on Protestant attitudes towards Catholics and their church. These attitudes obviously affected the relationship between southern Catholics and their Protestant neighbors. From the abolitionist politics of Irish leaders such as Daniel O'Connell to the anti-slavery encyclical of Pope Gregory XVI, the positions of non-southern Catholics impacted greatly on the lives of their co-religionists in Dixie. Moreover, the activities of Bishop England and other clerics in the
Charleston diocese also at times raised suspicions among Protestant whites.

To close the study, the sixth chapter serves as a summary of the various strains influencing perceptions of race and religion in the antebellum Deep South. Upsetting the notion of the white South’s cultural homogeneity, a study of antebellum Charleston reveals an assortment of ethnicities including the Anglo-Americans, French Huguenots, San Domingan French, Irish, and Germans. One of the primary binding forces among these various groups was their white racial identity. The arrival of Irish, French, and other Catholic ethnic groups brought a greater degree of cultural diversity to Charleston and other urban centers in the Deep South. Additionally, the Catholic presence also required from Protestant whites a new assessment of their religious, political, and social assumptions. Were the Irish and other Catholics to have a place among the white citizenry that did not undermine American liberties? In many ways, the arrival of Catholic immigrants in the antebellum United States represents the first challenge the young nation faced in extending and preserving the freedoms expressed in the Declaration of Independence and safeguarded in the Constitution. In the Deep South, the immigrant assumed his place among white citizens as Charleston Irishmen dared to defend both their church and their cultural distinctiveness, while joining their Protestant neighbors rallying in defense of slavery.
CHAPTER TWO

Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia

In spite of adversity, Catholicism took root in the antebellum South. While always a tiny fraction of the region's population, Catholics influenced southern culture and were shaped in part by it. In considering the Catholic southerners' response to anti-Catholicism, it is beneficial to consider briefly the region's people, their history and religion. Several points must be examined in appreciating the success Catholics nurtured against significant odds. Firstly, the Catholics who immigrated to Charleston in the early years of the Republic hardly represented the city's first experience with ethnic or religious diversity. Indeed, by the antebellum period, Charleston already had a long history of ethnic diversity within its white population. The first section of this chapter explores Charleston's cosmopolitan population and the influence of this diversity in the early development of Catholicism in the city.

The second section of the chapter focuses on the early life of Charleston's first bishop, John England, and the influences that prepared him for his episcopal assignment in the Carolinas and Georgia.
Bishop England's early life prepared him in many ways for his work in the diocese of Charleston. His life in Ireland under British rule left England deeply appreciative of the American principles of separation of church and state and government based on the consent of the governed. His work with a newspaper and his pastoral experiences among Catholics in a largely Protestant village afforded England with opportunities to hone skills he would put to good use as an American bishop. At the same time, his involvement in Irish politics convinced England of the sacredness of liberty—an ideal that, for the bishop, precluded any thought that one man should hold another as chattel. Educated, charming, and poised, John England was well equipped to become Charleston's first bishop, but he would be forced to justify slavery and to explain the Catholic Church's tacit support for an institution that he himself believed inherently evil.

Having considered the early history of the region and of the man who would be the first resident Catholic bishop in the area, the chapter provides an overview of the antebellum history of the Diocese of Charleston. The diocese's Catholics constituted a very small minority, and yet the Catholic Church in South Carolina's chief port city was as diverse as the city itself, with French, Irish, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and other European immigrants worshipping together in the city's lone Catholic parish. Charleston's Catholics experienced ethnic and
cultural divisions within their ranks, but in their religion found common cause as they made a life for themselves among a Protestant majority.

The development of lay trusteeism was another factor shaping American Catholicism. The only bishop in the United States until 1808 was the Bishop of Baltimore, whose ability to travel to all regions of his national diocese was greatly hampered by the lack of good roads in the young nation. Catholics often sought charters from their state legislatures that established local parishes under the control of lay trustees. A system of government much like an Episcopal Church parish's vestry developed in many places, including the Hasell Street Catholic Church in Charleston. This system insured the survival of the local parish and, at the same time, provided an ecclesiastical polity that the city's Protestants found more familiar and more democratic than what most early nineteenth-century Americans viewed as the authoritarian and anti-democratic government of the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, lay trusteeism created a local authority that could, and often did, undermine the bishop's authority.

To return to the first point, it should be noted that South Carolina was founded in 1670 by English colonists, many from Bermuda. St. Philip's in Charleston was the first of several parishes established in Carolina by the Church of England as entities encompassing both civil and religious life. While the established church would be disestablished during the American Revolution and would lose ground to other
Protestant groups in the Carolina upcountry, Anglicanism would remain the dominant religious force in the Charleston well into the antebellum period.

Seeking refuge from religious persecution, French Huguenots had arrived in the city shortly after France's Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes in October 1685. At first, the Huguenots worshiped with other Charleston Calvinists in a congregation organized in 1681, just a year after the city had moved to the peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers and only eleven years after Charleston had been first settled. The city's other Calvinists were New England Puritans and Scots and Scots-Irish Presbyterians. Differences among these Calvinists factions led to the establishment of at least four parishes. While the New Englanders remained at what would become the Congregational Church, the Huguenots formed their own parish in 1687. Early in the eighteenth century, a group from the New England contingency separated from the original congregation to form Charleston's Unitarian church community. Additionally, the Scots and Scots-Irish departed to form a Presbyterian congregation and by 1760 had constructed a building for worship services.

Meanwhile, German Lutherans immigrating to Charleston also had built a small church that would be replaced with a fine structure in 1816. A group of Anabaptists from Maine formed a congregation in Charleston about 1684 and erected a church in 1699. Finally, a group of
Quakers had settled in Charleston and erected a small meetinghouse. Thus, by the mid-eighteenth century a half dozen or more dissenting Protestant groups had established congregations in Charleston. Aside from these various Protestant Christian groups, Charleston also had a Jewish community that had begun with the arrival of Sephardic Jews at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In the 1740s Jews engaged in the indigo trade from London and Amsterdam began arriving in Charleston and in 1749 Synagogue Kahal Kadosh Beth Elohim was established. These groups of Protestants and Jews maintained their separate religious traditions and contributed to the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the port city, even as Anglicans remained the culturally dominant group among Charleston’s white minority.¹

While some among Charleston’s eighteen-century Irish population may have been Catholic, Christians in communion with the Bishop of Rome were legally excluded from settling in most of the thirteen colonies, including the Carolinas and Georgia, until after the American Revolution.² Among several instances in which Irish migration to the American colonies is documented, three ships sailed from England in

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²Fraser, Charleston! Charleston! 10 and 204-05.
August 1669 for the Carolinas. The ships stopped first at Kinsale, Ireland, where Irish settlers boarded and then at an overpopulated Barbados, where still others boarded. Interestingly, Barbados had been the destination of many Irishmen transported by the Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell about 1654. All of these Irish immigrants to the Carolinas registered at Charleston’s St. Phillip’s Church, the city’s Anglican parish. Other Irishmen in colonial Charleston included Dr. John Rutledge, a native of Longford, Ireland and the father of Charleston’s Revolutionary leaders, John and Edward Rutledge.\(^3\) For a variety of reasons, Irish emigration to colonial America was not as large in number as it would be later and most Irishmen crossing the Atlantic before the Revolution would have been Protestant, notably Scots-Irish Presbyterians from Ulster.

In fact, one historian places the percentage of Ulstermen at two-thirds of the Irish migration during the colonial period, or about 100,000 people. Of course, this figure leaves another 50,000 Irishmen in the migration to colonial America, most of whom were Catholic. In the years between the end of the American Revolution in 1783 and the second Anglo-American war beginning in 1812, Irish immigration increased significantly. Most of the immigrants entering the United States

continued to be Protestant, but an increasing number were Catholic.
The increase of those leaving Ireland is attributed to a number of factors, including reduced economic opportunities at home and a shift in Irish attitudes regarding emigration to America. Prior to the establishment of religious and political freedoms guaranteed in the United States Constitution, emigration had not enjoyed wide appeal among the Irish, whether Protestant or Catholic.⁴

The final defeat and exile of Napoleon meant an end of war in Europe and North America that allowed an expansion of trans-Atlantic trade and migration. This expansion saw a dramatic rise in emigration to the United States. At the same time, because of relaxed shipping and travel regulations in Britain, the percentage of Irish Catholics among immigrants was increasing. After 1838 the majority of Irish entering America each year were Catholic. While not yet in the numbers witnessed during the Potato Famine in the last few years of the 1840s, Irish Catholics were already seeking better opportunities in the New World in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. Charleston, while receiving fewer immigrants than other American port

cities, became home to an increasing number of foreign born, many of whom were Catholic.\textsuperscript{5}

A cursory study of South Carolina’s Catholics reveals both the relatively small number of Catholics in Charleston and the ethnic diversity within the city and its Catholic community. Yet, ethnic differences among Charleston’s Catholics never led to the establishment of “national parishes,” a system often utilized in northern cities in which each ethnic group had its own parish. In part, there were too few Catholics in Charleston to warrant the practice; only the Irish and later the Germans were present in sufficient numbers to compose such parishes, and these groups were among the poorest within the community. Additionally, the larger Protestant population, with its long history of anti-Catholic sentiment, no doubt fostered a greater sense of community among the relatively small number of Catholics.\textsuperscript{6}

Under Bishop John England’s leadership, Charleston’s Catholics in most instances appear to have moved beyond ethnic differences. Still, the tension in Franco-Irish relations within the Catholic community was

\textsuperscript{5}\textit{Ibid.}, 196, 199-201.

\textsuperscript{6}Many of the parishes in the Diocese of Charleston clearly were dominated by the Irish, who were the vast majority of Catholics in the diocese, but diocesan officials do not seem to have consciously sought the establishment of national parishes. The only exception to this statement is St. Paul’s Church, Charleston, which was created for the city’s German Catholics in 1861. However, the parish was closed in 1869 because of a shrinking congregation. See Poston, \textit{The Buildings of Charleston}, 469.
perhaps as much an issue of the perception of class differences as it was of ethnic divisiveness. Indeed, perceptions about the French and Irish, as will be shown in the fourth chapter, colored the white Protestant responses to each of these two groups as they became part of the social fabric of Charleston and the South. Further, it is not difficult to imagine that groups within a society, in defining themselves and others, should do so using the hegemonic class’s worldview as their standard.

The work of establishing parishes and schools occupied most of the time and efforts of the antebellum leadership in the diocese. The leaders, almost all men, are very much tied to the institutional history of southern Catholicism. The story of Catholicism in the Carolinas and Georgia begins long before the establishment of the Diocese of Charleston in July of 1820. Before the English colonial period in which Catholicism was proscribed, the region that became England’s southern-most North American colonies saw Catholic missions briefly flourish.

**Beginnings of Catholicism in the Anglo-American South**

Catholicism arrived in the area that became the Carolinas and Georgia a half century before Elizabethan Englishmen turned their attention to the colonization of the New World. Spain’s Hernando de Soto, in his 1542 exploration of the region now in the southeastern states, traveled through much of Georgia and possibly into South Carolina. According to legend, priests in his entourage baptized two
American Indians at the Indian town of Ocmulgee along the river of the same name, near what is present day Macon, Georgia. In the 1580s and 1590s, Spanish Franciscan friars established a series of missions northward from St. Augustine along the coast of an area the Spanish called Guale—that is, the coast of Georgia and South Carolina and the Golden Isles. The friars met many hardships including attacks from pirates and unfriendly American Indians, yet they persevered for more than a century, cultivating fruits and vegetables and converting friendly Indians to Catholicism. In 1606, a year before the English established their first permanent colony at Jamestown, the friars at San Pedro, the main Guale mission, received a visit from their ordinary, Juan de la Cabezas de Altamirano, bishop of Santiago, Cuba, who confirmed over 300 Indians.8

The half-century following the episcopal visit was the heyday of Georgia’s Spanish missions. In 1670 the English established a settlement called Charles Town (later renamed Charleston) and by 1680 had secured the success of their colony by moving the town to the more healthful and better defended location at the tip of the peninsula between the Ashley and Cooper Rivers. While not willing to cede its territory

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without dispute, Spain met with misfortune in several of its military expeditions against the English in Carolina. English traders who stirred the Indians against the Spanish harassed the area north of St. Augustine. After several Yamasee Indian raids, Governor Juan Marqués Cabrera ordered the remaining Franciscans to relocate south of the St. Mary's River in 1686. While Englishmen and Spaniards continued to fight over the land between Charleston and St. Augustine for more than another half-century, Spain's glory was fading, and with it any serious Spanish threat to the English. The establishment of Georgia as a British colony in 1733 was due in part to the English crown's desire to place a military base between South Carolina and the Spanish in Florida. A brief war in the summer of 1742, resulting in a British victory, ended Spanish plans for the region north of the St. Mary's River.9

After 1686 and the retreat of the Spanish missions, the area that would later become the Diocese of Charleston officially contained no Catholics, although Indian converts probably retained at least some elements of their Catholic faith. The English colonies of the Carolinas and Georgia were established with the same laws that proscribed Catholicism in Great Britain. Most of the settlers were from Great Britain, which had long been suspicious of anything Catholic. In no British American colony, save for a brief period in early Maryland, was

9Ibid., 12-13 and 30-33.
the free and open practice of Catholicism allowed. In 1692 the South Carolina Council legislated religious freedom for all Christian immigrants except Roman Catholics. In the 1733 settlement of Georgia, the admittance of Catholics was expressly prohibited. This anti-Catholic bias in Georgia was underscored by General Oglethorpe’s decision in late 1733 to allow a group of Sephardic Jews to settle in Protestant Georgia on the grounds that while they were not Protestants, they were certainly not Roman Catholics.10

Although some Catholics came to the colonies in spite of the religious intolerance, the Revolutionary War, as noted earlier, provided the first opportunity for religious freedom. The founding fathers, influenced by Enlightenment thought and beholden to their French and Spanish Catholic allies, embraced a greater tolerance for religious diversity. No doubt, American Catholics themselves helped along this attitude towards Catholics. American Catholicism in the early Republic was centered in Maryland and the Delaware River basin. Most American Catholics before the nineteenth century were Anglo-Americans of several generations standing, and their clerics were either native-born sons or Frenchmen, late subjects of the French king, America’s ally in the recent war for independence.

10 Fraser, Charleston! Charleston! 12 and Spalding, “Colonial Period,” 17 and 22.
An American Catholic Church emerged with the new nation when in 1789 the Holy See created the diocese of Baltimore and named John Carroll its first bishop. Bishop Carroll's family was the prominent and well-established Carroll family of Maryland, and his cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, had been a political leader in the Revolutionary Era and a signer of the Declaration of Independence. The bishop had begun his service in the church as a priest in the Society of Jesus, the religious order that had been most active in colonial America. As bishop of Baltimore, Carroll was faced with a chronic shortage of priests for the Catholic communities that were being established across the United States. Still, by 1808, his efforts had prompted the creation of additional dioceses to administer church activities in the northern states. In that year, Carroll became archbishop of Baltimore, and his diocesan city, a metropolitan see with suffragan bishops in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston along the coast and Bardstown, Kentucky, in the interior of the young nation.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11}The archbishop is the head of a province that includes his own diocese and a number of other dioceses. While he does not have authority in or jurisdiction over the other dioceses in his province, he is responsible for a degree of oversight. The bishops of the other dioceses in the province are referred to as suffragan bishops because they have the right to vote at provincial council meetings.

As it would for all of the nineteenth century, immigration accounted for the largest part of the increase within American Catholicism under Archbishop Carroll. Many, if not most, of these early immigrants were Irish. Carroll was not alone among Anglo-American Catholics when he viewed these recent arrivals as troublesome. Complaining of the Irish, the archbishop opined “[t]he new emigrants from foreign ports introduced licentiousness of manners, which exposed the Catholic Religion to the reproach of its enemies.”

Certainly the American hierarchy was overworked in its efforts to meet the pressing needs of Catholics already in the United States. In this light, John Carroll’s expression of distaste towards the newly arrived immigrants is perhaps understandable. Still, the Baltimore divine’s remark also underscores the anti-Irish prejudice pervading eighteenth-century Anglo-American culture. With this in mind, it comes as no surprise to learn that the establishment of the Catholic Diocese of Charleston in 1820 was rooted in the ethnic discord within both the Charleston congregation and the American Church as a whole.

In Charleston, ethnic tension centered in a dispute between Irish and French Catholics in the Hasell Street Catholic Church, which had

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been organized about 1789 under the leadership of Father Simon Felix Gallagher. In 1793, when the slaves revolted in San Domingo, many whites and mixed-race gens de couleur fled the island. Some 500, mostly Catholic, found their way to Charleston. While Catholics in Charleston, South Carolina, included Germans and San Domingan Frenchmen, most of the city’s Catholics were Irish.¹⁴

Within a few years of the establishment of the Hasell Street parish, French and Irish Catholics were in disagreement, each faction wanting the sermon at Mass preached in its own language. Bishop Carroll, already having upbraided Gallagher for failing to erect a church to replace the “ruinous house” used by the congregation, called Father LeMercier from Savannah to Charleston. The Irish refused to accept the new pastor and began hearing Mass in a private home with Gallagher, who remained in Charleston in defiance of his ordinary.¹⁵ When Gallagher showed signs of building a new church, Carroll sent LeMercier back to Savannah and reappointed Gallagher in Charleston. Shortly after Gallagher was reinstalled, the parish replaced its old wooden


¹⁵The ordinary is the bishop or archbishop of a diocese. He is also sometimes referred to as the diocesan bishop. In addition to the ordinary, a diocese may also have one or more auxiliary bishops, who serve under the direction of the ordinary.
church with a brick building featuring a portico supported by four columns. This structure was the church on Hasell Street where the Catholics of the city were meeting when Bishop England arrived at the end of 1820. The building erected under Gallagher’s leadership was lost to fire in 1838, but the parish church remains on Hasell Street, today known as St. Mary’s Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{16}

In 1810 the lay trustees of the Hasell Street Church renewed their attempts to exert their own authority in the parish by removing the pastor from the vestry. Gallagher protested in vain and appealed for help from his newfound friend, Archbishop Carroll. While the archbishop was unable to do much to correct the situation, he did provide another priest to assist Gallagher. In September 1812, remembering the French-speaking members of the Charleston parish, Carroll sent a Brittany native, Father Joseph Picot de Clorivière, who, although already fifty-five years old, was a recent graduate of Baltimore’s St. Mary’s Seminary. An aristocratic supporter of the Bourbon monarchy, de Clorivière had fled France after a plot against Napoleon Bonaparte failed. De Clorivière and the other conspirators had planned to assassinate the First Consul in an effort to restore the monarchy. Suffice it to say that de Clorivière’s escape was perilous, but he eventually found himself in Savannah. After

\textsuperscript{16}Richard C. Madden, \textit{Catholics in South Carolina: A Record} (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 47.
several years in Georgia he sought and gained permission to study for
the priesthood.\textsuperscript{17}

Downplaying the discord between Charleston's parish leaders and
their Baltimore archbishop, Jeremiah O'Connell, in his history of the
diocese, focused on the ethnic tensions between Charleston's French and
Irish Catholics. Writing in the 1870s, O'Connell, a Benedictine priest who
had trained at Bishop England's seminary in Charleston, worked in the
diocese through the latter part of the antebellum era. Noting that the
Irish and French together had created a church community, O'Connell
claimed that by 1818 the two groups were at loggerheads over control of
the parish.\textsuperscript{18} In 1816, just after the fall of Napoleon, while the pro-
Bourbon and counter-revolutionary de Clorivières was in France attending
family business, Gallagher invited Peter Browne, then serving in
Augusta, to assist him in Charleston. Gallagher's invitation, although
confirmed by the parish's vestry, had been issued without the knowledge,
let alone the approval, of the ordinary, Archbishop Leonard Neale, who

\textsuperscript{17} Madden, \textit{Catholics in South Carolina: A Record}, 26-27.

\textsuperscript{18} O'Connell, \textit{Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia}, 143-44.
Incidentally, O'Connell was nearing the end of his seminary training at the time
of Bishop England's death in April 1842. While he was not a priest under
England's episcopate, he knew Bishop England and many of the priests from
the early days of the diocese. His history of the diocese has the ring of one who
has spoken to participants in the events described. See also Madden, \textit{Catholics in South Carolina}, 25-29 and 32-33, and John Dawson Gilmary Shea, \textit{History of the Catholic Church in the United States} (4 volumes, New York: John G. Shea,
1890-92), III, 55-59 and 76-83.
had succeeded John Carroll in Baltimore at the latter's death in December 1815. Upon learning of this unorthodox arrangement, Neale reprimanded the vestry and suspended both Gallagher and Browne. The Charlestonians responded by refusing to allow de Clorivièrre access to the church after his return from Europe. Gallagher further angered the archbishop by appealing, without permission, directly to Rome. At this, Neale placed Gallagher and his supporters under interdict, denying the Charleston Catholics access to the sacraments of the Church.19

Already frail and nearly seventy years old at the time of his appointment to succeed John Carroll in Baltimore, Archbishop Neale died in June 1817 and was succeeded by the Frenchman Ambrose Maréchal, who renewed Father de Clorivièrre's faculties and continued the interdict against the schismatic Charleston Catholics. As early as Carroll's reign, the arrival of immigrant Catholics, especially the Irish, was troubling to American church leaders, who were desperately seeking the resources to meet the challenges of building church communities among native-born Catholics. While Carroll was known to complain quietly about his concerns over the Irish, Maréchal at times displayed a confrontational attitude, resisting what he saw as an Irish takeover of the

19 An interdict means that no Masses can be said, no confessions can be heard, and no marriages, funerals, baptisms, ordinations, or confirmations may take place. Perhaps the most famous example of an interdict was the one Pope Innocent III placed on the Kingdom of England during the reign of King John in the first decades of the thirteenth century.
American church. In November 1818, Maréchal sent two Jesuits, American-born Benedict Fenwick and Irish-born James Wallace, to Charleston in an effort to effect harmony and to restore normal relations.20

Since Maréchal had appointed Father Fenwick to serve as his Vicar General for the Carolinas and Georgia, the priest had the authority to assess the situation in Charleston and take what he deemed to be necessary and appropriate action. He removed the interdict after Father Gallagher publicly relented and after the lay trustees of the Hasell Street church recognized the archbishop's authority to appoint priests to serve the parish. While Fenwick worked in Charleston, Wallace settled in Columbia where he ministered to a small group of Catholics who had been neglected by the schismatic Charleston priests. About a month after the Jesuits arrived in South Carolina, the situation was further improved by the removal of de Cloriviére, who left Charleston to become


The son of George and Margaret Fenwick, of St. Mary's County, Benedict was born into an old Anglo-American Catholic family of Maryland, whose first American ancestor, Cuthbert Fenwick, arrived in Maryland about 1634. Benedict was one of three of four sons who became priests and was one of the first native-born priests in the American Catholic clergy. Ordained in 1817, Fenwick must have been born no later than 1792. He was ordained bishop of Boston in the Baltimore Cathedral on November 1, 1825, with Bishop England of Charleston serving as one of the two co-consecrators assisting Archbishop Maréchal.

Born in Kilkenny, Ireland, on March 11, 1787, Wallace immigrated to America, where he was admitted into the Society of Jesus in October, 1807 and was ordained a priest by Archbishop Carroll of Baltimore in November, 1814.
the chaplain at the Visitation Convent in Georgetown, District of Columbia.

While engaged in their dispute with the archbishop of Baltimore over clergy staffing assignments, Charleston Catholics, as well as those in Norfolk, Virginia, had been seeking from Rome the establishment of separate dioceses. The southern Catholics wanted to escape the oversight and what they regarded as the interference of the Baltimore metropolitan.21 Charleston’s French Catholics were among the lay trustees at the Hasell Street Church and were no doubt generally supportive of local control within the parish. However, the laity and priests advocating the establishment of the new dioceses in Carolina and Virginia were mostly Irish, while the early prelates in Baltimore were Anglo-American or French.

While Fenwick and Wallace attempted to reconcile Charleston Catholics with the archbishop, Father Browne journeyed to Europe, where at the papal court he won friends among the Irish clergy, who advanced his attempts to win Rome’s approval for the creation of a new diocese incorporating Georgia and the Carolinas. Meanwhile, refusing any sacerdotal duties, but singing with the choir at the Hasell Street church, the self-satisfied Gallagher, publicly reconciled but troublesome

21A metropolitan is the chief bishop of a province and, as such, is another term for archbishop.
and rebellious, remained in Charleston as a thorn for both the archbishop and his vicar.

Thus it was two Irish priests and the Irish-dominated lay vestry at the Hasell Street Catholic Church in Charleston who resisted the French-born archbishop of Baltimore and undermined Father de Clorivière, the French priest assigned to the Charleston parish. Fathers Gallagher and Browne also spearheaded the direct appeal to Rome that led to the creation of the new diocese. In explaining the behavior of Charleston's Irish priests and lay leaders, it is important to look beyond their sense of patriotism, or their ethnocentrism, which nonetheless certainly influenced them. Many Irish Americans distrusted their French-born fellow Catholics, suspecting them of reactionary politics and monarchical sympathies. In truth many French clergymen came to America when the excesses of the French Revolution forced them from their homelands. Driven from France by a revolution promising democracy, some of the French priests were openly skeptical of the American system. For the American church, short of priests and financial resources, these French clerics proved most helpful in spite of the cultural barriers.22

For their part, many of the French were suspicious of their Irish counterparts, who were generally predisposed to embrace American republican thought. Some of the French were willing to believe the Irish to be radical, if not irreligious, ideologues. De Clorivièrè's aristocratic background and royalist leanings almost certainly played a part in the differences between him and his Irish colleagues in Charleston. However, it is also clear that ethnic and cultural differences, going beyond even very serious political disagreements, shaped the disputes among Catholics and contributed to both the discord within the Charleston parish and the running disagreement between Charleston Catholics and the archbishop of Baltimore.23

Along these lines, it is interesting to note that the French unit of the local militia is not mentioned in Bishop England's narrative of the 1835 threat to the cathedral and himself. Why did the French Volunteers not turn out in defense of the cathedral? Did the bishop overlook their involvement? Or is it more likely that, because their parish on Hasell Street was not targeted, the French either remained

23Indeed, Theodore Maynard, The Reed and the Rock: Portrait of Simon Bruté (New York: Longmans, Green, 1942), 152 discusses the initial ethnic tension between Bruté and Bishop England, which apparently quickly gave way to a warm and long friendship. Maynard, 19ff asserts Simon Gabriel Bruté de Rémur was from an affluent bourgeois Breton family that held, through well-placed marriage alliances and political allegiances, a small number of hereditary offices connected to the royal court. The family also displayed, in the styling of their surname, their ambition for yet higher advancement.

home or joined the mob at the Exchange and the crowd at the Citadel. With this more likely scenario, the continuing tension underlying the generally good relations among Charleston’s Catholics is exposed in a moment of crisis. In addition, the French non-response also serves to suggest the varying degrees of acceptance these two Catholic groups had found among the city’s Protestant whites, as will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

In their desire for a Carolina diocese, Charleston’s Irish Catholics apparently hoped for a bishop who would prove at least more amiable than Archbishop Maréchal, if not one who would allow them a free hand in the governance of their local parish. Nonetheless, the Holy See, recognizing lay trusteeism’s antinomian threat to church discipline, sought a man who would be able to bring and maintain order in the Charleston parish and throughout the Carolinas and Georgia. While Archbishop Maréchal railed against foreign, by which he meant Irish, influence in the Holy See’s episcopal appointments for the United States, Father Browne, with the assistance of the Irish hierarchy and its Roman connections, managed to win for Charleston an Irish bishop. Charleston’s Catholics were to have their own Irish-born bishop, but they would find him no more tractable than had been the archbishops of
Baltimore. The first bishop of Charleston was to be Father John England, then working as a parish priest in Bandon, Ireland.\footnote{The long-running and sad controversy between the Charleston parish and Archbishop Maréchal and his predecessors is also recounted in Shea, History of Catholic Church, III, 306-9.}

**Bishop John England**

Already mentioned several times in this study, John England, born in Cork, Ireland, on September 23, 1786, was a bright, energetic, and very young priest at the time of his appointment as bishop of Charleston. Further, he already had made a name for himself as a champion of Irish Catholic political and religious freedom. His involvement in Irish politics had fostered his appreciation for republican virtues of self-determination and freedom. By the time he was named bishop of Charleston, England possessed a political and social disposition that much favored his successful entry into American culture.

John England's family, like many other eighteenth-century Irish Catholics, had suffered English rule with quiet resentment. His paternal grandfather had been imprisoned and the family turned out of their home when John's father, Thomas, was in his mid-teens. John's grandmother, already sick, died shortly after the family's eviction. Thomas England, the oldest of five children and only about seventeen years of age, valiantly worked to aid his imprisoned father and to provide
for his younger siblings. Applying himself as a teacher, Thomas ran
afoul of the law restricting Catholics from teaching and other learned
professions. He was forced to take flight to avoid transportation and
apparently lived as a fugitive in the remote countryside for a number of
years. According to Bishop England, his father returned to Cork only
after conditions had improved somewhat in the wake of the successful
American Revolution.\textsuperscript{25} The bishop no doubt was referring to the first
Catholic Relief Act of 1778 and the broader act of 1782, which London
drove through the Irish Parliament over the objections of radical Irish
Protestants. Among other points, these acts removed the most important
anti-Catholic restrictions on property ownership and religious practice.
Bishop England indirectly referenced these acts elsewhere in his
writings, including his biographical sketch of Mother Charles Molony,
first superior of the Ursuline Convent in Charleston, published soon after
her death in 1839.\textsuperscript{26}


In time, Thomas England became a surveyor, a profession not
forbidden by law to Catholics, and married Honora Lordan. The oldest of
ten children, their son John studied for the priesthood at Carlow College
and St. Mary's Seminary, Cork. At twenty-three years of age and two
years shy of the canonical age prescribed for candidates to the
priesthood, John required a dispensation to be ordained as a priest in
1808. After a couple of years in parish work, the still young Father
England returned to St. Mary's Seminary as a professor and in 1812
became rector, or president, of the seminary.27 About a year after his
ordination into the priesthood, in May 1809, England began editing The
Religious Repertory, a small religious periodical offering spiritual
direction to the reader. For the first four years or so of his priestly
ministry, England apparently followed the example of his bishop and the

(16) Virginia Crossman, "The Army and Law and Order in the Nineteenth
Century," 358-78.

These relief acts were passed largely to encourage Irish Catholic
enlistment in the British Army. In the mid-1770s the Army was hard pressed
to find enough Englishmen willing to risk death to persuade Americans to
remain subjects of His Britannic Majesty, King George III. The Army was also
charged with protecting the far-flung interests of the captains of British
industry and capital—who were very much involved in sundry places
throughout Britain's growing empire—and removing the threat to Europe's
political stability posed by revolutionary France and its emperor, Napoleon. In
short, even after the American Revolution the British Army's need for Irish and
other soldiers continued.

See also John England, "Mother Mary Charles Molony," The Works of the

27 Shea, History of the Catholic Church, III, 306-09; Madden, Catholics in
South Carolina, 31, and Guilday, Life and Times of John England, I, 70. Guilday
devotes the third chapter of his biography (76-97) to England's twelve years as a
priest in the Diocese of Cork.
older priests of the diocese, remaining well away from the political controversies of the day.

However, in November 1812, Cork’s representative to Parliament, Christopher Hely Hutchinson, was defeated. He had advocated Catholic emancipation, and many Irish Catholics saw his defeat as a serious threat to their efforts to remove other discriminatory laws and restrictions. John England became one of the first among the clergy to become politically involved following Hutchinson’s defeat and helped form the “Association of Independent Roman Catholic Electors of the City of Cork.” Calculating that 90 percent of Cork’s 100,000 inhabitants were Catholic and only 20 Catholics voted in the November 1812 election, Father England was keenly interested in getting Catholic freeholders registered to vote.28

It was also about this time that Father England probably began writing articles for the Cork Mercantile Chronicle. By the summer of the following year the Chronicle was near financial ruin, but it was saved when England, his bishop, and several others joined together to purchase one half of the newspaper. In June 1813 England became trustee and editor of the Chronicle, placing him in a very public position. As trustee of the paper, England was responsible for everything printed,

and in this capacity he was sued for libel. In April 1816 the *Chronicle* carried a story of the eviction of an Irish peasant, which mentioned the landlord was a clergyman. This proved to be enough information for any reader to identify the landlord as Protestant minister Wills Crofts, editor of the state-controlled newspaper, *The Southern Reporter*. When England refused to name the source for the article, Crofts brought suit against him. The Reverend Editor, as England's enemies called him, was found guilty by a jury of Protestant landowners and fined 1200 pounds. In several issues of the August 1816 *Chronicle*, England vainly complained about this assault on the rights of a free press.

While he edited the *Cork Mercantile Chronicle*, Father England also continued to publish *The Religious Repertory*, which had shifted its focus from personal spirituality to social justice. While the *Chronicle* provided readers political news and opinions, with England's philosophical and theological thought, the *Repertory* had become a prophetic call for Catholic involvement in the political arena. In addition to these publications, England sought to sway Protestant opinion in other writings. These activities made the rector of the Catholic seminary in Cork a very public figure indeed.29

John England's days as St. Mary's rector ended in 1817. He was transferred to a parish assignment, after his political activism brought

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him to the attention of British officials in Dublin and London. In a letter of June 20, 1815, to Irish political leader Denys Scully, John England had sought moral support in his decision to engage in a propaganda campaign. The priest advocated a pamphlet "calculated to shew the Protestant that he has nothing to apprehend & the Catholic that he has nothing to sacrifice, soothing him without relinquishing a particle of right, & as decently written in plain style as my pen would allow." While no copy of this pamphlet survives, it is known that by autumn of that year Protestant religious and civil leaders were concerned about its circulation.30

On October 16, 1815, the dean of the Anglican cathedral in Cork sent a copy of the tract to the Home Secretary in London. In his cover letter to the Home Secretary, the dean noted that the unsigned work generally was believed to be from the hand of "a friar in this city, of the name of England" and, while it had not been openly published, "was to be had without difficulty." According to the dean, the Anglican bishop of Cork had complained to his Catholic counterpart, Dr. John Murphy, "who fully agreed in the mischievousness of the dissemination" and claimed to have "done all in his power to prevent publication, but in vain." While Bishop Murphy diplomatically responded to Protestant

inquiries, he was no doubt supportive of Father England's bold political venture. In fact, it was in the same time period that Bishop Murphy twice refused England the *exeat* the priest sought in order to quit his diocesan responsibilities in Cork and take up his long-held dream of missionary work in the United States.31

Without his bishop's permission to leave Cork, Father England continued his work at the seminary until Bishop Murphy transferred him from St. Mary's. One of England's biographers also suggests that England's friendship with the Irish Franciscan Richard Hayes, who was having trouble of his own in Rome at the time, may have influenced Murphy's decision. Regardless, Murphy took action to remove the increasingly controversial England from the center of diocesan activities. On May 4, 1817, England was assigned to the parish in Bandon, following the untimely death of the pastor there, a Father Mahony, who had died in a fall from his horse. While leaving the *Cork Mercantile Chronicle* to assume his new parish duties, Father England had gained publishing experience that would later serve him well as the first bishop of Charleston.

The town of Bandon, about sixteen miles southwest from Cork, was a particularly unattractive place for Catholics in the early nineteenth

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century. Founded by the first earl of Cork as a Protestant enclave, the community was noted for its vigorous anti-Catholicism. A sign was placed at the city gates advertising "Turk, Jew or Atheist/ May enter here,/ But not a Papist." If the reason for England's removal from St. Mary's was a concern about his outspokenness on religious matters, Bishop Murphy's choice for Fr. England's new position away from diocesan center is indeed an interesting one. The Bandon assignment is perhaps best read as example of the bishop's trust and confidence in this priest, whose intelligent and articulate prose, while generally careful to voice support for the continuation of British oversight, challenged the policies of discrimination against Catholics and their Church. Having drawn attention to himself in Cork, Father England could still be a very useful advocate for Irish Catholics from his new position in the Protestant stronghold. Regardless of the reasons for his coming to Bandon, England's episcopate in the Carolinas and Georgia was not his first experience either among a Protestant majority or with religious intolerance.32

It was while in Bandon, on July 10, 1820, that John England first received word he had been named first bishop of Charleston. Writing

controversial School Primer of Irish History (1815) that was attributed to John England and elicited much criticism from British authorities.

32Guilday, Life and Times of John England, 1, 91-92. Regarding Bandon's gates, Guilday further records the story of an addendum to the sign, which
from Rome, Henry Hughes's news that Pope Pius VII had chosen England for the South Carolina posting arrived in Ireland before official notification from the Holy See. Accepting his elevation to the episcopacy and the required and previously coveted emigration to America, England was consecrated a bishop on September 21, 1820, in the Cathedral of St. Finbar, Cork, just two days before his thirty-fourth birthday. He left Ireland for the United States with his sister Joanna Monica England and a young priest, Dennis Corkery.33

When England arrived in Charleston, Fathers Browne and Gallagher were both in Charleston and plotting in open defiance of Archbishop Maréchal and his vicar, Father Fenwick. Arriving in his new see on December 30, 1820, Bishop England presented bulls of appointment and his certification of consecration to Father Fenwick, Baltimore's vicar general in Charleston. Receiving the England's credentials, Fenwick promptly retired from his office but, upon the new bishop's insistence, agreed to remain in Charleston to assist him. Created in the summer of 1820 just before John England was named its first bishop, the Diocese of Charleston was now officially organized as England assumed control from Fenwick. With little knowledge of the area over which he held spiritual direction, England optimistically

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Guilday attributes to Jonathan Swift and which warned, "Whoever wrote this, wrote it well./ For the same is wrote on the gate of Hell."
estimated his diocese numbered two million people, with as many as 11,000 Catholics, of whom about 1,000 were slaves. Actually, the total population in the three-state diocese was approximately one and a half million, of whom possibly 3,600 were Catholic. By state, North Carolina had a total population of 638,829, of whom 419,200 were white, 205,017 were slaves, and 14,612 were free blacks. Georgia had a total of just more than half of North Carolina’s population, with 328,677 people. Of Georgia’s inhabitants, there were 182,428 whites, 144,482 slaves, 1,763 free blacks, and four “other persons except Indians not taxed.” In South Carolina there were 231,812 whites, 251,783 slaves, and 6,714 free blacks, for a state total of 490,309.34

At first, England moved cautiously along a neutral ground between the wayward Irish priests and the Baltimore vicar general. He granted faculties to both Gallagher and Browne, yet persuaded Fenwick to remain for a time in the diocese as his own vicar general. Fenwick

33Shea, History of the Catholic Church, III, 306-09; Guilday, Life and Times of John England, I, 94; and Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 31.

34Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 31, provides the names of England’s sister and the newly ordained priest who emigrated with the bishop from Ireland. Bishop England’s early population projections for Catholics in the area are from diocesan figures cited in R. Frank Saunders, Jr. and George A. Rogers, “Bishop John England of Charleston: Catholic Spokesman and Southern Intellectual, 1820-1842,” Journal of the Early Republic 13 (Fall 1993), 307 and discussed in Madden, op. cit., 31-49. State population figures from U.S. Bureau of the Census, Aggregate Amount of Each Description of Persons within the United States and Their Territories, according to the Census of 1820, as Corrected at the Department of State, from the Returns of the Marshalls of the Several Districts (Washington: Blair and Rives, 1821. Reprint, New York:
believed England to be "calculated to do much good in the country," but he was disappointed with the bishop's hesitancy in dealing with the defiant clergymen, Gallagher and Browne. In spite of his concern over them, Fenwick acquiesced to England's request to serve in Charleston until Easter 1821.\footnote{35Benedict Fenwick to James Wallace, January 9, 1821, John England Papers File, Diocesan Archives, Diocese of Charleston (hereafter cited as England Papers). For Fenwick's intention to remain in Charleston until Easter, 1821, and for his description of England's itinerary in touring South Carolina and Georgia, see Guilday, \textit{Life and Times of John England}, I, 315-16, citing Fenwick to Archbishop Maréchal, February 19, 1821, Baltimore Cathedral Archives, Case 16, 32.}

Almost twenty years later, in an 1839 eulogy of the first superior of Charleston's Ursuline convent, England would claim he found upon his arrival in his new diocese only two priests, both eager to leave the South. He may have had the two Jesuits in mind, and Father Fenwick did in fact leave Charleston, returning to Baltimore, within six months of England's arrival.\footnote{36England, "Mother Mary Charles Molony," \textit{Works of John England}, Messmer, ed., IV, 334 and England, "Diocese of Charleston," \textit{Works of John England}, Messmer, ed., IV, 312.} Writing a diocesan history in 1832, the bishop recalled finding "only two churches occupied, and two priests doing duty; one in Charleston, and one at Augusta." This is somewhat puzzling since there were three priests—Fenwick, Gallagher, and Browne—in Charleston and Wallace in Columbia. Browne was supposed to be in

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Norman Ross, 1990), 24-29; hereafter cited as \textit{Compendium of the Fourth U.S. Census}. 

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Augusta, but every indication is that he had abandoned the post.\textsuperscript{37}

Additionally, there were perhaps four church buildings in the diocese. Regardless of the details, England is correct in summarizing the situation as less than promising, a small number of Catholics widely dispersed over an area larger than France with perhaps as many as four priests and four humble church buildings in varying stages of disrepair.\textsuperscript{38}

At the beginning of the third week of January 1821 and scarcely two weeks after completing the ocean passage from Ireland, the bishop and his sister set out on a tour of the diocese. Leaving Charleston on the sixteenth of the month for Savannah, Bishop England was in Georgia’s port city by the nineteenth. Chronicling the bishop’s progress from Charleston, Fenwick noted, “he will remain there [Savannah] till Tuesday 23rd jan [sic] on which day he will start for Augusta and remain there until Thursday 1st Feb.” After visiting the small community of Maryland Catholics in Locust Grove, Georgia, Bishop England expected to be “in Columbia a little before or after the 6th Feb.”\textsuperscript{39} By April, the bishop had


\textsuperscript{38}The diocese included one church in South Carolina (Charleston) and perhaps three in Georgia (Savannah, Augusta, and Locust Grove). It would appear that a log cabin served as a church in Locust Grove and that the churches in the three larger cities were in varying stages of disrepair. From the record, it is known that Archbishop Carroll had already cautioned Father Gallagher to attend to repairs needed at the Charleston church. The list of churches has been determined from the reports of Bishop England, along with the histories of the diocese prepared by Jeremiah J. O’Connell and Richard Madden.
completed his tour of the Savannah River valley and the South Carolina upcountry, returned for a time to Charleston, and departed again. On April 25, he was "on his tour through N. Carolina—is at present very near Norfolk [Virginia] at which place he will probably stop a while & then proceed to Balt're for a day or two." England traveled to Baltimore to meet his metropolitan, Archbishop Maréchal, who had been far from pleased to learn of an Irishman's appointment to the diocese that, along with the creation of the Richmond diocese in Virginia, bisected his own archdiocese. Maréchal was out of town when England arrived in Baltimore, and the meeting, for which England hoped, did not occur. Although it is not totally clear that Maréchal expected England's visit, it seems likely that the archbishop knew of the Charleston bishop's itinerary, but chose to be out of town before England reached Baltimore. Given this shaky start and Maréchal's attitude concerning Irish appointments to American bishoprics, it is not surprising to learn that the relationship between Maréchal and England was never very warm. For his part, England besieged the archbishop with unwanted advice in his first few years at Charleston. In truth, the archbishop, already jealous of his own prerogatives, began with a predisposition to dislike the

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40 Benedict Fenwick to James Wallace, April 25, 1821, England Papers. See also Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 26-29.
Irish-born bishop and came to resent the Charleston ordinary's popularity and influence.\textsuperscript{41}

Meanwhile, in this initial tour of the diocese, England had gained a firsthand knowledge of his people and his new country. In the settlements and towns where he stopped, he gathered together small groups of Catholics for instruction and encouragement. In several places he either organized a group or recognized an existing congregation. He encouraged these Catholics to meet regularly for corporate prayer and devotionals, and he appointed lay leaders to conduct services. He also promised to send priests to these groups so that parishes might be organized and the sacraments made available to the faithful. England seems to have been much encouraged by his tour in spite of the obvious difficulties facing him.

Having inspected the three states that comprised his diocese and having visited Baltimore to call on the archbishop, England returned to Charleston to begin in earnest a ministry that would continue for the next twenty years. Thoroughly committed to his work as a bishop in the United States and desirous of becoming an American citizen, Bishop

\textsuperscript{41}Gilday, \textit{Life and Times of John England}, I, 10, for Maréchal's dislike for the Irish clergy.

After 1820, the Archdiocese of Baltimore included the District of Columbia and Maryland in its northern part and most of Mississippi and Alabama in its southern part. The Bishop of Richmond retired in 1822 for want of support from Virginia Catholics. Under the circumstances, a new bishop was
England at his episcopal ordination in Ireland had refused to take the oath of allegiance to the King of Great Britain. He sought citizenship in his adopted country as soon as permissible and was granted citizenship on January 20, 1823.\textsuperscript{42} He would die in April 1842 exhausted from his efforts in shepherding Catholics in three states; his was a lifetime of arduous work teaching, preaching, fundraising, writing, building, pastoring, and traveling.

**The Diocese of Charleston, 1820–1842**

John England’s efforts in the American South were not entirely free from controversy. His detractors were found among Catholics and non-Catholics. Within the diocese of Charleston, England very early on encountered resistance from the congregation of the Hasell Street Catholic Church. This group, which had so ardently pressed for their own bishop, sought to continue lay governance of their parish. Bishop England was willing to allow a certain level of lay involvement, but he strenuously defended church doctrine regarding his own role as bishop within the church life of Charleston’s Catholic community. Only through

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\textsuperscript{42}John England to Richard Gantt, Associate Judge of the State of South Carolina, 1823, England Papers.
negotiations over a number of years would the bishop win the support of the Hasell Street parish.

Upon arriving in Charleston, Bishop England had probably intended to make the Hasell Street church his cathedral. The controversy over lay trusteeism at Charleston's first parish led the bishop to alter his plans. In 1822 England secured property formerly known as Vauxhall Gardens toward the west end of Broad Street. There he constructed a rude little building, which he named for the Cork cathedral where he had been ordained as a priest and bishop. Dedicated on May 19, 1822, Charleston's Cathedral of St. Finbar was meant as a temporary structure and therefore lacked the elegance of many of Charleston's other houses of worship. Indeed, it was described by one visitor to the city as "a somewhat shabby church for a Romish cathedral. It is low and rough, not boarded but shingled, not ceiled but open to the ridge-pole; a simple chancel, a small crucifix, and the whole with an air of poverty." In short, the cathedral reflected both the determination of the bishop and his flock and the diocese's lack of financial resources.43

Encountering anti-Catholic sentiments and incorrect assertions about the Catholic faith in the secular press, the bishop, from the earliest days of his episcopate, sought to correct misconceptions among the region's Protestant majority. In his first attempts to counter anti-

43The quotation is recorded in Richard Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 33, without citation.
Catholic rhetoric, England sent letters to Charleston’s newspapers, but the editors refused to print them. In a move that caught Charleston’s fourth estate off guard and earned the respect of many, England responded by purchasing space in the newspapers to run his letters as advertisements. With limited financial resources, the bishop was hardly in a position to make this approach a standard procedure. In 1822, seeking a more reliable means of disseminating information, England drew upon his earlier days as editor of the Cork Mercantile Chronicle and The Religious Repertory to launch a Catholic newspaper, called the United States Catholic Miscellany.

The first diocesan newspaper in the United States, the Miscellany attracted a widely scattered, if small, audience. In the paper, Bishop England reported news of Ireland, Europe, the Holy See, and the American Church. More importantly, the Miscellany gave the bishop a voice heard across South Carolina and the United States. Through his letters and opinion pieces, England used his newspaper to explain Catholic doctrine to hostile Americans ignorant of the Church’s teachings and to defend the Catholic Church from anti-Catholic and sometimes inflammatory language. Perhaps more than any other endeavor, the Miscellany propelled England into the public arena and made him the most influential Catholic clergyman in the antebellum United States. The bishop’s celebrity is evidenced in the invitation he received to speak
to a joint session of the United States Congress. On January 8, 1826, he became the first Catholic clergyman to address the national legislature, giving a two-hour speech to the republic's solons.44

As a ministry to poor European immigrants, Bishop England founded a women’s religious order, the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy, generally referred to in the diocese as the Sisters of Mercy. Women in this diocesan order taught school, served in hospitals, cleaned and cooked at the seminary, and performed a myriad of tasks the bishop assigned to them in ministering particularly to Irish immigrants.45 In June 1835 the bishop opened a school for free black children, which soon had about eighty scholars, taught by two of the sisters.

In 1834 England established a convent of Ursuline nuns in Charleston, the first three or four of the nuns coming directly from Ireland. The bishop sought to establish a school for upper-class girls operated by the Ursulines, who were noted for their excellent education and deportment. For the school to be successful it had to attract the daughters of wealthy Protestant families. In another time, Bishop England’s plans may have been realized; but the arrival of the Ursulines in Charleston coincided with the burning of the Ursuline convent in

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44Bishop England to Judge William Gaston, February 14, 1826, England Papers. In this letter, the bishop joked that he, wanting to leave his audience waiting for more, thought two hours enough for the legislators and himself. See also, Peter Guilday, Life and Times of John England, II, 48-67.
Charlestown, Massachusetts, and with England’s papal appointment to undertake the Holy See’s controversial diplomatic mission to Haiti.

With the many obstacles Bishop England faced, the greatest problem confronting the prelate was the lack of priests to staff existing parishes and to establish new ones. As he first toured Georgia and the Carolinas in 1821, England counted only two active church parishes and five priests. Finding many Catholics persevering in their faith, the bishop knew the task of serving them would be impossible without an increase in the number of priests in the diocese. In October 1820, shortly after his episcopal ordination and before his departure for America, England had appointed his brother, the Reverend Thomas England, and another priest, the Reverend Thomas O'Keefe, to serve as vicars general of Charleston. Remaining in Ireland these two priests were authorized to receive and screen applications from Irish priests and seminarians interested in working in Charleston. Still, Bishop England realized more would need to be done to secure priests for the widely scattered Catholics in Georgia and the Carolinas and, in 1822, he opened a seminary in Charleston.46

Of course, Bishop England could not hope to keep the Baltimore Jesuits sent to South Carolina by Archbishop Maréchal, who expected

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the priests to return to Maryland. Benedict Fenwick returned to
Baltimore to serve for several years in the Georgetown area of the District
of Columbia. Before being named second bishop of Boston, Fenwick
served as president of Georgetown University in addition to his parish
assignments. As the shepherd of the city of Boston, Fenwick established
the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown that occupied Mount Benedict, the
hill named in his honor. He proved an able administrator and showed
much courage in demanding justice during the trials of the rioters who
stormed and destroyed the Ursuline institution mentioned earlier.47

Father James Wallace, who had traveled to Charleston with
Fenwick and had gone on to Columbia, remained in the diocese of
Charleston but left the Society of Jesus. Wallace seems to have had
some difficulty with his Jesuit superiors and apparently was unhappy in
religious life. Perhaps exhausted by the unending work confronting him,
Wallace, in outlining his reasons for wanting to leave the Society of
Jesus, contended, "my state of health at present and the asthmatic
complaint under which I labour necessarily" require "a southern
climate." While he worried that he remained "as it appears . . . under a

46For Bishop England's appointments in Ireland, see Guilday, Life and
Times of John England, 1, 298.

47Warner, At Peace with All Their Neighbors, 27-28, 113-14, and 191.
kind of censure with a probability of this becoming public," Wallace was sure of his course of action.48

In order to support himself while serving the small Catholic community in Columbia, Wallace had obtained, in the autumn of 1820, a position as professor of mathematics at South Carolina College (now the University of South Carolina). At about the same time, Wallace learned he was being recalled to Georgetown. Delaying a direct response to his superiors and the archbishop, Wallace considered his future and decided to remain in Columbia. After his release from the Society of Jesus, Wallace settled on a place in Lexington County just across the Congaree River from the capital city, retaining his teaching position at the college. Throughout the fourteen years he was at South Carolina College, Wallace apparently held no leadership position in the small Catholic congregation in Columbia, which was organized formally in 1824 as the parish of St. Peter. Still, after having left the Jesuits, Wallace remained on good terms with Bishop England, whom he met in January 1821, and with England's successor, Bishop Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds.

In 1834, during the reorganization of the University of South Carolina at the end of President Thomas Cooper's administration, Wallace was released from his teaching position. Although Wallace's firing may have been a reaction to his purported relationship with a slave
woman, by whom he apparently had three sons beginning about 1830, anti-Catholicism was almost certainly a contributing factor to his departure from the university. Following his dismissal, Wallace retired to his Lexington County farm where he lived until his death on January 15, 1851. Wallace left his estate—except for his black family—to the Bishop of Charleston. According to the first of Bishop England’s biographers, Wallace continued to serve the Charleston diocese, functioning as a priest to the mission stations on the Columbia circuit. Clearly, neither Bishop England nor Bishop Reynolds had any idea of the relationship between Wallace and his slave woman. If Wallace’s ordinary was unaware of his failure to keep his vow of chastity, it is difficult to believe the relationship was common knowledge among his contemporaries.\footnote{James Wallace to Anthony Kohlmann, September 26, 1820, England Papers.}

Adding to the clergy shortage was the problem of recalcitrant priests. In this latter issue, Fenwick clearly sympathized with England, as he noted upon the bishop’s arrival, “Dr. Gallagher he did not know what to do with—but finally concluded that it is best to keep him in Charleston where he may be more immediately under his eye & where he

\footnote{\textit{Ibid.} See also John Hammond Moore, \textit{Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740–1990} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 132–33, but Guilday, \textit{Life and Times of John England}, I, 310–13, remarks “anti-Catholic influence caused his [Wallace’s] removal” from South Carolina College (310). Guilday also notes Wallace’s priestly service in the diocese after his being released from his obligations to the Society of Jesus (318).}
may render some service." Gallagher apparently refused to perform any sacerdotal duties or assume any responsibilities but pestered the bishop ceaselessly for an allowance. Ultimately, Gallagher asked for an *Exeunt* sometime shortly after 1822 and departed the diocese. Bishop England, who had grown weary with dealing with Gallagher, was only too happy to oblige him, and Gallagher's service in the Carolinas and Georgia was thus concluded. Father Robert Browne, who also had been in open defiance of Archbishop Maréchal, was not to be completely trusted. Bishop England posted Browne in Savannah, rather than in a less settled or more remote area, and required the troublesome priest to accompany him for much of his tour through Georgia and South Carolina. Browne chafed under the bishop's close supervision administered and soon begged leave from his duties on account of illness.50

In addition to Gallagher and Browne, Bishop England decried the general character of many of the priests whom he had engaged to enter the Charleston diocese. In May 1827 England warned Fr. Simon Bruté, a professor at Mount St. Mary's Seminary at Emmitsburg, Maryland, that a wayward Charleston deacon had found his way to the Maryland

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seminary via New York. The bishop had placed the deacon in a parish, whose priest he believed to be worthy of emulation. Visiting the parish, England found the priest's conduct very distressing, recording that the priest "has now been banished from this unfortunate Diocese [sic]." England went on to warn Bruté that the deacon was "a man whom I would never promote to the priesthood."\(^{51}\)

In another instance, Bishop England had thought to be en route to Bordeaux by the middle of January 1829, but had had to remain in Charleston to deal with the unpleasantness associated with a bad priest. Again writing to Bruté, the bishop stresses his resolve to staff his parishes with men of faith and solid reputations. In closing his letter, England wrote, "[m]y plan is to be alone rather than permit scandal. Gideon conquered by diminishing his force."\(^{52}\)

Priests admitted to Charleston from other, usually European, dioceses often proved to be less than satisfactory. Writing in 1832, Bishop England, noted "there was scarcely one that he had so received, whose admission he had not caused to regret, and whom he was not under the necessity of requesting to withdraw, and whose departure was not generally attended with considerable expense." Again in 1836, England complained of the mischief wrought by "many priests, who in


\(^{52}\)John England to Simon Bruté, January 19, 1829, England Papers.
Europe were found to be incorrigibly bad, or unable to act except under the guidance of others." While noting that some of the European priests were motivated by "the purest zeal," the bishop lamented that many "were driven across the Atlantic by disappointment or by censure, and though they rendered occasional services, unfortunately, they too often counterbalanced them by their scandals." In general, American bishops in the early days of the church often complained that priests were too long accustomed to little or no episcopal supervision and many had come to the United States because of trouble they had had in their native lands. Bishop England was not alone in seeing the pressing need for a native-born clergy.53

In addition to troublesome priest such as Browne and Gallagher, who were not without their supporters, Bishop England faced the problem of priests, having been educated at St. John the Baptist Seminary for service in the Diocese of Charleston, leaving for dioceses where pay and basic provisions were more certain. In January 1830 he wrote, "[s]ome of my young priests have been led from their correspondence with those of Dioceses to the North of me to think that they would have more comfort & liberty than under me, & more money for their services." England was sometimes inclined to blame his fellow

bishops for stealing away these men in whom he had invested so much. In the same letter, the bishop complained, "I was annoyed to find that in one or two Dioceses inducements had been held out to them, & after all my sacrifices & labours, just when they could be useful, I saw myself driven to give some of them up or to have dissatisfied spirits to disturb the peace of my Church." Regarding these defections, England, in a rare moment of self-pity, wrote to a trusted friend, "[y]ou can not conceive what I had to endure." 54

Finally, another problem in providing priests was Charleston's reputation for an unhealthy climate. Certainly many foreign-born priests chose to join American dioceses other than Charleston because of their fears about yellow fever and other diseases associated with the American South. A yellow fever episode could begin without warning and tended to be deadly among the young, the old, and the unacclimated. New arrivals in Charleston and in other coastal areas of the South were often struck down by what became known as the "Stranger's Fever." In fact, England's first recruit, Dennis Corkery, who arrived in 1820 in Charleston with the bishop, came down with yellow fever in 1826 and died in Augusta while tending the sick. In a greater personal loss to the bishop, Joanna England, who had accompanied her brother to America, succumbed to the fever in 1827. Bishop England, in reporting the loss of

foreign-born priests, noted ruefully that some had departed "at the suspected approach of sickness...."\textsuperscript{55}

Yellow Fever posed a serious health risk in Charleston and other coastal areas of the Charleston diocese throughout the antebellum period. The first recorded outbreak of the endemic fever in Charleston was in either 1699 or 1700, when it was simply called the plague. It reoccurred in Charleston in the years 1703, 1728, 1732, 1739, 1745, 1748, 1792, 1794, 1795, 1796, 1797, 1799, 1802, 1804, 1807, 1817, 1819, 1824, 1838, and 1839. At the height of the 1732 epidemic, which began in May and continued until October, as many as a dozen white people a day were buried. In a city no larger than Charleston in the mid-eighteenth century, that number of burials each day, even if only for a few days or weeks at the height of the disease, would have been crippling for the community. The total numbers of deaths for several of the later years were recorded. In 1799, 239 people died of yellow fever in the city of Charleston. In 1800, 184 people died; two years later, another 96; and two years later, 148. In 1807, the death toll was 162. The epidemic in 1838 was particularly fearsome, causing "the largest mortality which has ever resulted from the disease in this city." Even in years when the fever was not endemic, there were smaller but still serious outbreaks. The

fever that killed Joanna England was one of several cases in 1827 and the years 1828, 1834, and 1835 also saw a number of fatalities.

In addition to yellow fever, other diseases claimed victims. Charleston health officials were also troubled about outbreaks of measles and cholera, which was endemic in Charleston in 1836. Cholera, in particular, took a heavy toll among the poorer neighborhoods that had inadequate water supplies and a largely non-existent sewage drainage system. The Irish Catholics and other recent immigrants to the city were, of course, most likely to be found living in these crowded neighborhoods. Thus, the people to whom the immigrant priest was to minister were domiciled in areas of the city posing the greatest health risks. It is not surprising that many priests chose either to emigrate to northern cities rather than southern ports or to leave Charleston for a more healthful city shortly after their arrival in South Carolina’s largest metropolis.\textsuperscript{56}

In an effort to supply Catholics with priests and to encourage priestly vocations within his own diocese, Bishop England also opened a seminary in 1822. Several young men, who were graduated from Charleston’s St. John the Baptist Seminary, devoted their lives as priests

\textsuperscript{56}J. L. Dawson and H. W. DeSaussure, \textit{Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina for the Year 1848, exhibiting the Condition and Prospects of the City, Illustrated by Many Statistical Details, Prepared Under the Authority of the City Council} (Charleston: J. B. Nixon, 1849), 200-02. The quotation is from 201.
to the people of the diocese. These priests included Jeremiah O'Connell, who wrote the first diocesan history for the Carolinas and Georgia. Faced with pressing financial challenges, many dating back to Bishop England's episcopate, Charleston's second bishop, the Most Reverend Ignatius Reynolds, was forced to close the seminary in 1851. However, in the thirty years it operated, the seminary produced some sixty priests.\textsuperscript{57}

John England faced problems other than a shortage of priests as he attempted to establish the new diocese. With little funding, he was trying to build an institutional framework and support system for an immigrant community possessing scant resources, which had arrived with few if any ties among a largely hostile people. Even in the slave economy of the Deep South, propertyless and unskilled immigrants found employment. As in other ports, most of the Irish Catholics arriving in Charleston remained in the city for lack of funds to travel further inland or to purchase farmland. Coming from an agricultural background, these new urbanites possessed few skills to recommend them to any trade. The fortunate found jobs as laborers on the docks and in the warehouses of the city. The truly fortunate learned skills and moved into various trades or saved enough to travel further inland. For the industrious who could afford to save enough to move into the

\textsuperscript{57}O'Connell, \textit{Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia}, 109 and 111.
interior, state-sponsored projects aimed at promoting land development offered opportunities. To encourage westward settlement, several states, including Georgia, held several land lotteries in which any citizen of a year's residency could draw a lot and hope to become a man of property. Still, most immigrants remained in the port cities for at least a generation.\textsuperscript{58}

In providing institutional support for his immigrant flock, Bishop England had to find funding to build schools, churches, and convents. He appealed to European Catholic mission societies and to the Holy See's Sacred Congregation of Propaganda, now known as the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.\textsuperscript{59} The diocesan reports that England penned in 1832 and 1836 were part of appeals to the Society for the Propagation of the Faith of Lyon (in France) and a similar society in Ireland. He made comparable appeals to the Leopoldine Society of Vienna. While the sums presented were never enough to cover all needed expenses, these groups provided much needed funding to assist the work in Charleston. Still diocesan expenses continued to mount, and the diocese was seriously in debt at Bishop England's death in April

\textsuperscript{58}Georgia, for example, held land lotteries in 1805, 1807, 1821, and 1832. See "Headright Grants and Bounty Grants" (Atlanta: Georgia Department of Archives and History, n.d.).

1842. While the diocesan administrator, Father Richard Swinton Barker, reduced the debt considerably during the two-year interregnum, England's successor, Ignatius Aloysius Reynolds, was forced to trim spending, closing St. John's Seminary. This measure, in dispersing the faculty, provided a few additional priests for parish work throughout the diocese. Had he not died in 1842, Bishop England would have had to act in a similar fashion.  

The story of Bishop England's episcopate is not so much one of how often the bishop failed to capitalize on slim opportunities or to keep westward moving Catholics in the Church. Rather, the story is one of wonder that a single man through the force of his personality, intellect, and deep religious faith, could assemble a motley group of priests from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds scattered across a three-state area, and in the face of religious and ethnic bigotry, with scant resources, could establish a diocese that took root and survived. This accomplishment speaks to the best of human nature, and who is to say that the endeavor was not marked by the blessings of Providence?

Chapter Summary

Almost from its beginning, Charleston had a multi-ethnic, multi-sectarian Protestant population. Outnumbered by their black slaves, the

\[60\text{O'Connell, Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia, 101-05, 111, and 115.}\]
city's whites very early saw the advantages of diminishing cultural and ethnic differences among themselves. Fostering white solidarity promoted the development of a racial class. Catholic immigrations, beginning soon after the American Revolution and expanding after the Napoleonic Wars, forced Charleston's Protestant white ruling minority to rethink their assumptions about race, religion, and citizenship.

Meanwhile, Catholic Church leaders faced incredible odds in building the institutional supports needed to foster the development of the nascent American Catholic Church. Beginning with the episcopate of John Carroll of Baltimore, the first bishop in the United States, perhaps the greatest need was for competent priests to staff parishes and establish missions. The second problem with which Carroll and later bishops had to deal was that of lay trusteeism, or the control that local lay leaders had over parishes and their staffing. The practice of lay trusteeism, supported by charters from state legislatures suspicious of Catholicism, undermined the authority of bishops.

Catholic parishes in several American cities experienced great turmoil over lay trusteeism. In Charleston, Irish and French Catholics could lay aside disputes rooted in ethnicity and culture to wage common cause against their ordinary in Baltimore. When Bishop England arrived in his new diocese in December 1820, Archbishop Maréchal had a vicar general stationed in Charleston in an effort to resolve disputes with lay trustees there.
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As with bishops in other parts of the nation, Bishop England faced the tremendous task of recruiting and educating priests. In 1822, he established the Seminary of St. John the Baptist as a training facility for diocesan priests in the Carolinas and Georgia. Operating for nearly thirty years, the seminary trained most of priests who ultimately served under Bishop England and his antebellum successors.

The story of Catholicity of Catholicism in antebellum Georgia and the Carolinas is one fraught with challenges. In spite of the problems caused by a lack of human and financial resources, Bishop England and the Catholics of the diocese created a church community that took root and grew. Having traced briefly the institutional history of the Catholic Diocese of Charleston, it is time to consider who the region’s Catholics were. In identifying Catholics within antebellum Georgia and the Carolinas, it is also possible to ascertain the ethnic and cultural backgrounds, which will prove necessary in building the connections between anti-Catholicism and anti-abolitionism in the Old South.
CHAPTER THREE

Southern Catholics

Catholicism in the Deep South was primarily an urban phenomenon. While Savannah, Augusta, and other cities had Catholic parishes, only in Charleston were Catholics a significant percentage of the population. In building up the church in his diocese, John England, Charleston’s first bishop, naturally focused much attention on his see, or capital city, Charleston. For this reason, antebellum Catholicism in the Carolinas and Georgia was centered and most firmly established in South Carolina’s chief port. The large number of immigrants among Charleston’s Catholics and the increased significance of the Catholic presence among Charleston’s white minority reveal the city’s unique circumstances within the three-state diocese.

A study of Catholics in the diocese further reveals the ethnic distribution within the overall population and the immigrant status of most Catholics. Such a study also emphasizes the significance of Catholicism as an immigrant presence within the city of Charleston. Thus, in this chapter, the study will identify the ethnicity and socio-
economic status of Catholics in Charleston and, in examining the relationship between Bishop England and the members of his flock, will explore the expectations Catholics placed on their church and its leaders. These factors contribute to a more complete understanding of the forces leading up to the 1835 Charleston Post Office Raid that included anti-Catholic participants intent on violence against the city's bishop, cathedral, and convent school.

At the start of his first tour of the diocese at the beginning of 1821, Bishop John England had overestimated the number of Catholics within the three states to be 11,000 in a population of 2 million. In truth, the number of Catholics in the Diocese of Charleston at the time was approximately 3,600, within a total population of about 1.5 million.

In an 1832 account of the Diocese of Charleston, published in Ireland during a fundraising trip to Europe, England claimed that only 175 communicants had been at Charleston's Easter Mass in 1820. It is worth noting that Father Benedict Fenwick, as Vicar General for the Archbishop of Baltimore, in 1819, had reported 200 communicants at Easter in Charleston, but this number included twenty-three receiving first communion. In a population of 24,780—14,127 blacks and 10,743 whites—some 175 Catholics attended Mass and received Holy Communion at Easter 1820. If most of the city's Catholics were white,
the number in good standing and receiving communion represented little more than 1 percent of Charleston's white population.¹

But this number almost certainly does not account for all of Charleston's Catholics in 1820. While attendance at Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation was expected of Catholics, those in good standing, having gone to confession for the sacrament of Reconciliation, need only receive communion once annually during the Easter season. Some Catholics probably failed to meet these minimum requirements for full participation in the Mass, while others, for reasons of their own, simply did not approach the altar rail to receive Holy Eucharist. Given the discord within the city's Catholic community in 1820, it should not be surprising that so few took communion at Easter. Allowing for Catholics not receiving communion, the percentage of Catholics among Charleston's white population thus increases slightly. With this in mind, it is easier to understand the attendance figures for Easter 1821, when Bishop England would claim communicants were considerably more numerous, with 180 or more being confirmed.

The Charleston County population rose from 80,212 in 1820 to 86,338 in 1830. Most of this increase in the county's population was

found within the city limits of Charleston, where the number of residents increased from 24,780 in 1820 to 30,289 in 1830. Of the little over 30,000 Charleston inhabitants, 17,401 were black and 12,888 were white. At the same time the number of Catholics increased significantly, with at least 600 taking communion at the 1831 Easter services at the Hasell Street church, by then renamed St. Mary's, and at St. Finbar's Cathedral. The bishop also noted in 1832 that he was anxious to build another church at the north end, or the "Neck," of the Charleston peninsula. A Catholic cemetery was already established there, and apparently many Irish Catholics were living in this area outside of town.  

In 1832 Bishop England, citing the 1830 census of the United States, placed the total population of Georgia and the Carolinas at 1.8 million. Four years later, he estimated the number of Catholics in his diocese to be a little less than 12,000, or something less than two-thirds of 1 percent of the total population—black and white—of the three states.

Throughout his 1832 brief history of the diocese and his 1836 report to the Sacred Congregation for Propaganda, the bishop repeatedly

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commented on the conditions of local parishes in his diocese. Always, the people he speaks of as the most significant group within his flock are his fellow countrymen, the Irish. While he mentions the San Domingan refugees who, within the Diocese of Charleston, had settled mostly in Charleston, Savannah, and Augusta, Bishop England was clearly convinced that the greatest number of Catholics in his charge were fellow emigrants from Ireland. To fully appreciate the effect of Catholicism in the antebellum Diocese of Charleston and the influence of southern culture and ideology on Catholicism, one must consider the Irish Catholic presence among the urban white population of the region. The great majority of Catholics in Georgia and the Carolinas were among white immigrants, who constituted about 1.5 percent of the total white population in the three states.

Verification of Bishop England's accounting of Catholics in his three-state diocese is not a simple process. On the surface, it must be admitted that the bishop's figures seem reasonable and accurate. A number of factors lend credence to his work in the sketches of the diocese penned in 1832 and 1836. First, the works accurately cite the most recent United State Census (1830), for overall population figures, even though he probably did not have these figures at hand when composing the 1832 report while in Ireland. Secondly, as the bishop of

(Washington, D.C.: D. Green, 1832), " Aggregate amount of each description of Persons within the District of South Carolina."
the diocese, England was charged with the responsibility of overseeing all aspects of church life, and was, therefore, in the best position to ascertain a count of Catholics in the Carolinas and Georgia. Finally, these reports were written as part of the bishop’s campaign to win financial assistance from missionary societies and the Holy See. It is unlikely that England would have undercounted Catholics in his diocese, and there is no suggestion that he overcounted. Indeed, he is remarkably candid in decrying the tens of thousands lost to the faith for want of priests and institutional support.

To identify the Catholics of the antebellum city and diocese of Charleston or to ascertain their total numbers is today very difficult. Indeed, it is impossible to know with absolute certainty the actual number of Catholics either within the city or in the three-state area. Parish records of baptisms, marriages, and funerals at some churches, including the Cathedral of St. Finbar, have been lost or destroyed in part or in whole. Additionally, some priests were just better or more attentive record keepers than others. The cathedral records in Charleston for the period from the parish’s founding in 1822 to 1845 were destroyed in the 1861 fire that swept through half the city and left the cathedral in ruins for nearly fifty years. Information at St. Mary’s Church, Charleston, is spotty and not easily accessible. Materials from other churches within the antebellum diocese of Charleston have been preserved with varying degrees of success. For instance, the parish records of St. Joseph’s
Church, Macon, Georgia, have been microfilmed and made available at that city's public library, but even these are incomplete. The diocesan archives also shed little light on the questions of how many belonged to Charleston's antebellum Catholic community and who these people were.  

Even with these limitations, the Archives of the Diocese of Charleston is the first source in identifying Catholics and exploring the church's efforts in the region. Within the diocesan archives, nearly three hundred letters still survive from the period of England's episcopate, of which the largest number, grouped by addressee, were written to the bishop. Bishop England penned only twenty-three of the letters, and twenty of these were written between August 1825, and February 1835, to Simon Bruté, a professor of Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg, Maryland, whom the Holy See elevated to the episcopacy as bishop of Vincennes, Indiana, in 1834. Letters addressed to Bishop England number 135, or almost half the collection. Of these latter notes, 63 are preserved from the year 1840 alone. The ravages of war and natural disaster that have afflicted Charleston over the long course of its history, together with the lack of any consistent archival maintenance

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The Cathedral of St. Finbar and St. John the Baptist was destroyed by the fire that raged through Charleston the night of December 11–12, 1861. This building had been Bishop Reynolds' crowning achievement as Bishop England's successor. It replaced the humble structure that Bishop England had raised as St. Finnbar's Cathedral in 1822.
before recent times, have rendered the diocesan records incomplete. Although they represent almost anecdotal evidence because of the meagerness of what has survived, the bishop's papers give the names of some Catholics in the diocese, and, when used with caution, provide some idea of the wide range of duties and services that the bishop of Charleston provided his flock.\(^4\)

Naturally, many of the letters, from Catholic laymen in the Carolinas and Georgia, refer to conditions within the diocese. In a postscript of his letter to the *United States Catholic Miscellany* editor, Thomas Hazzard mentions "[m]any of the Negroes on St. Simon's [Island] can read and appear anxious to learn the Doctrine of your Most Holy Church...." He believed much good could be accomplished if the bishop were to send "catechisms 1 dozen lowest price, Prayer Books lowest price one dozen and ½ doz Testaments...," and he offered to pay a third of the cost.\(^5\)

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\(^4\)John England Papers File, Diocesan Archives, Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston, hereafter abbreviated as England Papers. There are four boxes of letters and papers spanning thirty-three years, from 1811 (nine years before Bishop England was named as Charleston’s first bishop) to 1844, the year after Bishop Reynolds was appointed to succeed Bishop England in Charleston. Of these papers, 282 are dated for the period of Bishop England’s episcopate, beginning the count in December, 1820, just a few weeks before England actually arrived in Charleston, and ending with the last letter addressed to the bishop, dated April 26, 1842, some two weeks after he had died.

In the main body of his letter, Hazzard identifies himself as “a Solitary Catholic in this Protestant Society” and complains that he has “not one Christian Brother to commune with, or exchange thoughts of Peace, or Consolation....” Surely as other Catholics must have felt, Hazzard’s frustration is directed at the bishop whom he has not seen in six months, since “the close of the Last Lent.” England, who practically ran the *Miscellany* single-handedly, almost certainly read the letter. One can only imagine the impact it must have had on a bishop who expended so much energy in his efforts to recruit priests and seminarians and to raise funds in order to support parishes throughout the diocese.\(^6\)

Similarly, Charles Cassidy of Clarendon, South Carolina, in 1840 asked Bishop England for “the regulations of Lent as we are so Baseward of our church.” Several years earlier, Peter Callan of Madison, Georgia, reported that the “Catholics of this village” had decided “it would result more beneficially to Catholics generally throughout the upper part of ...Georgia and to those in this vicinity particularly, if a Roman Catholic Clergyman ...would visit Madison once every three months....” What is striking about these petitions for episcopal assistance is the indication of the personal bond that England fostered between himself and the region’s Catholics. Hazzard feels lost without the direction and comfort

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\(^6\)Thomas Fuller Hazzard of St. Simons, Georgia to the Editor of the *United States Catholic Miscellany*, August 21, 1840, England Papers.

\(^6\)Ibid.
that he knows his bishop can provide, while Cassidy looks to England for explanations about Lenten fasting and spiritual growth. In its sense of familiarity evidenced in his apparently unsolicited advice, Callan’s letter bespeaks the leveling influence of democracy in American society. All three letters point to Bishop England’s ability to reach people through his charisma, magnetism, and powerful preaching.7

Other letters to Bishop England include an appeal to help a Baltimore woman, who, “separated from a worthless husband,” was then threatened by an attempt to alter the will of her brother of Locust Grove, Georgia, with whom she had been living. If the woman’s widowed sister-in-law were successful in the attempt, the woman would be deprived of her only hope of financial support. In another situation, the bishop witnessed the prenuptial agreement between a woman and her fiancé, whereby the woman retained full control of her property “as if she were sole and unmarried.”8 In other petitions, several young men wrote seeking either advice or teaching positions. These letters reveal the tenuous legal status of women in antebellum American society and the


8John Walsh to John England, November 1, 1826, and An Agreement between Rosine Menard and Augustus Campbell, witnessed by Bishop England, December 27, 1826, England Papers.
high regard that many Catholics had for Bishop England’s influence and opinion.\(^9\)

Still other letters remind the modern reader of the poignancy of leaving home and family to cross the Atlantic for the unknown in the New World. Hugh Colgan wrote on behalf of his friend Peter Mahony, who was anxious to know if his brother, Thomas Mahony, was “living or dead—his letters have gone unanswered.” Colgan also asked the bishop for any word on a friend, Martin Walsh, who had “promised faithfully to correspond.”\(^10\)

Some Catholics abroad, particularly fellow Irishmen still in the Old Country, wrote to ask England’s advice on emigrating or to recommend someone in a letter of introduction. In one instance, a letter of recommendation for a candidate for priestly formation seems to have simply been forwarded by England’s future coadjutor, William Clancy, then on staff at Carlow College in Ireland. At least one immigrant wrote to ask if the American citizenship oath “contains any thing inconsistent with the doctrines of the Catholic Church.” One assumes, given the bishop’s oath of citizenship a year or so earlier, that England must have encouraged Edward McCool to become a citizen. Still McCool’s questions

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are indicative of the political and social unease surrounding the assimilation of Catholics into a Protestant republic.\textsuperscript{11}

Clearly, Catholics in the Diocese of Charleston and abroad, regardless of the nature of their concern, sensed Bishop England's accessibility. Unfortunately, England's copies of his own letters do not survive, and his answers to these many questions can only be surmised in his other writings and his actions. Having briefly considered the range of problems and concerns facing Catholics in the Carolinas and Georgia, a closer reading of census records and a study of other figures should provide a better sense of both the number and the ethnicity of Catholics in the region, by identifying the number of immigrants within the population.

\textbf{Census Reports on Population and Demographics}

If diocesan records provide infrequent and random glimpses into the thoughts of Charleston Catholics, a review of other sources gives some sense of the numbers with which Bishop England was dealing. The bishop claimed that most of the Catholics in his diocese were immigrants, and of this number, the majority was Irish. This is not

\textsuperscript{10}Hugh Colgan to John England, March 24, 1840, England Papers.

surprising, inasmuch as the creation of the Carolina diocese lay in part in the friction between the French-born archbishop of Baltimore and the Irish Catholics of Charleston. Census records of 1820 and 1830 list only the number of aliens not yet naturalized, rather than all foreign born. The 1850 Census lists place of birth for all inhabitants, revealing the number of all foreign-born living in the United States in that year. While not all aliens or foreign-born denizens were Catholic, most would have been, given the high percentage of Irishmen in the group. Census records therefore serve as some indication of Bishop England's accuracy. Finally, a careful reading of the records will reveal the distribution of foreigners within the three-state diocese.\footnote{For friction between the Charleston congregation and their archbishop in Baltimore see Jeremiah J. O'Connell, Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History (Sadlier, 1879. Reprint, Westminster, Md.: Ars Sacra, 1964), 141-42. O'Connell mentions the tension between parish and bishop, but focuses on infighting within the parish in his discussion of the fractious days preceeding the creation of the Charleston diocese.}

In 1820 North Carolina numbered 419,200 whites, 205,017 enslaved blacks, and 14,612 free blacks for a total population of 638,829. South Carolina had 231,812 whites, 251,783 slaves, and 6,714 free blacks totaling 490,309 people. Georgia counted among its inhabitants 189,566 whites, 149,656 slaves, 1,763 free blacks, and 4 other people, who were listed as "all others except Indians not taxed," for a total of 340,989. Thus, the combined population for the three-state
region was 1,470,127, of whom 840,578 were white, 606,456 were black slaves, and 23,089 were free blacks.¹³

Within the white population of the Carolinas and Georgia in 1820, there were 2,073 foreign born aliens not yet naturalized. This represents not quite .15 percent of the overall population and only .25 percent of the white population. Yet, the influence of immigrants is lost in these figures. The number reflects only those who had not been naturalized and does not include all foreign-born whites. Additionally, this overview ignores the distribution of this foreign presence within the general population.¹⁴

A state by state assessment of the census data reveals that of South Carolina’s 1,205 unnaturalized foreigners, nearly half, 573, were living in the city of Charleston or in the outlying areas of Charleston County. The only other South Carolina county with more than 100 aliens was Greenville with 161. The white population in Charleston County was 17,259 and aliens represented 3.33 percent of that number. Within the city itself, aliens accounted for nearly 4 percent of the white population, 425 of 10,653. In a city where the ruling racial class was becoming increasingly paranoid about the security of their social order, the potential for servile insurrection, and the danger of outside influence,

¹³Census Bureau, Census for 1820, “Aggregate amount of each description of persons in the United States and their Territories.”
this alien presence represented a possible threat. When one considers that an alien in the 1820s could obtain citizenship within five years, the already naturalized citizens not included in these census figures push the foreign-born percentage of Charleston’s white population higher still.\textsuperscript{15}

Likewise, Georgia in 1820 numbered 453 unnaturalized aliens, with almost half, 191, in Chatham County. Of the unnaturalized aliens in Chatham County, all but one lived within the city limits of Savannah. Richmond County, with Augusta, Georgia’s second largest city, as its seat, had 84 unnaturalized aliens. Taken together, the unnaturalized aliens of Chatham and Richmond counties account for over 60 percent of Georgia’s 1820 alien population. Further, the total population of Savannah was 7,523, with a white population of 3,866, or about 51.4 percent of the total. The alien population of Oglethorpe’s city represented almost 5 percent of its white population. In Richmond County, with a total population of 8,608, whites numbered 3,667, or 42.5 percent of the total. The county’s 84 aliens represented just 2.29 percent of the white population. Of course, as with Charleston, the actual number of foreign born in both Chatham and Richmond counties

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., “Aggregate amount of each description of persons within the District of South Carolina.”
was no doubt higher, but the census only counted those foreign born not yet naturalized.\textsuperscript{16}

Of the three states, only North Carolina had a more or less evenly distributed alien population. The total not naturalized in the Tar Heel State was 415, and while twenty-three counties had none, only three had more than 25 and only five others had at least 20 but not 30. Fully thirty-one North Carolina counties each had fewer than 20 aliens, with only four of that number having more than 12. The North Carolina alien population was very small—even in proportion to the white population—and very well distributed.

Interestingly, North Carolina also lacked a port that rivaled Charleston or Savannah. Further, by 1860 the proportion of slaveholders among white families was smaller in North Carolina, where only about 25 percent of white families owned slaves, than in South Carolina and Georgia, where about 40 percent owned slaves.\textsuperscript{17} Finally, while Charleston, Savannah, and Augusta were centers for immigrants, only Charleston had a slave majority among its inhabitants during the antebellum period.

\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}, "Aggregate amount of each description or persons with the District of Georgia."

\textsuperscript{17}\textit{Ibid.}, "Aggregate amount of each description of persons within the District of North Carolina." For proportion of slaveholders among white families in each of the three states, see Kenneth M. Stampp, \textit{The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South}, (New York: Random House, 1956), 30.
Within the diocese as a whole, outside the see and possibly a couple of other towns, the immigrant Catholic remained something only heard of by most Carolinians and Georgians rather than someone known to them. Within the cities of Augusta, Savannah, and Charleston unnaturalized aliens—many of whom, no doubt, were Catholic—accounted for 2½ to 5 percent of the white population. These percentages increase if foreign-born citizens are taken into consideration.

Again, of these three cities, Charleston alone had a slave majority within its population. Almost from its inception, Charleston's leaders had been mindful of the potential danger always lurking in the shadows and the half-heard whispers of servile insurrection. As South Carolina's cultural and social capital, even after the upland town of Columbia became the seat of state government, Charleston played a key role in state politics. The lowcountry white ruling class's paranoia with slavery engendered a fear of strangers and foreigners—anyone who seemed to pose a threat to the slaveocracy. White Charleston's concerns and unease would only intensify throughout the antebellum period as the lowcountry continued to have a slave majority, the percentage of foreign born increased within the white population, and the northern attacks against slavery gained momentum. The Nullification Crisis of 1832 was only the beginning of the process by which lowcountry South Carolina became a region of reactionary politics and volatile tempers. Thus, the differences in the distribution of various groups among the populations
of the three states suggest some of the social factors behind the merging of anti-abolitionism, nativism, and anti-Catholicism in Charleston in July 1835.

By 1830 the population of the three-state region was 1,835,995, reflecting a growth rate of almost 25 percent over the decade. While North and South Carolina each had gained about 100,000 people to number 737,987 and 581,185 respectively, Georgia's population had grown to 516,823—an increase of more than 50 percent. Many of these recent arrivals to Georgia were coming from the Carolinas.\(^{18}\)

South Carolina's alien population was larger than that of its neighbors to the south and north combined. South Carolina's alien population was 486; North Carolina's, 202; and Georgia's, 101. Indeed, in both North Carolina and Georgia one was twice as likely to encounter a deaf-mute or a blind person as an unnaturalized alien. This is, of course, misleading, in that, in each of the three states, the alien population was congregated in a few localities.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{18}\)Georgia's rate of population growth was 51.57%. Many historians have noted the influence of Carolina on the other Deep South states because of the very large migration numbers in the antebellum period from the Palmetto State to the more western states of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. See Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 146. See also John Barnwell, *Love of Order: South Carolina's First Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 9. Barnwell's first chapter, "Of Numbers and Anxieties," 3-19, is a thoroughgoing discussion of population figures for antebellum South Carolina and the profound influence a black majority had on the politics and attitudes of whites.
Of South Carolina’s alien population, 63.38 percent (308) lived in Charleston County and 52.47 percent (255) lived within the city limits of Charleston. Only York, Chester, and Greenville Counties, with 40, 30, and 21 foreigners not naturalized respectively, had alien populations of more than 20 people. Charleston’s aliens accounted for less than 1 percent (.89%) of the total 1830 population in the city, but about 2 percent of the community’s white population. As in previous census years, Charleston’s 1830 population of 30,289 featured a large black majority of 17,643, or 58.25 percent.\(^{20}\)

North Carolina’s 200 unnaturalized foreigners were scattered across the state in twenty-nine of sixty-five counties. Yet only five counties had an alien population of 10 or more—namely, Craven, Randolph, Burke, Cumberland, and Mecklenburg—and these five account for more than half the state’s alien population (121 of 202). Mecklenburg County, with its seat of Charlotte, included 61 aliens, a number that accounts for 30 percent of North Carolina’s foreigners not naturalized.\(^{21}\)

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\(^{19}\)United States Bureau of Census, *Fifth Census...of the United States*, *A general aggregate account of each description of Persons within the several States and Territories of the United States, As corrected at the Department of State, from the original returns of the respective Marshals and their Assistants*.

\(^{20}\)Ibid., “Aggregate amount of each description of Persons within the District of South Carolina.”

\(^{21}\)Ibid., “Aggregate amount of each description of Persons within the District of North Carolina.”
In Georgia the 1830 enumeration of unnaturalized foreigners found the largest numbers in the leading cities of Savannah and Augusta. Savannah numbered 17 and Augusta, 24, thus accounting for 40 percent of the total number of aliens in Georgia in 1830. Only one other county—Camden situated in the southeast corner of the state along the Atlantic coast and with 13 foreigners not naturalized—had an alien population that numbered more than 10. Savannah’s alien population accounted for less than .5 percent (.41%) of the county’s white population. This figure is no doubt slightly higher if only the whites within the city limits are counted and, as stated earlier, would be higher still if all foreign-born, including already naturalized citizens, were included in the count. While Augusta had a smaller total population than Savannah, the city upriver, with 5,163 whites, had a slightly larger white population than the coastal city with only 4,226 whites. In Richmond County, aliens made up only a slightly larger percentage of the white population (.47%), and in Camden County, almost a full 1 percent (.90%).

While the total number of foreign born are not revealed in the federal censuses of 1820 and 1830, the pattern of foreign settlement emerges as one considers the count of foreigners not yet naturalized in each of the counties in the three states of the Diocese of Charleston. Not
unexpectedly, most of the newly arrived immigrants, *i.e.* "foreigners not yet naturalized," settled in port cities and urban centers. Charleston, Savannah, and Augusta account for a large percentage of the total number of these unnaturalized immigrants. Many, if not most, remained in the few cities of the region.

As immigration increased in the antebellum period, the percentage of Catholics among new arrivals also increased. The unnaturalized aliens enumerated in the Carolinas and Georgia in the fourth and fifth censuses include, no doubt, many Catholics. These people, settling in Charleston, Savannah, and other towns, contributed a cosmopolitan atmosphere to the South's urban areas, especially its port cities. The religious and ethnic diversity found in these towns, even if not on the same level with that of northern cities, set southern urban centers apart from most of the region, which remained rural, sparsely settled, and almost wholly Protestant. In other words, Charleston and towns like it became centers for the South's small Catholic population. While their numbers represented only a fraction of the total white population in these cities, an active parish, especially in Charleston, which also had a very active bishop, drew attention to Catholicism's presence. In a Protestant society with a long history of anti-Catholic and ethnic bigotry, the ringing of the Angelus bells three times a day, the Irish brogues and

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22 *Ibid.*, "Aggregate amount of each description of Persons within the District of Georgia."
German and French accents in the streets, and the sight of clerics and nuns in their uncommon garb signaled the presence of and the distinctiveness of Catholicism.

It is noteworthy that the fourth and fifth censuses of the United States, in 1820 and 1830 respectively, set out figures for "aliens," and that this term is defined as "foreigners not naturalized." Historians have noted the shift in antebellum attitudes towards immigrants, particularly Catholic immigrants. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Protestants still perhaps represented a majority of immigrants. Even so, many Catholics arriving at the time very often quietly abandoned their religion in their new life in America. Protestant Anglo-Americans who had first settled the land and who had established a new republic, were already ill at ease in defining themselves as something other than, indeed more than, transplanted Britons.

At the same time, American Anglicanism, the Episcopal Church, which had allowed the Deistic thought of many of the nation's founders to pass for orthodoxy, was challenged by the far less tolerant evangelical

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23See John England, "Propagation of the Faith in the United States," The Works of the Right Reverend John England, First Bishop of Charleston, edited by Sebastian G. Messmer (7 volumes, Cleveland, Ohio: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1908), IV, 256-97. See also Patrick W. Carey; the Roman Catholics in America (Westport, Conn. and London: Praeger, 1996) 32-33, who acknowledges the great strain put on the antebellum American Catholic Church to minister to a growing number of immigrants arriving in Atlantic ports while keeping up with the westward movement of frontier settlements, while ignoring the number of people who left the Catholic Church during the period.
Protestantism, which was to become the primary force in American religious thought and the dominant religious influence in American life, especially in the South. While the political revolution removed the state and its money from the life of the church, the church was still squarely in the life of the state. Early nineteenth-century Americans, nonetheless, assumed their nation to be a Protestant republic.\textsuperscript{24}

While most nineteenth-century Americans believed themselves to be a Protestant nation, they did not define the naturalization process solely in religious terms. Other issues were clearly important to Americans as they reflected upon the process by which immigrants became citizens of the republic. Still, religion was to prove a very large part of the problem many Americans would have with recent arrivals to their shores. The enumeration of "aliens—foreigners not naturalized" is symptomatic of American's continuing certainty regarding the superiority of their political process—and thereby, their social order. Americans as late as 1830 still saw aliens as potential Americans, that is, people like themselves—white, Protestant, republican.\textsuperscript{25}


\textsuperscript{25}Noel Ignatiev, \textit{How the Irish Became White} (London: Routledge, 1995) and Rogers, \textit{Coming to American}, among others, speak to this issue of race, religion, and nationality that confronted Protestant Anglo-Americans as the
Not surprisingly, this American self-assuredness began to crack as immigrants became increasingly Catholic during the antebellum period and as Catholic immigrants became more likely to cling to their faith and other aspects of their Old World cultures. Immigrants who resisted an Americanization process, which sought the eradication of their cultural distinctiveness, threatened old-line Americans. For many native-born Americans, nothing was a greater peril to the newfound republic than Catholicism, the religion of Europe’s *ancien régime*. While the sixth census in 1840 completely passed over the whole question of origins and citizenship, by the time of the seventh census in 1850 Americans wanted to know more than one’s political allegiance. Beginning in 1850, the census taker also was to determine the birthplace of every American.

South Carolina in 1850 had a total population of 668,507. Of this number 274,563 were white, 8,960 were free blacks, and 384,984 were enslaved blacks. The second most populous state, North Carolina, had a total population of 869,039. Whites numbered 553,028, free blacks, 27,463, and slaves, 288,548. In Georgia—which had finally overtaken North Carolina as the most populous state in the diocese—there were 521,572 whites, 2,931 free blacks, and 381,682 slaves for a total population of 906,185.26

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United States became more diverse as Catholic ethnic groups began arriving in large numbers after 1830.
Since the seventh census sought to determine the number of all foreign born, the figures from 1850 give a better indication of the number of immigrants in the United States. Not unexpectedly, this interest in the foreign-born population comes in the first census taken after the Irish Potato Famine and the European revolutions of 1848 forced the largest wave of immigration to the United States up to that time.

The 5,321 foreign-born in Charleston accounted for more than half of the 8,707 foreign-born in the Palmetto State in 1850. These 5,321 Charlestonians represent more than 10 percent of the city's 42,985 inhabitants—black and white. Of Charleston's foreign born, almost 45 percent (2,369) were from Ireland and more than a third (1,816) were from Germany or Prussia. The third largest group of Charleston's foreign born totaled 546 and were from England and Wales, with the fourth group, from Scotland, adding another 323. Those from France were the fifth largest group accounting for 187 of the 5,321, or 3.5 percent of the foreign-born. While England, Wales, and Scotland produced mostly Protestant immigrants, many from Germany and most if not all from France would have been Catholic. Additionally other Catholic countries

\[2^{6}\text{United States Bureau of Census, } \textit{Statistical View of the United States, embracing its territory, population—white, free colored, and slave—moral and social condition, industry, property, and revenue; the detailed statistics of cities, towns and counties; being a compendium of the seventh census [1850], to which are added the results of previous census, beginning with 1790, in comparative tables, with explanatory and illustrative notes, based upon the schedules and other official sources of information, by J. D. B. DeBow} (\text{Washington, D.C.}: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1855), 338-39, 307-308, \text{and } 364-65.\]
supplying immigrants to Charleston were Austria, Italy, and Spain. Not all of the nationalities are listed by name and it is not clear if the French from the West Indies are included under the listing for France.27

More than a third of Georgia’s 6,488 foreign born in 1850 were living in Chatham County and its seat, Savannah, the state’s largest city. Chatham County’s 2,434 foreign born constituted almost a sixth of the total population of 15,312 and almost a third of the white population of 8,395. The Irish-born population of 1,555 constituted 62.9 percent of the total number of foreign born. In descending order by population count, the other nationalities reported were 383 Germans, 227 English and Welsh, 60 Scots, 37 French, 15 Italians, 13 Spaniards, 7 Austrians, and 3 Prussians. This diversity in Savannah, as in Charleston, contributed to a cosmopolitan atmosphere to Georgia’s chief port city, but unlike Charleston, Savannah still had a white majority.28

At 2,565 in 1850, North Carolina’s foreign-born population was the lowest of the three states. In fact, of the three, only North Carolina had a free-black population that significantly outnumbered the white foreign-born, with five free blacks for every one foreign-born white. These changes in North Carolina’s demographics point to two trends occurring in the Tar Heel State. First, as in Maryland and Virginia, North Carolina

27Ibid., 41 and 309.
28Ibid., 41 and 366.
economic and agricultural developments brought a great diversification of crops and a decreased demand for slaves, many of whom were being sold or transported further south to more recently opened lands of the Cotton Kingdom in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. Secondly, without a large port such as Charleston or Savannah, North Carolina received fewer immigrants. By 1850, almost 96 percent of the state’s whites and free-blacks had been born in North Carolina and 99.5 percent were American born.

Thus, in 1850 the three-state area had a total population of just under two and a half million, of whom 1.35 million were white; 39,354 were free blacks; and 1.05 million were slaves. As with earlier census records, the various ethnic and class groups were disproportionately distributed in the three-state area. In South Carolina free blacks and slaves outnumbered whites by a three to two ratio. Furthermore, in the lowcountry the population continued to have a very large black majority and a significant foreign-born element among the white population. Meanwhile, in North Carolina whites outnumbered blacks almost two to one, and in Georgia whites were five of every nine people.

In the antebellum period, the foreign-born of the three-state diocese clustered in the urban areas of Charleston, Savannah, and Augusta. Most of the foreign-born were Irish, and most of these certainly by the middle of the antebellum period would have been Catholic. Not surprisingly, the three cities with the large number of foreign-born were
also centers for Catholicism in the region. In 1839, Bishop England, marking the growth of the church, placed the number of Catholics in his diocese at more than 10,000. In 1832 the bishop could claim eleven priests stationed at three churches in Charleston and in one parish at each of the following cities: Columbia in South Carolina; Savannah, Augusta, and Locust Grove in Georgia; and Washington in North Carolina.  

The significance of the high percentage of Irishmen among antebellum immigrants cannot be overstated. Unlike the San Domingan migration of relatively small numbers in the decade and a half of revolution in the French-speaking world, the Irish resettlement in the United States involved thousands who arrived in increasing numbers in the years between the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the beginning of the Potato Famine. With the onset of famine in Ireland in 1845, desperate people with the means to travel, took ship with destinations in America and throughout the British empire. From the beginning of nineteenth century Irish emigration, the percentage of Catholics among those leaving Ireland had been increasing and had become a majority long before the Potato Famine. In the United States, the Irish overwhelmed the American Catholic Church's resources to provide parish

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buildings and priests. Within a generation, the Irish were easily the
majority ethnic group within the American Church and among its clergy.
Even as Irish dominance impacted the development of American
Catholicism, it shaped perceptions among America's Protestant majority,
as will be seen in the fifth chapter.

Other Sources for Catholic Population Figures

Compilations of other primary sources also allow some sense of the
Catholic presence in Charleston. Most of the Irish and many of the
French and German names listed in marriage and death records from
local newspapers were no doubt those of Catholics. When men known to
have been Catholic priests are listed as officiants or celebrants at
marriage rites, at least one person of the wedding couple may safely be
assumed to have been Catholic. Priests listed as officiants at funerals
likely indicate the death of a Catholic. When the officiant listed was a
priest and the deceased was buried from the church, certainly the
newspaper has recorded a Catholic's death.30

30Names of Catholic priests have been culled from Richard Madden,
Catholics in South Carolina: A Record (Lanham, Md.: University Press of
America, 1985), and Shea, History of the Catholic Church. Marriage and death
records have been located in the Charleston Courier and the Charleston
Mercury. Also helpful have been Brent H. Holcomb, compiler, Marriage and
Death Notices from the Charleston Times, 1820–1821 (Baltimore: Genealogical
Publishing, 1979) and Brent H. Holcomb, compiler, Marriage and Death Notices
Of course, the newspapers are not complete listings of all marriages and funerals. For instance, the index of the *Charleston Times* and the *Charleston Observer* for the period between 1820 and 1845 cite Father Simon Gallagher as the officiating cleric a few dozen times, while only mentioning Bishop England twice. Gallagher was only in the diocese, let alone the city, of Charleston for the first three years of this period, while England was active in the city for nearly the whole quarter century. Moreover, the *Charleston Times* ceased publication in 1822 and the *Observer* was a Presbyterian organ that can not be relied upon to have included all Catholic marriages and funerals in Charleston. While Bishop England may have been reluctant to officiate at weddings, surely he presided at more than two such functions in the more than two decades covered by the indices of these newspapers.\(^{31}\)

Likewise, passenger lists of ships arriving in Charleston from foreign ports contribute to the picture. While Irish, French, and German surnames are no guarantee that the bearers were Catholics, surely many, if not most, are likely to have been Catholic. The presence of Irish, French, and German surnames on nineteenth-century passenger...
lists are more likely to represent Catholic immigration than on similar lists a century earlier when colonial restrictions against Catholic immigration were still enforced. After the American restrictions against Catholics were lifted and as political troubles in Europe and economic woes in Ireland developed, many Catholics chose to emigrate from their Old World homes.

As with newspaper citations, ships’ passenger lists are not completely trustworthy and must be used with caution. These lists were deposited with the United States Customs House in Charleston by ship captains as they arrived in harbor. The lists indicate the ports of origin and sometimes the birthplaces of ships’ passengers arriving in Charleston. If an Irishman boarded in Liverpool and his birthplace is not listed, it is impossible from the record to determine his Irish, and possibly his Catholic, identity. Further, the passengers coming from other American ports—including those who may have immigrated first to New York, Boston, or Philadelphia—are not included in the lists. Then too, not everyone arriving directly in Charleston from a foreign port was an immigrant; merchants and traders traveling home from business trips and travelers returning from European tours are also included in the passenger lists. Finally, the only such records extant cover just the decade between 1820 and 1829.32
Another source providing some clue to the number of foreign born in Charleston is the record of naturalizations. The antebellum process of obtaining American citizenship serves as an example of an emerging sense of national identity. Immigrants could register with either the federal court or with a state court when petitioning for citizenship. Citizenship granted by one state was even given, on occasion, as reason for a citizenship petition in another state. In short, the process lacked uniformity and consistency. The state records from Charleston tell little more than the applicant’s name and the date of the petition, therefore shedding less light than similar federal records.

Looking at the federal records between 1783 and 1850, there are 2,097 immigrants applying for citizenship. This number includes only 40 women and 1 child. With a few exceptions, the women are listed as wives or widows. It is likely that the wives listed had married a citizen after arriving in the United States and that the widows had entered with their husbands who died before citizenship could be obtained. With so few women listed, it seems that the citizenship of the male head of household may have determined the status of his family. While it is likely that the majority of the almost 2,100 men listed in the federal naturalization records were unmarried, many of them no doubt represent families.

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One historian has noted that emigration from Ireland in the late eighteenth century and the first decade and a half of the nineteenth century was overwhelmingly Protestant and of the middling class. After the cessation of war in 1815, Britain relaxed some policies against Irish Catholics, who took advantage of this measure of newfound freedom of movement. After 1815, the Irish diaspora would become increasingly Catholic, culminating in the massive exodus during the Great Famine. The Irish Catholics who immigrated to the United States were far more likely to come from a rural background, with few if any skills needed to secure a living in an urban environment. Consequently, many of the Irish who arrived in Charleston after 1815 became unskilled or semi-skilled laborers in the city’s business life, especially in the maritime industry. In fact, by 1860 the Irish accounted for 60 percent of Charleston’s laborers.  

Needless to say, not all of the Irish arriving in Charleston, or anywhere else in America, ended up in low-paying jobs. Among the Irish listed in the federal naturalization records, a few stand out as professional men and planters. Still, the Irish who moved to the upper rung of Charleston’s socio-economic structure were far more likely to be

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33Kerby Miller, *Exiles and Immigrants: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 194-95, 207-10, and 227-35. For the role of the Irish in Charleston’s workforce, see Christopher Silver, “A New Look at Old South Urbanization: The Irish Worker in
Protestant and to have arrived in the period ending with the War of 1812. In many instances, these men had already entered professional life before leaving Ireland. Those Irishmen listed later in the records who had become lawyers and doctors may well have been Catholic, but they would have only entered these professions in the time they had been in the United States, inasmuch as most learned professions were closed to the Catholics in their native land.

Between 1783 and 1850, nearly 2,100 people registered in either the United States Admiralty Court or the United States District Court. Of this number, 465 were from Ireland, 207 from France and 79 from the French colony of San Domingo. The 207 Irish arriving by 1815 account for not quite half of the total number of Irish listed, but this group included far more merchants and craftsmen. The 258 Irish who arrived after 1815 were far more likely to list their occupations as clerk, laborer, or mariner. Additionally, some whose nation of origin was listed as France were almost certainly refugees from San Domingo, inasmuch as a couple of sugar manufacturers and two or three planters are listed among the French. In total, the list indicates that France provided Charleston with 61 merchants, 6 bakers, 5 confectioners, 3 jewelers, 3 musicians, 3 clerks, 3 grocers, 3 engineers, 3 planters, 2 gunsmiths, 2 coopers, 2 cabinetmakers, 2 physicians, 2 French language teachers, a

surgeon, a dance master, a hairdresser, a barber, a professor of music, a sugar maker, a tailor, a coach maker, a goldsmith, a dyer, a printer, a silk weaver, an apothecary, and a stonecutter. Similarly, San Domingan refugees accounted for 20 merchants, 3 planters, 3 carpenters, 2 cigar manufacturers, 2 jewelers, 2 bookkeepers, 2 tailors, a priest, a musician, a surgeon, a physician, an instructress, a baker, a tin plate maker, a blacksmith, a coach maker, and a shoemaker. Clearly, with the revolutions in France and its Caribbean colony, many leaving those places had been upper class or business people with ties to the upper class. 34

From these sources, it becomes obvious that the Irish and other immigrants increased the number of Catholics in the Charleston diocese. The surprise one is left with is the small number of Catholics reported by Bishop England in his reports in 1832 and 1839. Many people who were at least from a Catholic culture were not identifying with the their religious heritage in their new homeland. Apostasy was a major concern faced by antebellum American prelates who remained largely powerless to effectively minister to all Catholics arriving in the United States and moving westward.

34Admiralty Journals, United States Court of Admiralty, 1795–1857 and United States District Court Journals, Charleston, South Carolina, 1789–1860,
Immigrant Apostates

The nation's expansion, which had begun in the eighteenth century and had gained momentum in the early nineteenth century, scattered Americans into the South and the trans-Appalachian lands at a speed that far outpaced the Catholic Church's abilities or resources to provide buildings or priests. All too often, lay Catholics found succor in other houses of worship, losing contact with the church of their ancestors.

Those who remained Catholic often met in private homes for prayer before eventually organizing a parish and building a church. Often without a priest to lead them, frontier Catholics frequently modeled their congregations on Protestant examples of ecclesiastical government, notably that of the Episcopal Church. In so doing, these Catholics established the church in their new homes, while outwardly minimizing the differences between themselves and their Protestant neighbors. The development of lay trusteeism as an administrative organ in local parishes therefore is not surprising. It was, however, strenuously resisted by hierarchy and other clergymen, who all too often found lay trustees and vestrymen unwilling to conform to church policy regarding real estate holdings or to church doctrine on episcopal authority in clerical staffing. Because the practice of lay control of finances and

properties, reinforced by America's prevailing democratic political and social ideology, answered a pressing need in many Catholic parishes, the issue of lay trusteeism plagued bishops through the antebellum period and, in some dioceses, into the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The number of people who had been Catholic or born into formerly Catholic families always troubled Bishop England. In 1836 he estimated the number of former Catholics and the descendants of Catholics in the various Protestant sects to be between 38,000 and 40,000 in his diocese alone. The loss of the faithful to the different branches of Protestantism was acutely felt by Catholic clergymen, who vainly worked to keep pace with the influx of people into the United States, and especially into the less settled areas of the nation's shifting frontier. Writing in the late 1870s, a frustrated Jeremiah O'Connell blamed the loss of faith among many former Catholics on the wayward themselves, asking “[w]hat necessity can there be for going to seek a home in the backwoods, and placing oneself beyond the reach of the Sacraments, the holy influence of the Sunday Mass, and the religious education of children?”

Comparing the numbers of probable Catholics listed in the census and naturalization records with the Mass attendance figures provided by Bishop England leaves the clear impression that many immigrants from

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Catholic countries fell away from the church. This movement away from Catholicism was often, no doubt, simply the result of the Church's inability to provide priests to minister to people in outlying areas. In fact, England, in his 1839 article on the propagation of the faith, mentioned solitary Catholics and potential converts along the frontier regions of his diocese who expressed keen interest in Catholicism, but who were reluctant to become part of a church that could provide little or no clerical leadership. Still, anti-Catholic bigotry and the identification that most Americans made between Protestantism and American republicanism can not be ignored as influences on some Catholics who entered other Christian communities.

Finally, it must be remembered that many recent arrivals did not long survive the new climate they found in the American South, especially if they remained in the coastal area. In Charleston and the surrounding lowcountry, many years brought deaths from yellow fever, often called "strangers' fever" because of the susceptibility of unacclimated newcomers to the disease. Having lost their father or both parents, many young immigrants were enrolled in the Charleston Orphan House. There, the city's Catholic wards were denied proper
religious instruction until 1825 when Bishop England brought a complaint against the directors of the orphanage.36

Accepting Bishop England's estimates of the numbers lost from Catholicism, it is truly astonishing to think that four-fifths of those born Catholic, who were living in the antebellum Diocese of Charleston, had fallen away from the Church. The frustration that priests must have felt is almost tangible in the defensive comments quoted from Jeremiah O'Connell's history of the diocese. Yet in spite of the adversities and disappointments faced, the small church community grew as immigrants settled down and began to raise families and as more immigrants arrived. European immigrants constituted the vast majority of Catholicism in the Carolinas and Georgia, but about a tenth of Catholics in the region were African Americans, and most of these the slaves of a few Catholic slaveholders. The composite of antebellum Catholicism in the region is not complete without considering the African American experience in and with the Church.

African American Catholics

While the vast majority of blacks in the antebellum South were Protestant, those few who were Catholic constituted a significant fraction of the church's southern membership. Most black Catholics, like most

36Barbara L. Bellows, Benevolence among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston 1670–1860 (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University
southern white Catholics, lived in Maryland and Louisiana. Slaves of Catholic landowners in these two states were often raised in the faith of their masters. Additionally, various religious orders within the Church owned plantations and slaves in both states. Even so, Catholic parishes in cities such as Charleston, Savannah, and Norfolk included both slaves and free blacks, and rural parishes across the South also included slaves of Catholic masters.37

The story of antebellum Catholicism among African Americans is more difficult to discover than that of their European immigrant co-religionists. In a society where most blacks were legally denied any self-autonomy, few African American Catholics were likely to figure prominently in the development of the Church in the South. Given the strictures placed on even free blacks and the mixed race parish structure, blacks were not posed to assume either leadership positions among the laity or a place within the clergy.

In his 1832 pamphlet about the Diocese of Charleston written and published in Ireland en route to Rome, Bishop England placed the number of black Catholics in his three-state diocese at eight hundred to a thousand. If ethnic demographics within the Catholic population remained more or less stable in the mid-1830s, then blacks were something just less than a tenth of the Catholic population in the Carolinas and Georgia. According to the bishop, these African American Catholics were found “only in the city of Charleston and a few towns, and on a very few plantations....” England also asserted most black Catholics either had come with their masters from Maryland and St. Domingo or were descendants of these two black immigrant groups to the lower South. Inasmuch as the descriptions that England gives of the slaves’ devotional exercises indicate his knowledge of practices at the two parishes in Charleston, it is likely that the bishop’s count of African American Catholics is more accurate for those living in the cathedral city. While definitive population figures for racial and ethnic groups among Carolina and Georgia Catholics in the antebellum period are not now possible, Bishop England’s figures and characterizations of African American Catholics in his diocese may be taken to be reasonably accurate as far as they go.38

One group of black Catholics in the diocese has a significant history only because they were determined to preserve their faith, handing it down to their children. In about 1824 Bishop England organized a parish about twenty miles from Charleston in a settlement known then as Crawford Hill. Surely similar to other rural parishes, the antebellum chapel at Crawford Hill, with an itinerant priest, served several white Catholic families and their black slaves. With the calamities of the Civil War, the white families in the area refugeed to other places or simply moved away. Left alone, the black Catholics in the settlement were overlooked and then forgotten by the diocese's leaders. Only in the 1920s, after nearly fifty years without the services of a priest, was the parish again afforded access to the sacraments. This return to the sacraments was the result of a priest stumbling upon the church community quite by accident. Left to their own devices, the people of the parish had seen to the upkeep of their small wooden church and to the religious instruction of their children. Unfortunately, the determination population of his diocese to be "less that 12,000," in a report to the Propagation of the Faith Society in Lyon, France. In 1839, England sent the 1836 report with cover letters to the Vicars General of the newly formed Irish branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. In the second of the two cover letters, England amended his estimates of the Catholic population of his diocese, noting he "did not think that there were more than 10,000 Roman Catholics, scattered over an area larger than France;" with total population of about two million. See John England, "Letters to the Very Rev. Messrs. Meyler and Yore, VV.G., of Dublin, With a Communication to the French and Irish Propagation Societies," Works of John England, Reynolds, ed., III, 226-27. This latter account was subsequently published the same year (1839), along with the letters to Meyler and Yore, in the United States Catholic Miscellany.
and self-identity expressed by the blacks of what has become known as Catholic Hill seldom translated into successful conversions among unchurched or Protestant blacks and the parish remained small. Ironically, Bishop England launched an African American parish that proved self-sustaining and faithful for fifty years without a priest, while so many of the Irish, whose cultural identification was closely bound to Catholicism, forsook the Church in their settlement in America and their assimilation into American culture.39

Probably the most famous African American Catholics from the antebellum diocese of Charleston were members of a family of many accomplishments, who came not from Charleston or some other town but from a plantation about seven miles upriver from Macon, Georgia. Interestingly enough, this mixed race family was not among the faithful whom Bishop England included in his enumeration of Catholics in the diocese. Rather, the family represents two groups who much concerned the bishop: the enslaved African Americans and Catholics who had abandoned their faith in a frontier society that included few priests.40

39 The story of the parish is briefly described in a financial assistance appeal from the Rev A. F. Kamler to a Sister Superior of an unidentified order, October 21, 1934, Bishop Emmet W. Walsh Papers, Archives, Diocese of Charleston.

Michael Morris Healy was a sixteen year old Irishman of County Roscommon who joined the British army at the beginning of the War of 1812. Healy deserted his post in Nova Scotia 1816 and made his way to Georgia, where he had a cousin named Thomas Healy. Georgia law at the time required aliens to live within its borders for two years before they were eligible for either citizenship or property ownership. Michael applied for citizenship in April of 1818, and it is to be assumed that he had recently met the two-year state residency requirement.41

Realizing the desirability of river access to cotton markets in Macon and beyond, Healy sold some of his scattered land holdings acquired in land lotteries and in 1829 purchased 325 acres on the Ocmulgee River in Jones County above Macon. Within two years Healy had transformed his farm into a 1600-acre plantation with seventeen

slaves. Healy was a respected and successful planter, who might have been expected to play a leadership role in the development of Catholicism in Middle Georgia. However, about 1830, in defiance of the social conventions of the day, Healy took as his consort a light-skinned slave woman named Eliza, whom he probably had purchased from Sam Griswold, a prominent Jones County planter.42

Georgia law forbade marriage between whites and blacks. The Catholic Church, had a priest been available, would not have allowed a marriage in violation of civil authority. There is no record that Michael Healy ever attempted to have the church bless his union with Eliza, but all evidence supports the argument that he certainly held Eliza to be his wife in fact, if not by law. The two had ten children together, of whom nine—six boys and three girls—lived to adulthood.43

Sometime in the late 1830s Michael had grown concerned enough about his children's future that he began to make plans to remove them from the South. In late summer 1837 Michael took his eldest son, James Augustine, north to enroll him in a school. Only after some

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from County Galway to the United States in 1815 through New York, but cites only Healy's citizenship petition.

Foley, *Dream of an Outcast*, 4; Williams, *History of Jones County*, 73; and Comer, "Immigrant Successful in Jones County," discuss Healy's success in building up a plantation and his taking Eliza as his common-law wife. Williams cites S. H. Griswold, *Jones County News*, 1909, remembering Eliza Healy as a sister of the Griswold's house servant, Nancy. It is commonly believed that Eliza's father was Major James Smith, as is so cited by Foley, *Dream of an Outcast*, 4.
difficulty, Healy found a school for the boy on Long Island, New York. Located in Flushing, the school was operated by Quakers. In time, the next two oldest boys, Hugh and Patrick, joined James there. Up to this time, Michael had not had any of his children or slaves baptized and he seems to have avoided other Catholics in Macon, even after a parish was established there in 1841.44

Michael decided upon a Catholic education for his children only after meeting John Bernard Fitzpatrick, the young and newly ordained auxiliary bishop of Boston. At Fitzpatrick’s urging, Healy in 1844 removed his three oldest boys from the Long Island Quaker school and sent them to a new school, Holy Cross, in Worcester, Massachusetts. The oldest daughter, Martha, was by this time also in Flushing and was transferred to the care of Bishop Fitzgerald’s sister, Mary Boland of Boston. The fifth child and fourth son, Sherwood, went directly from Georgia to Holy Cross. With their move to Massachusetts, the five older Healy children were baptized and received into the Catholic Church. Another, Michael James, soon followed his older brothers.45

44Foley, Bishop Healy, 13 and Foley, Dreams of an Outcaste, 4-5 and 32.

45Foley, Dream of an Outcaste, 6-7, 12-14 and O'Toole, “Racial Identity,” 194. There is no evidence that Michael Healy or his children ever attended Mass or other services at Macon’s Catholic parish (Foley, 7).
Having arranged in his 1845 will to free his wife and children from slavery by moving them to New York, Michael Healy survived Eliza by four months. The Healys' deaths in 1850 left their three youngest children in Georgia. Michael had carefully written his will so that his children might inherit his estate and avoid being sold as slaves. At great peril to himself, the second oldest, Hugh, returned to Georgia to dispose of his father's estate and to escort his younger siblings to New York. Selling the plantation, Hugh and the executors rented out the Healy slaves until 1855, when they were sold. In the most unfortunate part of this remarkable story, Michael and Eliza Healy's children supported themselves with first the rents from their inherited slave labor and then by the proceeds of the sale of the slaves.46

Of the nine children, Hugh, already a businessman in New York, died at the age of twenty, a few weeks after a boating mishap in which he swallowed polluted water and contracted typhoid fever. Three of the remaining five boys became priests—the first black Catholic priests in the United States. The oldest, James Augustine Healy, was graduated first in the first class from Holy Cross College, served as Vicar General of the diocese of Boston, and became the first black Catholic bishop in the United States, serving for twenty-five years as bishop of the Diocese of

46The terms of Michael Healy's will as probated in 1850 in the Jones County Probate Court are cited by Foley, Dreams of an Outcaste, 9-11. The Healy will was written in 1845 and amended with a codicil in 1847.
Portland, Maine. Patrick Healy entered the Society of Jesus and because of his leadership as President of Georgetown University is sometimes called the second founder of Georgetown. Sherwood Healy followed his oldest brother as a diocesan priest in Boston, serving as Vicar General of the diocese and earning an excellent reputation as a canon lawyer. Of the three girls, Eliza and Amanda Josephine entered religious orders. Eliza, in religion, Sister Mary Magdalene, served as superior in three houses of the Congregation of Notre Dame. The third Healy girl, Martha, after ten years as a Notre Dame sister, left the convent to marry a Boston Irishman and raised a family.47

The significant accomplishments of the Healys, with their roots in the diocese of Charleston, came only because the family left the South to be educated in the North and in Europe. The Healy parents, an Irishman and his common law slave wife, represent two failings of the antebellum Catholic Church in the American South. Michael is probably typical of those immigrants, eager to get on in their new lives, who shed their Catholicism either in eradicating Old World ways that they believed hindered their becoming Americans or by moving onto the frontier and beyond the church’s ability to supply priests. Eliza, probably reared in an evangelical Protestant environment, is a reminder of the church’s ineffectual ministry to a people held in bondage.
The Healy children became Catholics by chance. They found a religious home in the Catholic Church only in moving North and distancing themselves from their African ancestry. The story of Catholicism among African Americans is found in the unrecorded stories of about 1,000 African American Catholics in the antebellum Charleston diocese. Many, if not all, of these blacks were slaves of Catholic slaveowners from Maryland and San Domingo. These slaves found in the church of their masters a religious home apart from that of most African Americans in the South, who sought solace and support in evangelical Protestantism. The Catholic Church arrived in the Carolinas and Georgia only after the colonial laws against Catholic settlement had been expunged from the states' legal codes during the early days of the Republic. By this time, slaves and freed blacks in the region had been long exposed to the tenets of the various Protestant sects. Thus, the Catholic Church in the Diocese of Charleston and in most of the antebellum South remained a small group of largely European immigrants. Yet, Catholic slaveowners who introduced their slaves to the church brought a small number of blacks to Catholicism. These former slaves served as the nucleus for Catholic outreach in the African American community after the Civil War, as priests and religious organized black parishes and schools.

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47Foley, Dreams of an Outcaste, 56 and 293, and Foley, Bishop Healy, 105 and 242.
That Carolina and Georgia slaves and free blacks continued to be Protestant after the arrival of Catholicism was not a foregone conclusion. Catholicism's emphasis on ritualistic worship and the cults of the saints may have attracted some African Americans who found in such worship something akin to their native African religions. Embracing Catholicism also could offer the slave self-expression in the act of religious belief and practice independent from that of his or her master. Yet the Catholic Church did not win any significant number of converts among either slaves or freed blacks.

This failure of the Catholic Church to reach a significant number of African Americans was predicated on several challenges facing the church in its attempts to minister to black and white Catholics, while seeking to assimilate immigrants to their new environment. The paucity of the nineteenth-century American Catholic Church's human and financial resources, the lack of lay leadership roles for blacks in the Church, the contempt that almost all white Americans—including Catholics—held for African Americans, the formalized worship and use of Latin in the Catholic Church, the resistance from Protestant white slaveowners to Catholic evangelism efforts, the Catholic Church's conservative position on the slavery issue, and the tensions between black and white laborers—many of the latter Catholic immigrants—combined to hinder, if not prevent, an effective Catholic ministry among African Americans in the antebellum South. Finally, while it is virtually
impossible to document today, it is likely that cultural differences between Protestant, English-speaking slaves and the Catholic French- and Creole-speaking slaves and other blacks who refugeeed from Saint Domingue created in some areas resistance to Catholicism among the Protestant slaves.

The hierarchical structure and sacerdotal nature of the church's clergy reduced opportunities for black lay leadership. Compared to the governmental and ministerial structures within Protestant churches, and particularly within evangelical communities, Catholicism offered little to blacks. Further, Catholic priests, like their Protestant counterparts, often expressed their concerns for black communicants in paternalistic terms that many blacks no doubt resented. While this tendency toward condescension crossed sectarian lines, evangelical Protestants at least offered blacks a spiritual equality in the brotherhood of believers. Although this sense of equality was also inherent in Catholic thought, it was mitigated by a medieval legacy of hierarchy and deference that prescribed honor and prestige to priests and religious. In the Catholic weltbild, even as society was ranked, heaven was arranged in a hierarchy of angelic forces and the company of saints. This mind set was clearly expressed by Father Jeremiah O'Connell in the preface of his 1879

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48A religious is a man or woman in a religious order, such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, or Dominicans. Depending on the nature of the
history of the diocese of Charleston. When referring to the interest within the Church regarding a topic, he wrote, "all the faithful, from [Pope] Leo XIII to the humblest Catholic negro... ." Moreover, while liturgical worship incorporated rituals that may have resonated ancient African religious customs for some blacks, the Church's use of ritual was dictated by a formalized system of rubrics that did not allow the emotive responses and actions of evangelicalism that possibly reminded blacks of their Old World religions.49

Chapter Summary

A study of papers available in the diocesan archives reveals the concerns of Bishop England and of the priests and people of the Diocese of Charleston. The letters from laity across the diocese speak poignantly of the uncertainties of emigration to a new and largely unsettled country and the loneliness of being the only Catholic in a community. These letters also preserve both a sense of the expectations Catholics had for

49 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 271-73 asserts African Americans chose Protestantism for a number of reasons, including accessibility, while noting the potentially attractive characteristics of Catholicism. Stephen Ochs, Desegregating the Altar: The Josephites and the Struggle for Black Priests, 1871–1960 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 33-34 and 36-54 describes the detrimental influence white priests and others exacted over the African American Catholic community in the Reconstruction era and the ante bellum history behind the white priests' attitudes towards their black parishes.

Quote from O'Connell, Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia, x.
their bishop and the charisma Bishop England exhibited in fostering community among the Catholics within the diocese. Thus, reading the extant correspondence provides a view of the wide range of issues facing immigrants and their struggling church in a sometimes hostile environment permeated with anti-Catholic sentiment.

Census and naturalization figures suggest the numbers of Irish, French, German, and other ethnic groups that arrived in Charleston in the antebellum period, while clearly showing the Irish to have constituted the majority of these immigrants. The naturalization figures also suggest the class divisions among these ethnic groups as varying forces in the Old World led different groups to emigrate. After 1815, the Catholic unskilled laborer of the rural south and west of Ireland replaced the Protestant skilled laborer or merchant of the Dublin Pale and northern counties among Irish immigrants to America. After 1830, the number of Irish immigrants—most now Catholic and semi-skilled at best—increased dramatically. In sharp contrast to the unskilled and semi-skilled Irish laborers, French immigrants were refugees of the upper classes or of the middling merchant and trade class that was closely tied to the aristocracy as purveyors of culture and refinement.

The early development of the Diocese of Charleston owed much to the pre-immigration experiences of the city's Catholics, especially the Irish, who became the dominant group within the church community in the decade and a half after the Napoleonic Wars. Having suffered
religious persecution and political disfranchisement in their homeland, Irish Catholics often had developed an appreciation for American ideals before entering the United States. Many of these Irish, including Charleston’s first bishop, John England, were very adamant in their support of such principles as the separation of church and state, consent of the governed, and a wide based electorate.

Apart from European immigration to the American South, the Catholic Church in the Carolinas and Georgia included African Americans, as many as a thousand strong in 1832 and most the slaves of white Catholics. Bishop England’s report makes clear that the African Americans within his church almost all came to Catholicism because of their connections to white Catholics. Yet, black Catholics proved, as they did at Catholic Hill, South Carolina, that they too were devout and faithful. That Catholicism did not appeal to more southern blacks represents anti-Catholic bias by Protestant white slaveholders, a Catholic missionary effort that offered neither holy orders to black men nor other leadership positions to black laity, and the successful Protestant missionary efforts among slaves and free blacks that predated Catholic missions to these groups by more than half a century.

The institution of slavery, posed an additional issue in the assimilation process. Charleston and lowcountry South Carolina had a unique and sustained history of a slave majority in its population. The presence of foreign-born whites and the constant threat of outside
influence on the slaves bred distrust of immigrants among American-born Charlestonians. The next step in understanding the reaction of the mob in the Post Office Raid of July 1835 is to explore the anti-Catholicism of Protestant Charleston. Ethnic stereotypes and religious prejudice proved convenient reasons for suspecting Catholics of fostering unrest among the slaves.

For the Irish immigrant in the slave society of the Deep South, the process of assimilation began with his acceptance of the southern way of life, with slavery at the foundation of its economy. The presence of black slavery in the South helped drive the process of Irish assimilation. That is, white Protestant southerners expanded their concept of citizenship to include the Irish, as these immigrants demonstrated support for the institution of slavery, identifying with other southern whites rather than with their free black and enslaved neighbors. Irish identification with the white Protestant ruling minority and their acceptance by that hegemonic class were particularly telling in Charleston where Irish immigrants shared poor neighborhoods with a small number of free blacks and a great many slaves and where, throughout the antebellum period, the black population outnumbered whites. In short, the Irish acceptance of slavery solidified the immigrant's position as a white man and completed the transoceanic process by which the Irishman was transfigured into an American. By his migration to America and assimilation into white American culture, the Irish Catholic exchanged his membership in a
reviled and subjected race to one in the new republic's master race. In this light, the Post Office Raid of 1835 becomes, for the Irish, a crucible by which his whiteness and his citizenship were to be measured.

Seeking to allay nativist fears among American Protestants, Irish Catholics asserted their support for American institutions was derived from their faith rather than threatened by it. For these new Americans, their experiences under an oppressive British rule in Ireland had been endured and their appreciation for personal freedoms developed because of the strength of purpose, the dignity and the resolve that was sustained by their Catholic faith. Southern Catholics, in making this case, were fortunate to have in Bishop England one of the most articulate speakers, and one of the great intellects of the day. Even his opponents acknowledged the bishop's intelligence, wit, and eloquence. His influence and the Old World experiences of the Irish went far in paving the way for the assimilation of Catholics into the mainstream of the South's white society.
CHAPTER FOUR

Ethnic and Religious Bigotry in the Antebellum South

Histories of the Catholic Church in the United States and in the southern Atlantic seaboard states have discussed to varying degree the antebellum development of the diocese of Charleston. While previous works on the antebellum Catholic Church have generally explored Catholic communities in the North, they have failed to appreciate the influence of slavery on the development of the church in the South, where nearly half the population was comprised of African Americans held in bondage. Indeed, no study of the diocese or of the American church has focused attention on the influence of a number of issues that shaped the relationship between the hegemonic Protestant Anglo-American majority and the sundry ethnicities within the antebellum Catholic Church in the American South. Yet, anti-Catholicism, nativism,
and slavery each played a part in defining the Church's place in southern culture.¹

The perceptions that Anglo-American Protestants had of various ethnic groups greatly influenced the relationship between mainstream American society and those recently arrived in the United States and helped shape the immigrants' assimilation process into American culture. This chapter will reveal how antebellum white Americans viewed French and Irish Catholics, who constituted the two most influential ethnic groups within Charleston's Catholic community.

The experiences that various ethnic groups brought with them to the New World was an important factor that colored American perceptions of Catholic immigrants and impacted on the assimilation of the latter group. This chapter will show that the French refugees from

¹Jeremiah J. O'Connell, Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History (Sadlier, 1879. Reprint, Westminster, Md.: Ars Sacra, 1964) is an understandably polemical work, written towards the end of O'Connell's long career in the diocese of Charleston. Richard Madden, Catholics in South Carolina: A Record (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985) written by another diocesan priest from Charleston, is a more recent history and a solid narrative organized around the episcopates of the diocese's several bishops.

San Domingo arrived in fairly small numbers at a number of American, chiefly southern, ports, while the Irish migration to the United States began large and got larger, with hundreds of thousands of Irish people leaving their homeland for the hope of a better life across the Atlantic. If viewed with suspicion because of the slave uprising from which they came, the French immigrants by and large found acceptance among Charleston's slaveholding whites. On the other hand, the Irish farmers who arrived in port cities such as Charleston often had to seek work with few skills that prepared them for urban life. More importantly, the Irish, who soon dominated the American Catholic Church by the sheer force of their numbers, demonstrated an intense devotion and faithfulness to Catholicism borne out of the Irish experience under British rule and the linking of religious and national identity which resulted from that subjugation. As Irish American Catholics grew in numbers and the Catholic Church in the United States became better established, American Protestants became increasingly suspicious of the church, which they viewed as a threat to freedom and the American political system.

Beginning with the expansion of American Catholicism in the antebellum period, several causes should be noted, although immigration was largely responsible for the growth. Between 1820 and
1860, the church absorbed both a large influx of European immigrants and the many Catholics in western lands acquired by the United States in the Louisiana Purchase and the Mexican War. These developments meant American bishops faced the task of ministering to several ethnic groups. While antebellum American Catholics, most of whom were immigrants or first generation Americans, were never as numerous in the South as in the North, those in the South tended to settle in cities. In southern coastal and inland towns, Catholics sometimes were to be found in numbers large enough to constitute significant percentages of an urban population. The story of these southern Catholics may parallel that of their northern co-religionists to some extent, but their experience in the South shaped and defined their lives in ways unknown to Catholics north of the Mason-Dixon Line. For example, immigrants' ethnic identification and self-definition, which in the North fostered the development of ethnically segregated “national” parishes, developed in the South against the backdrop of slavery and a system of racial identification that served to unite whites, regardless of ethnic origins, while subjugating blacks.

The scarcity of Catholics and the denominationalism inherent in the South’s Protestant culture encouraged a sectarian identification among southern Catholics that prevented the full development of national parishes. Additionally, the low number of Catholics within the
population of the Deep South—apart from southern Louisiana and perhaps a few localities such as Mobile—never challenged the domination of Protestant culture.

Protestantism, in its several forms, was the religion of antebellum America. This national scenario of religious domination was repeated among both whites and blacks in the South Carolina lowcountry, where the presence of blacks, most of whom were slaves, helped foster a mentality of white race identification and solidarity that blurred distinctions and ameliorated ethnic tensions among southern whites. Outnumbered by the slaves in their midst, the white ruling elite encouraged a racial identity among the several ethnic groups that constituted the area's white minority. While the racial bond among whites shaped values and mores of South Carolina culture, whites nonetheless were mindful of the religious and ethnic differences among themselves. In spite of the tendency towards racial solidarity among southern whites, these differences created tensions within the white community. In a moment of crisis, ethnic and religious divisions could function as fault lines along which society fractured. This is, in fact, what was happening as some protestors in July 1835 at the Charleston Post Office Raid shouted out their desire to lynch Bishop England and torch church property.
Although their percentage within Charleston's overall population was never great, the presence of Catholics, especially the large number within the propertyless laboring class, was troubling to many Protestant whites who were already concerned about the threat of domestic strife rooted in the potentiality of servile insurrections. For many white Charlestonians, the immigrant Catholic's "otherness," as immigrants and as Catholics, was indicative of the danger posed by aliens, who had no vested interest in the preservation of the South's social order. Catholics also perhaps aroused suspicions among increasingly paranoid and defensive antebellum white southerners as Protestant churches fractured into regional institutions while the Catholic Church remained global in scope and governance.²

Additionally, for Protestant Anglo-American southerners, the urban South's Catholic immigrants served as everyday reminders of the much larger number of Catholic immigrants who were crowding into northern cities. The rise of immigration to the North tipped the balance of power in the federal government away from the South, as the more populous free states gained control of the House of Representatives. Many white Protestant southerners feared that the immigrants, unlettered in

American politics and culture, were particularly susceptible to anti-slavery propaganda, and thus threatened the southern way of life. More generally, for many Americans, these foreigners, especially Catholics, brought to the United States an alien perspective that represented a social and political danger that imperiled the stability and strength of the United States.

Protestant perspectives on ethnicity also influenced the development of southern Catholicism and the relationships among Catholics. Of course, Catholics themselves played the larger role in the establishment and growth of their church. While both Protestants and Catholics saw distinctions among various immigrant groups, a common Catholic faith transcended these differences within the Church and encouraged Catholic solidarity amid a racially divided Protestant society. Reacting to the threatened violence in 1835, Charleston Catholics prepared to defend their bishop and their church.

Several sources indicate that an angry crowd of Charlestownians gathered on the evening of July 1835 intent on destroying the anti-slavery papers held in the city's Exchange Building post. Historians have long noted that the only source explicitly telling of this threat to Catholics during the Post Office Raid is a letter from Bishop John England to Paul Cullen, Rector of Rome's Irish College, written half a
year after the events described. According to Bishop England, a few Irishmen in the mob overheard threats to lynch him and to burn the cathedral, seminary, convent, and school. These men raced to warn their bishop and their fellow Irishmen of the impending danger.3

Bishop England wrote that he and members of the Irish Volunteers, one of the city's five militia units, stood vigilant for two nights in defense of the Cathedral and its precincts. On the first night, after the crowd at the east end of Broad Street near the Post Office had been dispersed by a detachment of the city militia, a group of men reassembled at the Exchange Building and broke into the Post Office, taking the antislavery papers. Then on the second night a large crowd gathered to cheer as the papers were destroyed in a bonfire. After two nights spent in vigil and worry, it was with relief and a degree of pride that Bishop England described the arrival of the leading men of Charleston to sign on as honorary members of the Irish Volunteers.4

As tempers cooled with the ashes of the anti-slavery papers on Marion Square, calm gingerly returned to Charleston. With the city


4Ibid. For activities of the mob during the riot see Charleston Courier and Charleston Mercury, July 30, 1835. The happenings surrounding the bonfire were covered in the Charleston Courier and Charleston Mercury, July 31, 1835.
fathers' public support of the Irish Catholics at the cathedral, Charleston's white leadership preserved the sanctity of property rights while building a racial alliance uniting whites across economic, cultural, and ethnic lines. The town fathers realized that a united white populace was needed to combat any threat to slavery and to the region's economic security.5

The development of a white society that included ethnic and religious minorities was not easily achieved, but the Post Office Raid of 1835 is an illuminating event in this process of immigrant assimilation. The French Catholics of the city had arrived as refugees from the San Domingan slave revolt. Their experiences as slaveholders and merchants catering to slaveowners had prepared them for Carolina and Georgia culture and had created among southern white Protestants a reference point for receiving these Catholics into their own society. Irish Catholics, coming from a radically different background and associated with far less desirable cultural stereotypes, encountered more difficulties in making their way in the social and cultural matrix of the antebellum American South.

To understand the divergent assimilation experiences of the different Catholic ethnic groups and to appreciate the importance of the

events surrounding the 1835 Post Office Raid, it is necessary to study
the ethnic and racial stereotypes that often came into play in the
immigrant’s assimilation process and in the anti-Catholicism frequently
encountered in antebellum American life.

**Anti-Catholic Prejudice**

While anti-Catholicism, a legacy of the Protestant Reformation, had
been an integral part of colonial American culture and had been
ameliorated by an era of religious harmony during the Revolutionary era,
it resurfaced in the early nineteenth century. The main reason for the
re-emergence of anti-Catholic sentiment was the large influx of Catholic
immigrants beginning after the Napoleonic Wars. American Protestants
believed Catholics to be under the control of their hierarchy and clergy,
who were thought to take orders directly from the pope—a reactionary,
undemocratic and absolute monarch. Many Protestants worried that the
increasing wave of immigration eventually would mean a Catholic
majority and the subversion of the republican ideology central to
American political and social institutions. In addition to the large
increase in immigration, the young American nation experienced social
movements including temperance and abolition, along with other
influences such as a highly mobile population and a widespread revival
within Protestant evangelicalism. Meanwhile, in the face of growing support in the North and overseas for the abolition of slavery, the South was becoming more defensive about its peculiar institution. With an outlook increasingly that of a siege mentality, white southerners sought out enemies at home and railed against abolitionists outside the South.\(^6\)

At the same time, Anglo-American Catholicism, which had its roots in the colonial upper South and which had defined the church in the early years of the republic, gave way to the multi-ethnic wave of immigration dominated by the Irish. The influx of foreign-born Catholics changed the face of the Church and the nation at a time when both were seeking their own sense of identity.\(^7\)

The Jacksonian Era, in which the first large wave of European immigrants arrived in the United States, was an age of cultural democratization and national expansion in America. In a sense, the age was the culmination, the logical extension, of republican ideology espoused by the nation's founders. Eliminating property ownership


requirements for the right to vote, Jacksonian Democrats enfranchised
thousands and involved nearly all adult white males, including many of
those recently arrived from Europe, in the political process. The
Jacksonian political philosophy that lifted the unpropertied to full
citizenship rested on a broad perception of the equality formulated in
Jefferson's agrarian and small government ideals. Yet, the common
man's arrival on the political scene was resisted by many of the already
enfranchised.8

As early as President James Monroe's second term (1821-1825),
factions were developing that would end the "era of good feelings," which
had marked the national political atmosphere of his administration. The
House of Representatives' unusual 1824 presidential vote, which sent
John Quincy Adams to the White House following an inconclusive
general election, confirmed the emergence of two political parties.
Andrew Jackson's Democrats embraced the expansion of the voter pool
and the development of a generally more lenient naturalization policy for
immigrants. These policies naturally won Democrats many supporters
among recently arrived aliens who sought citizenship. Opposing

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Jackson, the Whigs advocated more rigid standards, with longer residency requirements, for naturalization. Aimed at weakening Democratic strength, the Whig’s nativist agenda also reflected a chauvinism, which survived the Whig Party and continued to impact the American political scene for most of the antebellum period. Only the slavery controversy would eclipse nativism, an extremely volatile issue in many elections, particularly local and state campaigns, in the mid-1830s and again in the late 1840s and the 1850s.\(^9\)

The anti-immigrant bias was all too often tied to, if not predicated upon, an anti-Catholic sentiment, which tested the faith and resolve of Catholic immigrants. In the colonial period, there had been no Catholic bishop and few places where Catholics could worship openly. Independence from Great Britain had not brought immediate respectability for Catholics, but the wave of political change had led to the disestablishing of the Church of England (after 1785, the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States) in most states. Anglican disestablishment and an increasing diversity within American

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Protestantism served to promote a religious tolerance previously unknown. Catholics benefited in the atmosphere of religious toleration fostered by American republicanism and Protestant diversification.10

Yet the generation to whom the founders passed on the task of nation building proved less tolerant than their fathers. American republican ideology, which was spawned in Enlightenment thought, became tinged with the theocratic tendencies of Protestant patriotism in the wake of the religious revival that swept the nation in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.11 The Second Great Awakening prompted evangelical Protestants to organize various groups through which individuals were to work for the improvement of society. Networking these groups into national organizations, evangelicals developed a national view that guided their activities and redirected their perspective. They saw the hand of God in America's successful bid for independence: their nation was part of God's design. Republicanism, for these inheritors of freedom, was seen as a precious and divinely


11 Ibid., 149-54; Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 82-83; and McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform, 102-06 and 138-40.
sanctioned birthright, which must be carefully guarded from the evil
influences of Europe and Catholicism.\textsuperscript{12}

Even so, Protestant Americans, who generally regarded
Catholicism as part and parcel of European despotism, almost from the
beginning of the American nation identified Protestantism with
republican virtue. The more vehement among nativists saw threats to
the American Republic in any instance of Catholic involvement in the
political process. At the same time Evangelical Protestantism was
emerging as America's dominant religious force, the first large influx of
Catholics began as Irish immigration steadily increased after 1815. The
second quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a reemergence of
anti-Catholicism in American life. By 1830, the so-called “Catholic
threat” to the United States was real enough for some Protestants to turn
to violence. Not surprisingly, convents were often targeted for attack for
a number of reasons: the general public was already uneasy with the
challenge to paternalistic social conventions represented by celibate
women living in community, the nuns in their habits suggested the

\textsuperscript{12}Lee Brown, “Religious Groups and Political Parties,” Antebellum Reform,
edited by David Brion Davis (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and
Row, 1967), 108-119 notes “Whigs tended to respond more favorably than
Democrats to the ‘church and state’ concept,” while delivering a well argued
study of the influence of Protestant reform movements on American politics.
distinctiveness, or better yet, the foreignness of Catholicism in American culture, and the convents were undefended.\textsuperscript{13}

When President Jackson named Roger Brooke Taney to be Attorney General in 1831, one nativist and anti-Catholic newspaper went so far as to assert "that every sincere Papist is disqualified, de facto, from holding any office under a Protestant government." In 1834, Samuel F. B. Morse, American painter and future inventor of the telegraph (1844), penned a series of letters published in the New York Journal of Commerce. The letters were presently collected and published as a booklet entitled, \textit{Imminent Dangers to the Free Institutions of the United States through Foreign Immigration, and the Present State of the Naturalization Laws}. The work sold widely and presented a particularly shrill attack on Catholicism and immigration. Morse believed the increase in immigration to the United States was a European reaction to the ideals of the American Revolution and a Catholic plot to overthrow America's democratic political institutions.\textsuperscript{14}


\textsuperscript{14}The Protestant quoted in the United States Catholic Miscellany v. XI, 75 and cited by Peter Guilday, \textit{The Life and Times of John England, First Bishop of Charleston} (1786–1842) (2 volumes, New York: American Press, 1927), II, 221. Guilday, \textit{Life and Times of John England}, II, 195-208 always discusses Samuel Morse's leadership in the anti-Catholic movement of the early 1830s. Fearing the Morse publication had become too scarce for his readers to find, Guilday quotes extensively from the work to provide "an example of the anti-Catholic literature then flooding the Protestant American press" (197).
The increased intensity of anti-Catholic forces during the Jacksonian Era was also in part caused by the success of the Catholic Church itself. Recognized as the father of the American Provincial Councils, Bishop England had early championed the idea of a provincial council meeting. England saw the need for the bishops of the Baltimore Province, that is to say, the American bishops under the leadership of the Archbishop of Baltimore, to meet to discuss issues and agree on a concerted effort in overcoming problems. Archbishop Ambrose Maréchal had no interest in such a council, perhaps out of his jealousy of the popularity and prestige enjoyed by the Charleston ordinary, and no council was held during his episcopate. Lay trusteeism, recalcitrant priests, and other issues continued to trouble the American bishops through much of the nineteenth century, but the church leaders began together to grapple with these problems only after Maréchal's successor, Archbishop James Whitfield, called them to Baltimore for the First Provincial Council in October 1829.15


A province is a district composed of an archbishop's diocese (his archdiocese) and several other dioceses. The ordinaries or chief bishops of the other dioceses are also called suffragan bishops because they have the right to vote at provincial councils. At the time of the councils in 1829 and 1833 all bishops in the United States were in the province of Baltimore.
Beginning with the First Provincial Council, the bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States sought to present to all Americans a united, purposeful ecclesiastical organization. By 1833 when the bishops assembled for the Second Provincial Council, several diocesan newspapers had joined Bishop England's *United States Catholic Miscellany*, while a small number of Catholic bookstores had opened in the nation's larger cities and more schools had been established. Through these works, the bishops hoped to counter the anti-Catholic rhetoric all too often found in the American media. In another measure of the Catholic Church's success, it is estimated that by 1833 Catholicism was already the largest Christian body in the United States with more than 600,000 American members.\(^\text{16}\)

The animosity between Catholicism and Protestantism is reflected in published works from the Reformation period down through the nineteenth century. The legacy of anti-Catholicism in Anglo-American culture is easily recognized in books and other materials collected by Charlestonians and in the newspapers and other publications produced in Charleston throughout the antebellum period.

\(^\text{16}\)Guilday, *Life and Times of John England*, II, 215, estimates the numbers of the largest Protestant groups as Methodists at 421,000; Baptists at 150,000; Presbyterians at 147,000; and Congregationalists at 115,000. See also, Carey, *Roman Catholics in America*, 33 and Dolan, *American Catholic Experience*, 246-47.
One of the best depositories for the anti-Catholic literature available to antebellum Charlestonians was the Charleston Library Society. Founded in 1748, the society is one of the oldest libraries in the United States. Although destroyed by fire in 1778, the society rebuilt and soon had amassed a large collection of Charleston publications and a wide range of books. Many of the materials now in the collection have been there since the early nineteenth century and were available to the library’s antebellum subscribers. Much of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century materials in the collection evidence the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the day.

In one such book in the Charleston Library Society’s collection, Baron Francis de Wimpffen, regarding his tour of Saint Domingo, wrote of Catholicism, “it is not enough, Sir, that the principles be good, and the dogmas be pure: he who labours to propagate them, must also shew, in his own person, and example of the strictest conformity to them... To make his point clear, the baron sarcastically adds, “[a]s long as I shall see the fisherman’s ring in the finger of a sovereign prince, and the bald front of the Servant of the Servants of God, decorated with a triple crown, it will be difficult to convince me that humility is a quality necessary to salvation.” For the baron and many other Protestants, in the United States and abroad, the temporal sovereignty of the pope and the despotic government he exercised undermined any claim the Bishop of Rome may
have made for holiness or spiritual authority. For Americans, the lengths to which the popes went to preserve their power and extend their influence signaled the Catholic threat to the democratic principles undergirding the American government.\textsuperscript{17}

Many Charleston Protestants harbored a profound distrust of the Catholic Church, and their anti-Catholic opinions were often freely expressed. In addition to his religion, the Catholic was usually an immigrant and as such generally regarded by old-line Americans as too ignorant of the democratic political culture to participate without some period of assimilation. For South Carolinians, the Catholic immigrant also represented the threat posed by the enemies of slavery outside the South.\textsuperscript{18} One Charleston “layman of the Reformed Church,” writing in 1823, denounced Catholicism in general while attacking published letters by Bishop John England and a Father McEnroe. Condemning the Roman pontiff, this layman claimed:

There is another kind of Religion, falsely so called—a counterfeit presentment of the true—at whose altars the worldly and ambitious worship. Haughty and imperious in

\textsuperscript{17}Francis Alexander Stanislaus, Baron de Wimpffen, \textit{A Voyage to Saint Domingo, in the years 1788, 1789, and 1790. Translated from the Original Manuscript, which has never been published, by J. Wright} (London: T. Cadell, Jr. and W. Davies; J. Wright, 1817), 284-85.

\textsuperscript{18}Barnwell, \textit{Love of Order}, 17. Immigration was increasing even as South Carolina's gentry sought to isolate their economic and political system for abolitionists and a federal government potentially dominated by abolitionists.
its character—towering and gigantic in its ambition—cruel
and intolerant in its spirit—it walks through the world with
gloomy magnificence, and casts its colossal shade over the
face of creation.

If the reader had any doubts to whom the author referred, he closed the
small diatribe by noting, "[s]uch was the character, and such were the
pretentions of the Church of Rome when, in all the laurelled pomp of
imperial pride, sovereigns bowed to her bidding, and nations trembled at
her power."\(^{19}\)

As did later nativists concerned about large waves of immigration,
the Reformed Church layman couched his anti-Catholic arguments in a
political discourse. This attitude, of course, is not surprising in that
American Protestant bitterness towards Catholicism rested as much on
the perceived Catholic threat to the nation’s republican ideology as on
any quarrel over religious doctrine. For Protestant Americans,
Catholicism represented all that was repressive and wrong in Europe’s
ancien regimes. They feared the church sought to control all aspects of
society. The Reformed Church layman warned:

Such would its insatiable thirst for dominion render it even
at the present day, were it not that the human mind,
unenslaved by monkish superstition—and unseduced by
ostentation and display—has learned to appreciate the

\(^{19}\) _Strictures on the Letters written by the Right Rev. Dr. England and the
Rev. Mr. M’Enroe_ (Charleston: A. E. Miller, 1823), 4.
value of every institution in proportion to the positive happiness which it diffuses through a nation at large.20

For Charleston's Reformed Church layman and many other American Protestants, the American republic was the natural progression and culmination of the Protestant Reformation. The Charleston layman argued, "REPUBLICANISM and CATHOLICISM bear no affinity in any one single relation—nor can they ever cordially unite in character." Further, "[a]ll the great and glorious achievements of our Revolution are too highly appreciated to admit of the belief that the doctrines of the Roman Church can ever flourish to any great extent ..." in the United States. A realization of the antipodal relationship between American republican ideology and Catholicism led one to conclude that Catholicism's "ESTABLISHMENT TO ANY EXTENT, would necessarily endanger every thing we hold dear and valuable."21 Thus, Catholicism was not merely a wrong belief or a perverted view of Christianity; it represented a repressive and abhorrent political system completely incompatible with the American constitution and republican ideology. The Charleston layman was confident that Catholicism would never endanger the American political system as long as the people, in whom

20Ibid., 4-5.

21Ibid., 21-22.
sovereignty rested, remained sensible to the threat and mindful of their political and religious heritage.

In combating anti-Catholicism, Bishop John England and other nineteenth-century Catholic writers defended the Church's record and advanced the argument that the Catholic Church, in its concern for the dignity of human life, could and did embrace America's republican ideology. These American Catholic writers found no incompatibility between their religion and the political ideology of their new homeland. American republicanism protected religion from incursions from the state; a position untainted by the atheistic tendencies of European radical republicanism as demonstrated in the French Revolution.

An anti-Catholic mindset was so prevalent in the antebellum United States that the American bishops expended much energy in attempting to eradicate only the most blatant forms of bigotry. Their attention was largely focused on suppressing the negative assumptions and prejudicial statements that passed for lessons in the textbooks widely used by schools and tutors. On a related topic, when church leaders in various localities objected to Catholic school children being forced to use the King James Version of the Bible rather than a church
authorized translation, Protestant church and lay leaders charged Catholics were anti-Bible.\textsuperscript{22}

Throughout antebellum American society, writers without second thought made passing references to instances of Catholic atrocities, even when discussing some topic not directly related to the church. An example of the offhanded nature in which anti-Catholic sentiment was often expressed is found in an anti-slavery pamphlet of former Charlestonian Angelina Grimké, a transplanted southerner unwelcomed in her homeland, who with her husband, Theodore Weld, were noted Massachusetts abolitionists. Noting the consequences of challenging the status quo, Mrs. Weld asked, "[w]hy were Luther and Caivin persecuted and excommunicated, Cranmer, Ridley, and Latimer burned? Because they fearlessly proclaimed the truth, though the truth was contrary to public opinion, & the authority of Ecclesiastical councils and conventions." She went on to lament:

all those hundreds & thousands of women, who perished in the Low countries of Holland ... when the Catholic Inquisitions of Europe became the merciless executioners of vindictive wrath, upon those who dared to worship God, instead of bowing down in unholy adoration before 'my Lord God the Pope.'\textsuperscript{23}


\textsuperscript{23} Angelina Grimké Weld, Appeal to the Christian Women of the South (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836), 20-21 and 23.
In 1836, when she penned these lines, Weld was arguing for the then still generally unpopular position of immediate abolition. It is noteworthy that Weld used language that would be so antagonistic to Catholics. She and her publisher certainly would not have done so had they believed they would offend the audience they hoped to persuade. Condemning Protestant American rebels in Texas for fighting to reestablish slavery in a Catholic nation where it had been abolished twelve years earlier, Weld failed to see the irony of her comments regarding Catholicism. Moreover, Weld's remarks underscore the larger irony in attempting an explanation of white Protestant southerners' distrust of Catholic immigrants: the American Catholic Church came under attack from both abolitionists in the North and pro-slavery supporters in the South.

As was true across the antebellum United States, a wide assortment of books for sale in Charleston bookstores, acquired by Charleston libraries, and written by Charlestonians often expressed anti-Catholic sentiments. Additionally, such sentiment was expressed freely in Charleston's streets and newspapers. Preaching at the Episcopal Church's 1833 South Carolina diocesan convention just two years before the post office raid, the Reverend Jasper Adams, president of the College
of Charleston and a distant cousin to the revolutionary leader Samuel Adams and the American presidents John and John Quincy Adams, railed against papal authority, declaring that "[b]y a series of gradual, but well contrived usurpations, a Bishop of the Church claiming to be the successor of the Chief of the Apostles and the Vicar of Christ, had been seen for centuries, to rule the nations of Christendom with the sceptre of despotism."  

Charleston was clearly in the American mainstream in the anti-Catholic rhetoric that pervaded the culture. Even so, the most inflammatory anti-Catholic work appearing before the 1835 Post Office Raid was a Massachusetts publication, Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent*. Published in Boston in 1834 and certainly one of the most controversial books of the antebellum period, Reed's work purported to disclose an accurate picture of her stay as a novice in the Charlestown, Massachusetts, Ursuline house. Claiming to have been held against her will as a novice in the religious order for half a year, Miss Reed was in fact a domestic servant in the convent for about two months.

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Encouraged and promoted by Boston area Protestant ministers, Reed concocted a story that conformed to the prejudices of her supporters and won her the attention she craved.\textsuperscript{25} Unfortunately, the consequences of her mischief proved tragic.

Bishop Benedict Fenwick of Boston—the Baltimore archbishop's vicar general in Charleston, South Carolina, who had welcomed Bishop John England to his new see in 1820—had established the Ursuline convent atop a Charlestown hill across the river from Boston. The hill, renamed in honor of Bishop Fenwick, was called Mount Benedict. Here the Ursulines operated a secondary school for girls, enrolling both Catholics and Protestants. The publication of Reed's story and the harangue many Boston-area Protestant ministers embraced in promoting the book served to stir passion and anti-Catholic bigotry.

In the wake of Reed's book and the anti-Catholic sermons preached by Protestant ministers led by Lyman Beecher, one of the Ursuline nuns—Elizabeth Harrison, in religion known as Sister Mary John, and the academy's music teacher—suffered a nervous breakdown and fled to a neighboring farm. Arriving at the farm in a confused state,

\textsuperscript{25}Rebecca Theresa Reed, \textit{Six Months in a Convent; or the Narrative of Rebecca Theresa Reed, Who was under the Influence of the Roman Catholics about two years, and an Inmate of the Ursuline Convent on Mount Benedict, Charlestown, Mass., nearly six months, in the years 1831–32} (Boston: Russell, Odiorne, and Metcalf, 1835).
Harrison was taken to her brother's house, where she calmed down somewhat and asked to see the bishop. Shortly after Fenwick visited the troubled nun on the day after her flight from the convent, Harrison asked to return to Mount Benedict and was escorted by her family back to the Ursuline house. In light of Reed's charges, many Bostonians were ready to believe that Harrison's "escape" had been foiled by the intrigues of Bishop Fenwick and his minions.26

For several days, local authorities demanded to inspect the convent grounds, while providing no search warrant, and to interview Sister Mary John Harrison. To the requests, the convent superior responded in a condescending manner, which further vexed the authorities. Finally, on Monday evening, August 11, 1834, an angry crowd of mostly laborers, skilled mechanics, and teenage boys, well supplied with alcoholic drink, marched on the convent unopposed by either any constabulary or militia force. After a few speakers further riled the drunken crowd, the mob stormed the convent, ransacked the rooms, desecrated the chapel altar, and looted religious items and other valuables. Having wrecked the building, the mob set it afire. The event set off a week of anti-Catholic rioting and violence that shocked Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

During the initial assault on the convent, the nuns and their students barely escaped to hide in a nearby field. The women and their young charges spend a night running about the countryside seeking sanctuary, before being offered safe haven by a sympathetic neighbor. The strain proved too much for two of the sisters. One older nun died of heart failure and a young consumptive nun died soon after from the effects of the trauma on her already weakened condition. Many among Boston’s middle and upper classes were appalled at the wanton destruction of property and the threat represented by this breach of the social order. In June 1835 all but one of those indicted in the convent riot was acquitted. As most of the accused were known to have been involved in the crimes, the outcome of the trials appalled Catholics and angered even a few non-Catholics.²⁷

Readily believed by American Protestants already suspicious of Catholicism, Reed’s book reached a far wider audience than the Boston environs. In an effort to correct the misinformation disseminated in Reed’s book, Mother Mary Ann Ursula, the superior at the convent, published a refutation that was largely ignored in the wave of popularity

that *Six Months in a Convent* enjoyed. In their harangue against Catholicism and the threat it represented to the American republic, Reed’s supporters stopped long enough to publish a short dismissive review of the superior’s rebuttal of *Six Months in a Convent.* South Carolina booksellers in Charleston were still headlining Reed’s book in their 1835 advertisements in the city’s newspapers. So great was the book’s influence that Bishop England found it necessary to undertake a detailed refutation of the book’s contents in his diocesan newspaper, *The United States Catholic Miscellany.* Indeed, Reed’s tale proved to have such an impact that four years later, in addressing claims made by a New England minister, an 1839 *Catholic Miscellany* article reminded its readers that the minister had been involved in the books’ promotion.28

**Influence of Ethnic Stereotypes**

In the early history of anti-immigration and anti-Catholicism, the nativist assumed that the climate of American society would lead recent

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immigrants to embrace republican ideology and Protestant Christianity. The influence of life in a free society would convert the immigrant to an American perspective. However, two otherwise unrelated antebellum American cultural trends converged to shift the public's understanding of immigrants.

First, the scientific community's advances in several disciplines and the increasing sense of professionalism within the community instilled a keener public appreciation for science and technology. The work of early anthropologists was beginning to shape the way the western world perceived racial characteristics and racial differences. In addition to the fields of study that led to serious scientific research and the development of modern disciplines, the early nineteenth-century witnessed pseudoscientific endeavors garnering public interest and support. These latter pursuits, such as phrenology and physiognomy, often appeared to have the same rules of evidence as and to buttress the findings of legitimate scientific pursuits. Racist assumptions prevalent in American and European cultures were reinforced by scientific work of varying legitimacy, while simultaneously finding their way into the scientific projects. Thus, phrenology and anthropology, for instance, often came to similar conclusions regarding ethnic and racial groups,
and the phrenologists and anthropologists worked from a common set of racist assumptions.  

In the second trend in antebellum America, Catholicism was gaining strength even as church leaders faced controversies surrounding the issue of lay trusteeism and the problems of little money and few priests. Bishops were recruiting young men to the priesthood and securing the services of European women's religious orders. Churches, schools, and other institutions were being established. Unlike Catholic immigrants arriving prior to 1830 or 1840, the Catholic immigrant of the late antebellum period was likely to find an active Catholic community when he arrived. He was also more likely than were earlier immigrants to remain within the church. Thus, while nativists were expecting the demise of Catholicism in the face of the rational thought and individualism of republican ideology, the Catholic immigrant seemed more intransigent than ever in his religious belief. 

In other words, the Catholic immigrant remained in his church not because of some inherent problem in the rationality of republican ideology or in Protestantism, but because the immigrant suffered one or

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more weaknesses characteristic of his race. This shift, based on the nascent social sciences of the day, helped Protestant Americans account for the immigrant’s faithfulness to Catholicism and cultural heritage. For Protestant America, the failure of immigrants readily and completely to assimilate American political and cultural values did not rest in some previously undetected weakness in American culture, but in the racial inferiority of the immigrant. The implications of this shift from environment to natural abilities have been traced in the history of American immigration, and the influence this shift had on American whites’ attitudes towards blacks and other peoples of color is easily surmised.

Fear of the potential economic and social instability represented by the latest wave of immigration has persisted in the American experience. In the antebellum period, hostility toward Catholics, particularly the Irish, was very strong. In fact, for many Americans, “immigrant” represented the Irish Catholic threat to American society. One historian has even suggested that American Protestants were less concerned about Catholicism than they were by the Irishness of antebellum immigrants.31

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31 Randall M. Miller, “Introduction” from Catholics in the Old South edited by Randall M. Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983) addresses the issue of anti-Irish bigotry in the nativist and anti-Catholic language of antebellum America. Feldberg, The Turbulent Era, has suggested that “Catholicism was a less important factor than Irishness...” (35).
Even as Protestant nativists bemoaned the threat posed by the first large wave of immigration, Americans were making distinctions among the various ethnic groups arriving in the nation's port cities. These distinctions, based on often centuries old ethnic stereotypes and prejudices, largely determined the degree of resistance each ethnic group encountered.

Although most Americans had first thought of themselves as a new nation of people during the Revolutionary period, the characteristics of what it was to be an American were not easily or quickly defined. During the Jacksonian Era, Americans were busily building a nation of roads and canals, cities and farms, while confronting myriad social issues from immigration to abolitionism and other reform movements. In the process, Americans and their foreign visitors were discerning the national and cultural traits by which Americans would be defined. In this time of American self-discovery, the Irish and other immigrants threatened the homogeneity of white society. The increasing anxiety, which was witnessed in this era of America's coming of age, can be measured in the words used in writing about immigrants, notably the Irish, as a foreign presence in the midst of the antebellum American landscape.32

32Knobel, Paddy and the Republic, 4-7.
In roughly the first two-thirds of the antebellum period, about 1820 to 1845, Anglo-Americans generally perceived the distinctions between themselves and recent immigrants to be the result of environmental differences. Only in the latter part of the antebellum era did ethnic differences come to be viewed by most Americans to be rooted in racial characteristics. Although nineteenth-century people used the terms “nationality,” “race,” and “a people” interchangeably and loosely, it is clear that the popular perception of the causes behind ethnic differences shifted from nurture to nature during the late 1840s.\footnote{Ibid., 26-28.}

While Anglo-Americans discussed the racial differences among various groups of European Americans, placing the Irish and others in inferior positions, they created a chasm between whites and African Americans. The African rested squarely at the bottom of the racial caste system that defined Jacksonian America’s economic and social relations. For many whites, this divide between white and black was the unbridgeable difference between human and sub-human, between free and slave. This racial division was particularly important to the Irish and other working class whites who saw free blacks—an anomaly of the
racially bipolar class system—as the greatest threat to their social and economic security.³⁴

Here is the beginning of the successful assimilation of the Irish and other Catholics in antebellum America, particularly in southern culture. Southerners lived daily with their fear of servile insurrection and its potential threat to their personal security and social order. For most white southerners, the Irish were a problem, but the greater danger was from free blacks, many of whom, as mulattos, by their very existence, challenged the South’s economic and social structures. Southern whites feared that the free blacks’ potential influence over the slave population further imperiled social order. In context of the South’s racially defined society and economy, the poor Irish posed a challenge to the establishment’s system, but their white racial identity ameliorated the religious, ethnic, and economic distinctions. White solidarity in a biracial society made the Irish a part of the so-called master race and as such lessened the antagonisms against them. At the same time, the Irish laborer’s support of a biracial class system, which placed him in the

master race, provided the southern white slaveholder with a political ally in the defense of slavery.\textsuperscript{35}

**Attitudes toward Irish Immigrants**

Particularly after the mid-1840s and the diaspora in the wake of the potato famine, Irish immigrants flooded northern ports in the United States. While most remained in the North or eventually migrated westward, some traveled South in search of work. These Irish, like others before them, often took jobs in canal and railroad construction or on the docks of port cities such as Charleston. Taking work that either positioned them in competition with free blacks or in lieu of more valuable slave labor, the Irish began a transformation from oppressed race in his native land to a member of the oppressor race in his adopted country. In becoming supporters of the American social status quo that ensured them a place above blacks, Irish immigrants became true white Americans. In so doing, these sons of Ireland turned their backs on their

\textsuperscript{35}Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), 62-89, see especially 69 and 89. Ignatiev argues that historians that it is not so much a matter of slavery making possible the extension of citizenship privileges to the Irish, as it is the Irish support for pro-slavery ideology and Irish assimilation into the white master race making possible the continuation of slavery. Even so, Ignatiev recognizes that the political relationship between northern Irish American laborers and southern slaveholders was reciprocal.
countrymen, ignored the antislavery rhetoric of Irish nationalist Daniel O'Connell, and earned the scorn of American antislavery advocates.  

While the Irish and other Catholic immigrants eventually won a place within white America, the process was gradual and marked by examples of bigotry in public discourse and community events. Immigrant Catholics received the slings of antebellum nativism and anti-Catholicism. Even as Charleston’s Protestants viewed immigrant Catholics with deep suspicion, they perceived differences among the Catholics. These differences were rooted in the Anglo-American Protestant’s ethnic prejudices.

On the national level, the political and social discourse targeted the perceived incompatibility between so-called Anglo-Saxon and Celtic racial characteristics of Americans and Irishmen, respectively. The second largest group of antebellum immigrants to the United States was the Germans, who during the 1850s actually surpassed the Irish in annual immigration figures. Unlike the Irish, Germans were thought to successfully embrace American culture because their Teutonic racial characteristics were so much like the American Anglo-Saxon.

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In Charleston, German immigrants included large numbers of Lutherans and some Jews. Until the latter part of the antebellum period, Charleston’s German Catholics were small in number and actually had less influence in the Catholic community than the French. The large number of Protestants among the Germans mitigated their alien status. Perhaps more significantly and certainly on a deeper, less discernable level, the relatively positive ethnic stereotype that Germans elicited in Anglo-American thought smoothed their entry into lowcountry culture.38

Although Germans were one of the larger groups of Catholics in South Carolina and may have outnumbered French Catholics, the two main groups among Charleston’s Catholics through much of the antebellum period were the Irish and the San Domingan French. With a distinction predicated on inherited prejudices and anecdotal impressions, ethnicity influenced Charleston’s reception of these two Catholic groups. Many of Charleston’s Irish Catholics were at the bottom of the socio-economic scale among whites. Generally from rural areas of Ireland, these immigrants arrived in America too poor to move beyond the cities where they came ashore or to buy land or property. They also often lacked useful skills that might have made them more employable. Out of necessity, these immigrants sought what unskilled labor jobs were

38Knobel, 31-33 and 99 and Fraser, Charleston! Charleston!, 204, 227.
available. In an economy based on slave labor, the unskilled or menial labor of the Irish, who formed the core of the city's non-slave work force, was not greatly appreciated.39

On the other hand, most of the French Catholics in Charleston had arrived from San Domingo in the wake of the successful slave revolt that established Haiti as the western hemisphere's only black republic. While most of the French were not slaveowners, they came from a colony that had achieved a reputation for opulence and wealth predicated on slave labor. These refugees were accustomed to and supportive of African slavery. Moreover, the world's opinion, as will be discussed in greater length later in the chapter, allowed the French to assume a position as arbiters of taste, fashion, and manners in Charleston society. With their personal contacts among the slaveholding elite, the French Catholics were in a position of influence disproportional to their actual numbers within Charleston's Catholic community.

39Kerby Miller, *Exiles and Emigrants: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 199-200. While the emigration patterns up through the end of the Napoleonic Wars featured more Protestants and more urban dwelling craftsmen, artisans, and merchants, Miller notes that in the period between the Napoleonic Wars and the Potato Famine, a number of factors—including the establishment of regular and cheaper passenger service from Ireland to North America—provided the impetus for the migration of a broader, more socio-economically diverse group of Irish, but the trend was towards the emigration of more Catholics and or greater numbers of the poor. By the end of the period, a large majority of those leaving Ireland each year were farmers, renters, and manual laborers.
For most of the Irish immigrants, the lack of job skills marketable in an urban setting and the ruling class’s anti-Irish prejudices combined to make for a life of poverty. This prejudice among Charleston’s native-born, Anglo-American Protestant population was a sentiment of long standing. Acknowledging two, if not three, ethnicities or races of people in Ireland, the conventional wisdom in both America and Britain insisted that the native-born Catholic Irishman was ignorant, superstitious, and vile. Even those Englishmen and Americans who thought more should be done for the Irish all too often shared the prevailing racist attitude of condescension.\textsuperscript{40}

For example, one of the books found in the Charleston Library Society, was written by Daniel Dewar, an Englishman, in 1812. Attempting to defend the character of the native-Irish and suggesting a program for the development of Ireland, Dewar conceded that “[a]fter all, the character which I have been delineating must be allowed to have many faults.”\textsuperscript{41} Further, he claims:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{40}R. F. Foster, \textit{Modern Ireland 1600-1972} (London: Penguin, 1989) 167-225 discusses the worldviews of the Irish Catholic and the Anglo-Irish Anglican. The third major group in Irish politics was the Scots-Irish Presbyterians who settled primarily in Ulster. This ethnic diversity is reflected in the writings of several commentators, including Daniel Dewar, who discusses the three “races” present in Ireland, while focusing on the Irish Catholic.

\textsuperscript{41}Daniel Dewar, \textit{Observations on the Character, Customs, and Superstitions of the Irish; and on some of the causes which have Retarded the Moral and Political Improvement of Ireland} (2 volumes in one book, London: Gale
[It will] be credited that it is only of late the native Irish were viewed in any other light than a species of the rudest savage barbarians, as unworthy, as they were incapable, of receiving instruction; and were therefore abandoned, without a single effort to cultivate or reclaim them, to the dark and devious maze of the profoundest ignorance, and of the most hateful but fascinating error.\textsuperscript{42}

While Dewar argues against a misperception of the Irish, he attributes their faults "to the moral and political circumstances in which the Irish have been placed."\textsuperscript{43}

For Dewar and others, if the Irish themselves were not loathsome, their religion rendered them so. And here, the ethnic prejudice gives way to religious bigotry. "It is not to be supposed that the Popish religion directly produces habits of inebriation; but it sanctions the idleness of an ignorant and superstitious people, by appointing so many holidays, and by making intoxication a trifling offence...." Dewar was convinced that "these vices partly occasion that poverty and wretchedness which cover so great a portion of Ireland."\textsuperscript{44}

Afterall, "[s]uperstition and priestcraft, when they could not oppose [Christianity's] triumphant progress, enlisted under its banner, and

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., I, 106.

\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., I, 41.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., II, 154.
assuming its hallowed name, erected a power which, during a long night of darkness, benumbed the energies of man." Part of the solution to Ireland's Catholic darkness, according to Dewar, was the employment of Protestant, highlander Scots schoolmasters and preachers throughout Ireland. In short, Irish antipathy to English rule could be eradicated by the proven method of "conciliating measures, of an enlightened education, and of Christian instruction" that had effected such a change in the Scottish Highlands in the twenty years following the Jacobite rebellion of 1745. While Scots highlanders may well have disagreed with Dewar's benign view of English policies in post-rebellion Scotland, the argument for a similar "enlightened" policy in Ireland was predicated upon ethnic scorn and anti-Catholicism. 45

**Attitudes toward San Domingan Refugees**

Anglo-Americans were also capable of anti-French sentiment, but Charleston's French residents encountered little animosity compared to the Irish for a number of reasons. First, Charleston in the early antebellum period had a strong Jeffersonian Republican sentiment that generally promoted a sympathetic position regarding the French. Secondly, Anglo-American Charlestonians had a long acquaintance with

with Frenchmen. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1687, a number of Huguenots, or French Protestants, had immigrated to Charleston to avoid religious persecution.\textsuperscript{46}

After the successful slave revolt in San Domingo, whites from the island fled to other islands in the Caribbean—many to Cuba where they used their expertise to improve that island’s sugar crop—and to southern ports in the United States. Charleston received a number of these French Catholic refugees in the wake of the island slaves’ revolution. One Charlestonian observed that the refugees came as “a stream of miserable French people from the islands,” arriving “usually destitute, frequently wounded or sick, and always distressed.”\textsuperscript{47}

As noted above, the French emigrated directly or indirectly from San Domingo, beginning with the slave revolt in 1791. The wealth accumulated in sugar cultivation in the French colonies of the Caribbean was legendary. This concept was particularly true of San Domingo, France’s tiny colony on the western end of the island of Hispanola, where many Europeans and Americans believed a fortune could be easily made.

\textsuperscript{46}Walter J. Fraser, Jr., Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 10 and 181-82.

Hundreds of Frenchmen braved the Atlantic crossing to seek a fortune in sugar anticipating early retirement in France. For most, the reality proved a harsh disappointment. While a few planters made vast fortunes on San Domingo, the majority of the island's whites were small planters or merchants.

While some visitors to the island attempted in their subsequent publications to refute the idyllic view of San Domingo, the world continued to see the island as a paradise. Writing about his sojourn in San Domingo in 1788 and 1790, the Baron de Wimpfflen acknowledged that "[p]eople imagine in Europe that the colony is only inhabited by men overflowing with riches; wholly occupied with the care of employing their immense wealth in diversifying and multiplying their pleasures."

Likewise, in 1797, writing of the island during the period 1789 to 1794, Bryan Edwards, an English planter from the Caribbean, mourned the passing of Port-au-Prince, "a city which for trade, opulence, and magnificence, was undoubtedly the first in the West Indies,—perhaps in the New World. ..."

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48 Baron de Wimpfflen, A Voyage to Saint Domingo, 145; and Bryan Edwards, An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo: Comprehending a Short Account of its Ancient Government, Political State, Population, Production, and Exports; A Narrative of the Calamities which have Desolated the Country ever since the year 1789, with some Reflections on their Causes and Probable Consequences; and a Detail of the Military Transactions of
This reputation for opulence was not completely unfounded, for as a British army officer, Colonel Charles Chalmers, noted, "[a]ll the Militia of the West Indies are solicitous to serve on horseback; and this is natural, seeing their easy and luxurious mode of life, and their climate so unpropitious to military exertion." Still, these European writers were reaffirming existing positions even while attempting to reveal the social ills that plagued San Domingo. In his comment about West Indian militia, Chalmers underscored the foolishness of having mounted soldiers in San Domingo where "the plains ... are chiefly cultivated and strongly fenced ... and are extremely unfavorable to the operations of cavalry." Additionally, "these plains are exceeded at least twenty to one by mountains, which seem almost inaccessible to cavalry." Chalmers concluded "no country seems so unfit for horse as San Domingo, where forage is scarce, and where European and American horses perish like their riders by disease." Yet, for the French colonials in San Domingo, nothing less than a mounted militia would suffice, regardless of the impracticalities and ostentation involved.49

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49Charles Chalmers, Remarks on the late War in St. Domingo, with observations on the Relative Situation in Jamaica, and other Interesting Subjects (London: Nichol and Son, 1803), 38-39.
De Wimpffen, in a heavily moralistic tone, condemned several social institutions of San Domingo. He reported, in Jaquemel in May 1789, the construction of a church using building materials shipped from France, but warned his readers of having “a high opinion of the piety of the colonists.” Sarcastically, the baron cautioned, “[h]e who loves to *wander in unfrequented places,* may enter the churches of Saint Domingo without fear: he will not find there *Les dégrès de l’autel usés par la prière.*” The baron also derided the colonists’ failure to establish an educational system on an island “where population, thinly scattered, compels the greatest part of the colonists to live in a kind of solitude, which exposes them to all the evils of listlessness and ennui.” Crowning his outrage with contempt, de Wimpffen enjoined, “let not the partisans of the opinion, that arts corrupt the morals, be too much alarmed: there is nothing to corrupt at Saint Domingo!”

Repulsed at the lack of efficiency in labor and the swinish opulence of the planters, de Wimpffen declared “there is no country where the fortunes of individuals are less solid, and where the anxiety of securing them ... so effectually trouble the enjoyments they might otherwise

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50 De Wimpffen, *Voyage to Saint Domingo*, 90-91. (The baron commends San Domingan churches as refuges for those seeking quiet inasmuch as the solitary person will not find there “the altar steps worn down with prayer.”)

produce.” In short, he wrote, “[i]n no part of the world are riches and happiness less synonymous [sic] than at Saint Domingo.” To prove his assertion, de Wimpffen cited the occasions when he had stopped at different estates, only to find that there were but “two kinds of plantations ... one shewed [sic] us only the picture of indolence in the last stage of wretchedness; and the other, that of negligence and disorder of poverty, contrasted with the pretentious of opulence directed by the most execrable taste.” The baron concluded, “we would sometimes meet an elegant carriage drawn by horses, or mules of different colours, and of different sizes, with ropes for traces, covered with the most filthy housings, and driven by a postilion bedaubed in gold, and barefoot!” He would also later complain he did “not know how the rich inhabitants of the plain contrive to manage it; but nothing resembles a state of wretchedness so much as their opulence.”

In spite of de Wimpffen’s repulsion and Chalmers’ smugness, most Europeans continued to view the colonial world of Saint Domingo as the epitome of easy and fine living. The nineteenth century’s perceptions of Saint Domingo were reflected in the attitudes of early twentieth-century historians. Theodore Lothrop Stoddard maintained that the island “rightfully enjoyed a widespread reputation for wealth and luxury.”

52Ibid., 202 and 215.
Answering critics such as de Wimpffen, Stoddard further argued that a scarcity of real money, the hardships imposed by the *Pacte Coloniale*, and an universal extravagance devoured the princely revenues of San Domingo’s planters. Writing about the French refugees from San Domingo, a later historian noted the tremendous wealth of the island and compared the eighteenth century’s impression of the term “Creole” with that of the nineteenth century’s of “nabob.” While ironic since few of the San Domingan French were truly Creoles, or whites born in the colony, the comparison suggests the reputation that San Domingo’s white inhabitants had among Europeans and white Americans.  

While the Huguenot presence had strengthened Charleston’s anti-Catholic sentiment, the San Domingan refugees found uneasy acceptance because of their reputation for *haute couture*. This attitude about the haute couture of Saint Domingo is reflected in Charleston in the newspaper coverage of French families who refugeed and settled in

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Stoddard argued that among San Domingo’s white inhabitants, even among townsmen and planters, there were “few marriages and fewer children.” He further notes the almost two to one ratio of white men to white women in the colony and reminds his readers that “this was a population of fortune-hunters, not settlers, and the return to France was ever in men’s minds” (21).

Additionally, Stoddard, 20-21, claims the white population of Saint-Domingue was predominantly foreign, i.e. European, born, noting that certainly one-half (Garran-Coulon, I, 16) and possibly three-fourths (Moreau de Sand Mery, I, 9) were of European birth.
the Palmetto State. The *Charleston Times* noted the marriage "on Tuesdav evening, the 17th instant by the rev. Dr. Gallagher, John Gropchan, Esq. To the amiable Miss Adelle DeGrasse daughter of the late count DeGrasse, lieut. General of the naval army of the late king of France." Further, in reporting the October 30, 1800 death of Stephen Toussiger, the *Times* reported the deceased was "truly and justly lamented by all who had the pleasure of his acquaintance; whose affable and engaging manners endeared him to all who knew him."\(^{54}\)

Ironically, the San Domingan Catholics’ status as slaveowners was also the very thing about these French-speaking refugees that most worried Charleston’s white Protestants. The French refugees brought with them some of their slaves. These slaves spoke Creole, a pidgin French, and were more likely than Carolina lowcountry slaves to have come directly into New World slavery from Africa. The assimilation of slaves into French culture had not been a goal of the San Domingan planter. While the San Domingan slaves were nominally Catholic, their owners’ duty to provide religious instruction, in general, had never been systematic or thoroughgoing. Harried in France by their bishops and religious for their laziness, heterodoxy, lack of discipline, or some combination of the three, the priests who served the colonists in the

\(^{54}\) *Charleston Times*, February 20, 1801, 10 and October 31, 1800, 1.
Caribbean were hardly the dedicated, let alone pious, men needed. The slaves all too often mixed their Catholicism with elements of their tribal religions and superstitions, and among them grew up the practice—part religion, part magic—of voodoo. In addition to the slaveholders and a few slaves, many free blacks also fled the bloodshed in the French colony. For white Protestant Charlestonians, the enslaved and free black refugees from Saint Domingo, with their foreign tongue and unknown rituals, were to be feared.\textsuperscript{55}

After the successful slave revolt in 1791, France was determined to suppress the Negro republic. Under Napoleon, this desire was given force. Following the Peace of Amiens, October 1801, which provided a truce between France and its long-time foe, Britain, Napoleon attempted to reestablish France’s Caribbean empire, including slavery. Napoleon's brother-in-law, General Charles Leclerc, led a large force into Haiti in February 1802. By the time the French withdrew twenty-two months later in December 1803, Napoleon had lost 40,000 men—many to tropical fevers, including Leclerc. The French emperor also had resumed his fight with Britain after John Bull declared war in May 1803. In San Domingo, the failed French aggressive, which was characterized by

several examples of brutality against the former slaves, had served largely to incite the black majority to violence against the white inhabitants remaining on the island.56

The European conflagration continued to affect the Caribbean region and the United States. While President Jefferson attempted to keep the United States neutral with an Embargo Act that in the end hurt only American shippers, Spain in May 1808 witnessed an uprising against the French emperor and his brother, the Spanish puppet king Joseph. The British seized on the opportunity and invaded the Iberian Peninsula with a considerable force in support of the rebellion. The Peninsular War was a success for the British.57

With the collapse of the French-backed Spanish government in 1808 following France's Caribbean debacle five years earlier, Cuba's local authorities were again in full charge of their island. Of course, Cuban leaders saw the advantage of cooperating with the British. In short, the

56 Jan Rogoziński, *A Brief History of the Caribbean From the Arawak and the Carib to the Present* (Harmondsworth, England and New York: Plendian), 172.

fall of Spain's Bonaparte king meant that San Domingan refugees—after nearly twenty years—were no longer welcome in Cuba.58

Again forced from their homes, many San Domingans leaving Cuba made for the southern ports of the United States. While they and their slaves were eventually allowed entry, the San Domingan slaves proved problematic for the American government. Federal law, anticipated since the penning of the United States Constitution in 1787, made the foreign slave trade illegal beginning in 1808. As with the San Domingan slaves arriving with white refugees in the 1790s, the slaves journeying with their masters from Cuba were much more likely to have been born in Africa and to have living memories of freedom in their homelands than did the South Carolina lowcountry's native-born slaves. These San Domingan slaves also spoke Creole and engaged in religious practices far removed from the dominant forms of worship and devotional life practiced among the Palmetto State's Protestant Christians. Additionally, the San Domingan slaves were part of the slave population that had launched a new nation after instigating the only successful slave revolt in the Americas. In short, these refugee slaves again evoked fear among South Carolina's whites, who could imagine no greater evil than black rule.

The genesis of the black republic of Haiti long served as a warning to white slaveowners across the American South of the dangers inherent in servile insurrection. In fact, as late as 1860 with the Republican Party's nomination of Abraham Lincoln for the presidency, southerners were warned "to defend their honor, their properties, and their families" or suffer the "beastly horrors of the ... Revolution in St. Domingo. ..."59 In spite of their concerns, whites received the French refugees and their slaves. Perhaps the loyalty of the refugeeing slaves touched a chord with white southerners, who were all too willing to lull themselves into a sense of security with their faith in the loyalty of their own slaves and by the thought that they had taken all appropriate and necessary measures to safeguard the peace and well-being of their community.

In the Atlantic world such was the San Domingan's reputation for prodigal luxury that the French colonials' lifestyle gave rise to the expression, "to dine à la Creole," that is to say, to eat a meal from a profuse display of foods. Often possessing no more skills than their Irish counterparts, the San Domingan French peddled culture in music classes, etiquette studios, and art galleries. Finally, though only a fraction of the refugees had been grand blancs, or large plantation

owners, white Charleston Protestants accepted the San Domingan French as fellow slaveowners and supporters of the slavery system.60

The San Domingan reputation for opulence and high living had made the inhabitants of France’s wealthiest colony the envy of the western world. With little to call their own, many of these San Domingan whites settled in Charleston and other southern port cities and created new lives for themselves as arbiters of taste and purveyors of culture. Coming from a colonial society based on slave economics helped ease the San Domingans entry into the social life of the southern cities to which they fled. Although a small group, the San Domingans exerted a large influence in Charleston and in the city’s Catholic community. Their positions in society guaranteed them this influence through much of the antebellum period.61

Chapter Summary

The history of Catholicism in the antebellum American South differs in important respects from the more thoroughly covered history of the Church in the northern and Midwestern states. While Catholics in

all parts of the United States confronted anti-Catholicism and nativism, Catholics in the Deep South also faced the issue of slavery. Mostly immigrants, southern Catholics were primarily from areas in Europe with little or no recent direct experience with slavery. Indeed, Irish Catholics, while often comparing their lot under British rule with that of slaves, proudly boasted that slavery had been unknown in their homeland for centuries. Only the French refugees from Caribbean slave revolts came to the Carolinas and Georgia with a familiarity with slavery.

White Southerners, especially those in lowcountry Carolina where blacks greatly outnumbered whites, were suspicious of potential trouble represented by foreigners. Many of the early Catholic immigrants to the American republic had left the church for a variety of reasons. As Catholic immigration to American increased after the War of 1812, the number of foreign-born who remained in their native Church also increased. More priests were immigrating and American bishops were making headway in training a native-born clergy. Additionally, the antebellum immigrant was increasingly likely to be Irish and the Irish Catholics arriving in the United States after 1815 were more likely to be resolute in their religion than earlier Catholic immigrants were. Thus, the antebellum Catholic immigrant came to pose a double threat to the

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61 Fraser, Charleston! Charleston!, 182-84.
southern way of life, because of his foreign-birth and his insistence on his own religious traditions.

In the face of a growing American Catholic Church, many Protestants worried about the safety of their national government. Motivated by a religious bigotry inherited from the Protestant Reformation, many Americans called for limits on immigration, extended time requirements for citizenship, and other measures intended to reduce the influence and political power of immigrants. Many wrote and many more read the diatribes against "the whore of Babylon," as the Catholic Church was often called. In many instances violence against Catholics and their property was threatened and in several instances damage was done.

In the South, several circumstances worked to ameliorate the anti-Catholic threat. First, Catholics were never very numerous in the South and were found for the most part in the urban centers of the region. Secondly, Bishop England of Charleston and other prelates publicly expressed support for American institutions. To reassure the Protestant majority, Catholic leaders wrote frequently on the Catholic's obligations as good citizens of the republic. In the bishops' letters to American Catholics following the first and second Provincial Councils, Bishop England repeated this theme. Additionally, church leaders in the South spoke out in support of the region's peculiar institution, thus reassuring
their Protestant neighbors of the Catholic immigrant's commitment to the southern way of life.

Even so, anti-Catholicism and nativism became more pronounced as the antebellum period developed. In addition to the success of the Church in recruiting priests and keeping immigrants in the faith, other factors motivated and shaped the anti-Catholicism of the Jacksonian Era. A growing interest in science and the development of anthropology and related pseudosciences made popular new concepts of race and ethnicity. Scientific explanations for age-old ethnic stereotypes were outlined and expounded, influencing both pro-slavery ideology and ethnic bigotry. The two largest groups of Catholics nationally were the Irish and the Germans. In Charleston, the Germans were not very numerous and lacked the influence of the San Domingan French. Thus, for the Carolinas and Georgia, the two main Catholic ethnic groups were the Irish and the French.

While the Anglo-American Protestant's stereotype image of the San Domingan French opened doors of opportunity in Charleston and elsewhere in the United States for the refugees of the Haitian Revolution, that of the Irish had quite the opposite effect. Almost overlooking the Catholicism of the San Domingans, Charleston Protestants patronized the businesses of the French dressmakers, jewelers, confectioners, and others in the city. Meanwhile, the Irish farmers arriving with few skills
suitable to urban life found jobs as unskilled or semiskilled laborers along the docks and in the warehouses of Charleston. According to de Wimpffen and others, the French colonials’ lacked religious ardor, having a less than devout approach to religious life. Perhaps Charleston’s San Domingan refugees were not overly zealous Catholics. On the other hand, the Irish had found solace and a sense of national identity in the Catholic Church, whose leadership had placed it in solidarity with the Irish people during the three centuries of their resistance to English rule. These factors clearly influenced the perceptions that Charleston’s Protestants had of these two ethnic groups, who formed the larger part of the city’s Catholic community.
CHAPTER FIVE

Catholic Influences on Southern Protestant Prejudices

An examination of anti-Catholic rhetoric evidenced in the Jacksonian period of United States history reveals several layers of thought influencing the religious prejudice of many Protestant Americans. Distrust of a hierarchical and autocratic ecclesial government and the almost folk memory of the persecution of Protestants during the Reformation prompted many Americans to fear the Catholic Church. Supported by developing disciplines such as anthropology and pseudosciences such as phrenology and physiognomy, Anglo-American ethnic prejudice against Catholic immigrants reinforced the anti-Catholicism that permeated American culture in the antebellum period.

Given the nineteenth-century American Protestants' unfavorable predisposition towards Catholicism and southern Protestants' attitudes toward both the Catholic Church and antislavery forces, it is remarkable that Catholics in America and abroad at times embraced positions that undermined the relationship between Catholics and Protestant in the United States. Furthermore, Bishop England and other American
Catholics were involved in activities that raised Protestants' suspicions about Catholicism's place in the American republic and about Catholic support for American institutions, especially slavery.

In the Charleston diocese in the two or three years prior to the 1835 Post Office Raid, controversy surrounded Bishop England's diplomatic work on behalf of the Holy See and his efforts to open Catholic schools in his own see. In the wake of the Post Office Raid, these activities haunted Bishop England and Charleston Catholics for two nights of fear and waiting as the bishop and members of the Irish Guards stood vigil in defense of church property. In retrospect it is plain that the very public endeavors of Bishop England and other Catholics across the United States and abroad engendered misunderstanding and sometimes even hostility and violence.

**Catholic Influences from Abroad**

Among the foreign influences in America during the Charleston episcopate of John England, two Catholics overseas helped shape Protestant attitudes towards southern Catholics. The first of these two was the Irish nationalist, Daniel O'Connell, with whom Bishop England had worked while still a priest in the Diocese of Cork. The other was an Italian churchman, Bartolomeo Alberto Cappellari, who became Pope Gregory XVI in February 1831.
In O'Connell’s opposition to slavery, the issue was closely aligned with his political agenda in the British House of Commons. Pope Gregory’s well-known encyclical against slavery, *In Supremo*, while giving fuel to Americans whose political ideology embraced anti-Catholic and anti-abolitionist positions, was not issued until 1839 and then carefully avoided any appearance of alliance between the papacy and the Protestant American anti-slavery effort. For Pope Gregory—a political reactionary—and his curia, the American anti-slavery movement and similar social reform initiatives, all too often led by outspokenly anti-Catholic Protestant ministers and lay leaders, were indications that American republicanism was not completely free of the anti-clerical and anti-ecclesiastical radicalism evidenced in Europe’s democratic movements. Influencing Protestant America’s attitudes towards Catholicism and American Catholics, Daniel O’Connell and Pope Gregory, along with their anti-slavery positions and the pontiff’s anti-democratic tendencies, require a closer examination.

Daniel O’Connell earned the sobriquet of “the Liberator” for his political efforts to free Ireland and Irish Catholics from the oppressive laws imposed by the British Parliament. Born in August 1775 in County Kerry into an old Catholic gentry family, O’Connell was a boy of seven

O'Connell was educated at France's English-language schools at St. Omer and Douai from 1791 to 1793. He subsequently spent three years, from 1794 to 1796, preparing for a legal career at Lincoln's Inn in London. Having been educated by Catholic priests of the *ancien régime* and having seen firsthand in France the results of mob violence and revolution, O'Connell developed a political conservatism, which was tempered by Enlightenment influences during his time at the Inns of Court. He was called to the Irish Bar in May 1798 on the very eve of the Irish Rebellion of that year. \footnote{Ibid., 2-3 and Lawrence J. McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Year* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), 2-3.} Within two years, the Irish Parliament voted itself out of existence, when in 1800 Ireland's ruling Protestant elite accepted the Act of Union, which moved the government of the Emerald Island to Westminster Palace. O'Connell's political career would be devoted to overturning the union and restoring home rule and the Irish parliament.\footnote{Kevin B. Nowlan, *The Politics of Repeal: A Study in the Relations between Great Britain and Ireland, 1841–1850* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), 7; McCaffrey, *Daniel O'Connell and the Repeal Year*, 8-9; and Macintyre, *The Liberator*, 13.}
Toward achieving his objectives, O'Connell developed a grass roots political and fundraising network called the Irish Association, founded in 1823. Middle-class members paid a pound a year in dues, while the poor contributed as little as a penny a month to be associates. This "Catholic Rent," often collected by parish priests in the churches across Ireland, provided the funding necessary to combat the British government in the press and in court. Suppressed in March 1825, the Association was reorganized that summer as the New Catholic Association.

While the law prohibited a Catholic from taking a seat in Parliament, there was no proscription against a Catholic running for a seat. In the General Election of 1826, using this loophole, the Association candidates embarrassed Prime Minister Wellington's London government by out polling candidates sponsored by the local Protestant gentry in several Irish counties.4

In 1828 O'Connell himself stood for and won a seat from County Clare. This election further embarrassed Wellington's government, forcing it to pass into legislation the Emancipation Act of 1829, which allowed Catholics to participate in previously forbidden areas of society, including political office. After the formality of an uncontested reelection, O'Connell and another Irishman were allowed to take their seats in the House of Commons in 1830. In Parliament, O'Connell came to lead a

small group generally called the Irish Party, or O'Connell's tail, which pressed for repeal of the 1800 Act of Union. In 1832 the Irish Party claimed forty-one seats in Parliament and would continue to number about forty until 1841, when they lost half their seats, marking the beginning of the party's rapid decline. O'Connell remained the acknowledged leader of the group until his imprisonment for conspiracy in February 1844. Although the House of Lords within half a year overturned his conviction, O'Connell was broken by the political betrayal leading to his downfall and, following his release from prison, remained in retirement until his death three years later.\(^5\)

In its efforts to spotlight Irish concerns, the Irish Party had been forced to reach out to other political interest groups. As Whigs grew closer to overtaking the Tory majority in the Commons, the former wooed O'Connell and his followers, while the latter sought to minimize Irish influence. O'Connell and the other Irish members sought to leverage their position in winning key points from the Whigs, but ultimately found the Whig party to have little commitment to Irish interests.\(^6\) Throughout his career, O'Connell was seen as a man on the make. This view

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notwithstanding, neither Tories nor Whigs were ever quite sure how to respond to the Irishman’s apparent lack of ambition in turning down cabinet level positions and other offices.  

At the same time, the Irish party was making alliances with various reform groups including secular radicals and nonconformists. Another example of cooperation is that between the Irish party and the British abolitionists, a single-issue pressure group. Upon O’Connell’s entering the Commons in 1830, the representatives of West Indian interests supposedly offered him their support on Irish matters in return for his silence on slavery. O’Connell is reported to have indignantly replied, “...may my right hand forget its cunning, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if to save Ireland, even Ireland, I forget the negro one single hour.” As early as 1829, a year before taking his seat in Parliament, O’Connell had publicly condemned slavery and exhorted his fellow Irish in the United States to work for abolition of the system in this country.  

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The darling of Irish Catholics for his success in forcing concessions from the British government leading to Irish Catholic Emancipation in 1829, O'Connell enjoyed tremendous popularity even among the Irish living abroad. In Charleston, Bishop John England was far from pleased when his friend in Ireland launched his attack against slavery in general and against American slavery in particular. O'Connell's call for Irish Americans to resist the South's peculiar institution served only to antagonize southern white Protestants and to exacerbate religious tension. In the tense days of late July 1835, one Charlestonian bravely reminded the editors of the city's two main daily newspapers that Bishop England had defended slavery half a decade earlier, when O'Connell called upon American Irishmen to join the abolitionist effort.9

At the same time O'Connell was first gaining entry into Parliament and making his abolitionist appeal to Irish Americans, the bishops of the American Catholic Church were finally meeting for their first, and Bishop England thought long overdue, provincial council. Following this meeting in 1829 and another in 1832, the bishops in the United States issued pastoral letters to American Catholics. In each instance, Bishop

representative for the West Indies interest group. See also Jenkins, The Liberal Ascendancy, 2.

England was called upon to write the letter. Mindful of O'Connell's appeal and the genesis of the American anti-slavery movement, England urged Americans to obey the laws of the land, reminding the faithful that a Catholic was to "discharge honestly, faithfully, and with affectionate attachment" his duties to the civil authorities. Thus in the Pauline tradition, the American prelates called upon Catholics to support the national and state governments of their new homeland. If not explicitly stated in the pastoral letters, a commitment to slavery was certainly implied inasmuch as the United States Constitution inherently had recognized the South's peculiar institution, wherein provisions were made for enumerating slaves for the basis of congressional representation. In addition, of course, several states had enshrined the institution of slavery in their legal codes.10

While O'Connell's political positions regarding slavery and abolition had already proven troublesome to Bishop England and other Catholics in the American South before the 1835 Post Office Raid, Pope Gregory's encyclical, In Supremo, appeared only in 1839, four years after the Charleston Post Office Raid. Nonetheless, following immediately upon

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the comparatively liberal and very short pontificate of Pius VIII, Gregory’s reign, from its beginning in 1831, represented an ultra-conservative and anti-democratic shift in the policies of the Holy See that frightened American Protestants.

The son of an aristocratic lawyer from Venetia, Cappellari at age eighteen entered a monastery of the Camaldolese Order, the strictest offshoot of Benedictine monasticism, emphasizing fasting, silence, and solitude. After completing his studies for ordination as a priest, Cappellari became a theologian and served his order and his church in a number of offices. In 1826, five years before his election to the papacy, Cappellari was named a cardinal and was tapped to lead the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.\textsuperscript{11}

Having been elected as the two hundred and fifty-first successor of the Apostle Peter as Bishop of Rome, Gregory charted a reactionary course often at odds with the times in which he lived. Western Europeans and Americans were amused when he forbade railroads in the Papal States. Certainly as amusing, but with chilling undertones,

Gregory also banned street lamps lest people gather under their light to hear revolutionaries and plot sedition.\textsuperscript{12}

An intelligent but fiercely reactionary man, Pope Gregory's autocratic personality and his fears for the Holy See's prerogatives influenced many of his theological and political decisions, even as he occasionally demonstrated progressive thinking. To his credit, Pope Gregory condemned slavery in the encyclical, \textit{In Supremo}. Having headed Propaganda in the five years before becoming supreme pontiff, Gregory was a strong advocate of missions. He created seventy dioceses and vicariates apostolic and almost two hundred missionary bishops in the fifteen years of his reign. Pope Gregory also pressed for a native clergy and native hierarchy in mission lands and showed remarkable tolerance for cultural accommodations for Far Eastern converts.\textsuperscript{13}

However, Gregory resisted democratic reforms both in Rome and elsewhere, and he jailed thousands of political dissidents within the Papal States. In his encyclical, \textit{Mirasi vos}, proclaimed August 15, 1832, Gregory denounced the democratic concepts of freedom of conscience, freedom of press, and the separation of church and state. At his death in 1846, his Roman prisons held two thousand political prisoners. These


\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, 338-39.
latter facts of his pontificate outweighed his more benign policies in the shaping of his reputation in Western Europe and the United States.\(^\text{14}\)

Interestingly, the Tories, who resisted Daniel O'Connell's reform plan, found an unlikely ally in the pope, who was more opposed to political reform than he was to the Protestantism of Britain's Tory government. Gregory XVI and his curia distrusted democratic structures and suspected O'Connell and his party of a hidden agenda of radical social and economic reform. In building these ties to Tory Britain, Gregory undermined the champion of Catholic Ireland, while reiterating his anti-democratic reputation.\(^\text{15}\)

Understandably, Bishop England's response to Pope Gregory's pronouncements was far less direct than his public admonishment of his friend O'Connell. Without mentioning Gregory's animosity towards republican ideology and democratic reform, Charleston's bishop frequently and passionately spoke of his own abiding commitment to America's political institutions. His genuine appreciation for the rights and freedoms safeguarded in the Bill of Rights was well known to the bishop's fellow citizens. He insisted on placing the First Amendment to the Constitution in the letterhead below the name of his newspaper and

\(^{14}\text{Nicholas Cheetham, }\text{Keeper of the Keys: A History of the Popes from St. Peter to John Paul II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), 255-56.}\)

\(^{15}\text{Lebow, White Britain, Black Ireland, 60-61 and Hubert Jedin, editor, The Church in the Modern World, 142.}\)
often used his column in the paper to discuss the related and harmonious duties a Catholic citizen owed his church and his country.\textsuperscript{16}

In response to criticism of Pope Gregory's abolitionism, Bishop England and other American churchmen interpreted the papal encyclical as a condemnation of the Atlantic slave trade. Since the United States had outlawed the importation of slaves in 1808, Bishop England argued that Pope Gregory was not addressing the institution of slavery as it existed in the United States. Interestingly, the Holy See never corrected American church leaders' interpretation of the papal encyclical, although it is usually regarded today as a general condemnation of slavery.\textsuperscript{17}

Among the pope's critics was United States Secretary of State John Forsyth, who protested the interference of a foreign potentate in the domestic affairs of the United States. Appointed to the cabinet in 1834 by President Jackson, Forsyth continued as Secretary of State through the Van Buren administration, being replaced in 1841 by Daniel Webster, William Henry Harrison's choice to head the State Department. As a Georgian, Forsyth was a resident of Bishop England's diocese, which was probably an unneeded additional incentive for England—who


\textsuperscript{17}Bishop England's essays on slavery were first printed as a series of letters to Secretary of State John Forsyth and appeared in the \textit{United States Catholic Miscellany} between September 29, 1840 and February 25, 1841.
never shrank from controversy—to respond to the secretary's condemnation of the pontiff and the Catholic Church. England devoted several columns in the *United States Catholic Miscellany*, over the last two years of his life, responding to Forsyth's anti-Catholic remarks, but in the end breaking off his response because of more pressing obligations. Nonetheless, from these columns comes the fullest expression of antebellum Catholicism's support for slavery.

England's letters to Forsyth begin with a rebuttal of Forsyth's characterization of Pope Gregory's remarks. The Secretary of State, a Democrat, in his address to the people of Georgia, dated at Fredericksburg, Virginia on August 29, 1840, was primarily addressing the political situation in the United States, claiming that William Henry Harrison, the Whig candidate for President, had been forced upon southern Whigs "by the combination of anti-masonry and abolitionism." Within the letter the secretary charged that Daniel O'Connell's abolitionism and Pope Gregory's recent encyclical, *In Supremo*, were the results of Great Britain's control or influence.18

Before proceeding to the Forsyth's comments regarding the pope's letter, Bishop England defended O'Connell's character against the secretary's charge that the Irishman was a brute. The bishop also

reminded the secretary that he himself had come under attacks from American abolitionist when he earlier had reproved O'Connell's attacks on the slavery institution in the United States. Finally, England pointed out that O'Connell's abolitionism, in Britain where slavery had been legislated out of existence in 1833, served the two-fold purpose of upholding the dignity of mankind while pointing to the English government's disgraceful treatment of its Irish Catholic subjects.19

Having eliminated the issue of Daniel O'Connell and the Irish, the bishop focuses on the papacy and the issue of slavery. He masterfully reminds Forsyth that several pontiffs beginning with Pius II in 1462 had issued letters concerning slavery, without any influence from Britain. England then turns to the language of Gregory's letter to show that the pontiff had not addressed the institution of slavery as it existed in the United States. Rather, Gregory's encyclical, which attacked the "slave traffic" or "slave trade" was to be understood as a condemnation of what the American government had forbidden since 1808, namely, the capturing of free peoples in Africa and transporting them to slavery in the New World.20 The remaining letters trace the history of slavery and candidacy as he lays out the direction of his own argument countering the secretary's anti-Catholic remarks.

19Ibid., 184-85.

20Ibid., 186, 187-96.
the Church's acceptance of the institution as it found slavery in different regions of the world and at various times in history.

Bishop England argued that a person could sell his own labor, that is, could sell himself into slavery, without opposing natural law, but he rejected as always unlawful any system in which the master had full dominion over the slave. For slavery to remain consistent with natural law, the master could control only the slave's labor. This idea of what might be called "just" slavery remains a hypothetical institution and Bishop England was adamant in his own opposition to slavery, even if he failed to see how emancipation could be effected without seriously disrupting social order.21

Obviously, the positions taken by O'Connell and Gregory influenced southern Protestant perceptions of their Catholic neighbors. The controversies also required southern Catholics to reconcile their own support of the South's peculiar institution with the statements made by these two well-known and influential Catholics. Bishop England led the effort to assuage the doubts and concerns of Protestant whites in the South, while taking a position that did not overtly contradict a papal encyclical or antagonize fellow Irishmen abroad.

In addition to the abolitionism of Daniel O'Connell and Pope Gregory XVI, John England was involved in other projects, some not of

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his own choosing, that troubled his Protestant slaveholding neighbors. In at least three instances—his diplomatic mission to Haiti and two of his efforts to open schools in Charleston—Bishop England challenged the social standards of the day and rankled the Protestant majority among Charleston’s white population.

Moreover, Bishop England failed to gauge accurately the shifting political climate regarding the issue of slavery, remaining too long a man known to find slavery contemptible, even if he publicly supported the South’s peculiar institution as a regrettable system long established and not to be hastily disassembled. He had grudgingly tolerated it in the first decade or more of his episcopate at a time when many in Charleston still publicly recognized the evil of the system. However, the mood in Charleston and throughout South Carolina was darkening. The Nullification Crisis of 1832 had been a warning that South Carolinians were willing to risk the union and defy the federal government to protect their own interests. For white Carolinians, low tariffs may have been the rallying cry in 1832, but the preservation of slavery was paramount in their hierarchy of political and social interests.²²

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Bishop England had not been alone in decrying the inherent evil of the institution of slavery, but in the face of external threats to their security and prosperity, South Carolinians became increasingly defiant in their defense of slavery. While South Carolina proved the most radical, the mounting opposition to their economic way of life alarmed other white southerners as well. Expressed opinions against slavery became more rare in the South as the antebellum period progressed; they were virtually non-existent in South Carolina after the mid-1830s.

After the Nullification Crisis and the beginning of the anti-slavery movement, cautious men talked of supporting the deplorable institution of slavery as the only viable system for redeeming the African race. Still, while recognizing no direct scriptural condemnation of slavery, Bishop England maintained his opposition to the institution. Having stated his opposition to slavery and to its extension, England was always careful to reiterate his opinion that it was most difficult to abolish slavery where it was already established. The three days at the end of the last week of July 1835 mark a crucible for southern Catholicism, a test in which foreign-born Catholics proved their white southern identity by demonstrating their support for slavery. While most Irish Catholics laborers supported slavery, Charleston’s Irish found themselves defending their bishop whose commitment to the South’s peculiar institution is best described as half-hearted.
Bishop England's Haitian Diplomatic Mission

In the first instance of Bishop England’s running counter to the prevailing attitudes among white Charlestonians, Pope Gregory played a significant role. After eleven years in Charleston, in 1832 England traveled to Rome on an overdue *ad limina* visit. Pope Gregory XVI, who had become the supreme pontiff a year before, was the fourth man to occupy Peter’s chair since John England had become bishop of Charleston in 1820.

Apparently impressed with the Irish-born bishop from the American Deep South, Pope Gregory, ignoring the obvious problems, appointed England as papal legate to Haiti. The bishop protested his ignorance of the French language, never mind his complete unfamiliarity with Creole, and the likely adverse reaction his involvement in the mission would have in his home diocese. Unmoved by these arguments, the Holy Father, who himself spoke no language other than his native Italian, insisted Bishop England undertake the mission. Pope Gregory

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23The *ad limina* is more properly known as a *visitatio ad limina apostolorum*, or visit to the threshold of the apostles. Today, bishops from across the world travel to Rome once every five years to formally present reports of their dioceses to the pope and his curia and to pray at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and other shrines in the Eternal City.

24Hubert Jedid, editor, *The Church in the Modern World*, 141. In addition to speaking no foreign language, Pope Gregory was handicapped in having never met any of the statesmen of his time and in not having much knowledge of politics. Bishop England publicly outlined his reasons for protesting the appointment in his letters to Secretary of State John Forsyth, noting that his episcopate over a region containing the largest number of slaves in any diocese would make him unacceptable to the Haitians, and his work in Haiti “probably
initially charged England with the task of investigating conditions in the
island republic. The pope hoped for a concordat with Haitian leaders
that would allow for the reopening of churches and seminaries officially
closed with the departure of the island's last archbishop, Peter Valera,
who had fled to Cuba in 1789.

Thus, in addition to his efforts in the Carolinas and Georgia,
Bishop England reluctantly undertook the diplomatic mission to Haiti on
behalf of the Holy See. In a mission fraught with potential problems,
England became the first American bishop appointed to service as a
papal diplomat. This work on behalf of the Holy See took England out of
his diocese for a number of months between 1832 and 1836 and
generated, as the bishop had anticipated, much ill-will among southern
whites, who viewed Haiti as the manifestation of all that could go wrong
in their own world.25

Formerly the French colony of Saint-Domingue, or San Domingo as
it was commonly called in the English-speaking world, Haiti had emerged

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render me unacceptable in my own diocess [sic].” See John England, “Domestic

25 Guilday, Life and Times of John England, II, 270-313, devotes a forty-
plus page chapter to the Apostolic Delegation to Haiti in the second volume of
his work. To a much lesser degree, Jeremiah J. O'Connell, Catholicity in the
Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of its History (Sadlier, 1879. Reprint,
Westminster, Md.: Ars Sacra, 1964), 72-73 and Richard Madden, Catholics in
South Carolina: A Record (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985), 45-
46 provide coverage of Bishop England's diplomatic service on behalf of the
Holy See.
as an African American state during a slave revolt and often bloody war between 1791 and 1801. Many whites and mixed race people, or *gens de couleur*, fled the colony with the beginning of the revolt. Situated on the mountainous western tip of the West Indian island of Hispanola, the colony's only escape was by sea. The whites and *gens de couleur* who fled the violence, often took ship with little attention to destination and were thus scattered throughout the Caribbean and South Atlantic world, finding refuge in Cuba, New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah, Charleston, and even further north in the eastern port cities of the United States.\textsuperscript{26}

In 1804 Haitian leaders declared the island colony's independence from France after defeating that nation's military forces. Napoleon and French prestige had been unwilling to allow the former slaves to go peacefully. The French emperor had launched a military attempt to reclaim the lost colony in 1801, with a large force under the command of his brother-in-law, General Charles Victor Emmanuel Leclerc. Leclerc subdued the island and captured the military leader Toussaint Louverture, but he failed in the end to overturn the results of the slave insurrection. While the French faced continuing Haitian resistance and the ravages of yellow fever and other tropical diseases, they were ultimately forced to withdraw from Haiti by the intervention of British naval forces, which blockaded the French on the island in 1803. The last

\textsuperscript{26}Jan Rogoziński, *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the Arawak and the Carib to the Present* (New York: Meridian, 1994), 164-66.
French soldiers left Haiti at the end of November 1803, and the Haitians declared their independence on January 1, 1804.27

With Louverture no longer present on the island, warring factions divided Haiti. *Gens de couleur* under Alexander Pétion in the south were at odds with blacks under Henri Christophe, the self-styled Emperor Henri, in the north. Following Pétion’s death in 1818, his secretary and close friend, General Jean Pierre Boyer, came to power in the south. From the shadows, Boyer supported an uprising against his adversary Emperor Henri, who committed suicide in 1820 as rebels overran his capital. Having instigated the rebellion against Henri’s government, Boyer quickly moved into the kingdom and, on charges of treason, he condemned to death the insurgents he had recently befriended. Thus, President Boyer united Haiti under his leadership within two years of taking control of the southern half of the former French colony.28

Under Boyer’s rule, Haiti also captured the Spanish part of Hispaniola, Santo Domingo, in 1821 and held it until 1844, the year after Boyer’s death. By the mid-1830s, Boyer was a man who had solidified his political base but ruled a nation very much in flux. The Haitian president was anxious to achieve legitimacy abroad through diplomatic

27Ibid., 172-73.

28Ibid., 218-20; Hubert Cole, Christophe, King of Haiti (New York, Viking, 1967), 201, 206, 244 and 274.
recognition from other nations. He was also eager to create a greater social stability at home, which he thought might be effected through an agreement with the Holy See that would end the schism that had started in 1805 when the revolutionary leader Dessalines had declared himself head of the church in Haiti. In the intervening thirty years, Rome had sanctioned no new priests or bishops for Haiti. By 1830, the churches that remained open in Haiti were served either by aging priests who had been there at the outset of the Revolution or by men who had either been assigned by the state to serve as priests or who had drifted into the positions.29

Distrustful of Boyer and worried about the reaction to his mission among Charlestonians, England journeyed to Haiti in December 1833. Pining for the respectability that comes with diplomatic recognition, Boyer greeted England with great ceremony and courtesy. Returning to Charleston early in 1834, the bishop left for Rome in April and arrived there in May. Pleasantly surprised by his reception in Haiti, England presented a report that very much pleased the pope, who authorized the bishop to begin formal negotiations with Boyer.

The cordial relations between Haiti's leaders and the Holy See's envoy soon vanished. It became clear to Bishop England that President

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Boyer's motives were completely self-serving and that the Haitian leader had no intention of allowing the Catholic Church to operate its schools and other institutions, such as orphanages and convents, free of government control. Yet Boyer's willingness to engage in talks with the Holy See won for his regime the trappings of legitimacy. From Boyer's perspective, he was merely safeguarding the continued success of the revolution. He viewed the church as another European, that is to say, white, threat to the only black republic in the world. No doubt, his nation's experiences, in the thirty years prior to his emergence to power, prompted Boyer to suspect whites. With this level of mutual distrust involved, the mission was likely to fail.

Thus, with little hope of success, Bishop England expended much time, money, and energy traveling from Charleston, to Haiti, to Rome, and then back. As the bishop feared, the mission eventually proved futile and the Holy See abandoned the project in 1837. Ultimately, in 1860 the Holy See and Haiti would be able to reach agreements whereby Roman Catholicism was reintroduced into the nation. By the time the concordat was approved, President Boyer and Bishop England had been dead almost twenty years. Meanwhile, England's work in Charleston was seriously hampered by his absence from the diocese when serving as papal envoy to Haiti.30

30Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 46.
In undertaking the Holy See’s diplomatic mission, Bishop England had won assurances that a bishop coadjutor would be appointed to assist him in his work in Charleston. William Clancy, also Irish and an acquaintance of England’s, was elevated to the episcopacy on December 21, 1834. Against England’s advice to wait until arriving in Charleston to be ordained bishop, Clancy was consecrated in Ireland. Then Clancy procrastinated until finally ordered by Rome to make for America and only arrived in Charleston in November 1835. (Not surprisingly, the bishop coadjutor never embraced his new country, and he returned to Ireland in the summer of 1837).31

Adding insult to injury, after all the delays and the frustrations, Bishop England had to meet much of his travel expenses from his own purse. Thus, in the summer of 1835, stalled in his diplomatic mission to the black republic as he awaited the arrival in Charleston of his dilatory co-adjutor, John England found himself the object of mob rage as the pro-slavery reaction to anti-slavery mailings swept his see. Many Charlestonians did not hesitate to label the bishop an abolitionist.32

In a move that further antagonized Charleston whites, Bishop England, in 1834 while in Haiti, ordained a Haitian native to the

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priesthood. The ordination of a black man to holy orders was deeply troubling to many white southerners, particularly some within the Catholic parishes in Charleston and elsewhere in the diocese. While evangelical Protestant churches in the South allowed blacks to preach in a limited lay ministry, the sacerdotal nature of the Catholic clergy did not afford the African American a similar role within the Catholic Church. Holy Orders in Catholicism allowed for no diminishment of ministry based upon racial distinctions. A black Catholic priest possessed the same canonical authority as a white priest. The idea of racial equality implicit in the Catholic Church’s position regarding the efficacy of properly conferred holy orders meant that the idea of a black priest was more than antebellum American whites—Catholics and Protestants—were willing to accept. While whites across the United States could not accept the concept of racial equality, the idea was utterly out of bounds for southern slaveholders.33

Moreover, South Carolinians and other white southerners had protested in 1826 when President John Quincy Adams proposed sending

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33Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 389-91 covers the career of George Paddington, the Haitian in question. It would appear that Paddington had not spent much time in Haiti inasmuch as he did not speak or write French. It is not known where Bishop England met Paddington, but England raised him to the diaconate before ordaining him into the priesthood in 1836. Paddington subsequently was forced to flee the island when Boyer’s government placed restrictions on the clergy. The priest ended up in Rome where he engaged in further studies at the Irish College, before returning to Haiti in
delegates to a meeting of North and South American nations because the United States' delegates would have had to accept as their equals the black representatives from Haiti. White Catholics in his flock, particularly the French who fled in the face of the slave insurrection that created the nation of Haiti, and other southern whites viewed England's work in Haiti with a mix of anger and disgust. For these whites, the bishop's talks with Haitian leaders placed England, a white man, on equal terms with blacks—a gesture that was both a betrayal of French Catholics within his own diocese and an affront to white southern sensibilities.34

For Charleston's white Protestants, Bishop England's diplomatic mission to Haiti brought together the two most explosive elements of the antebellum American political scene: slavery and nativism. England's efforts, as a representative of the Holy See to the Caribbean black republic, challenged white South Carolina's racial attitudes and the social structure resting on those attitudes, while confirming the nativists' worse fears regarding the allegiance Catholics had to the pope and the threat of foreign interference, if not domination, that such a loyalty represented to the republic. Indeed, South Carolinians were so vexed by

1845. See also O'Connell, Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia, 72 and Guilday, Life of John England, II, 328.

Bishop England’s diplomatic mission that his proposals to incorporate a number of parishes and a convent were under attack in the South Carolina state legislature in December 1835. The bills were left in committee while similar legislation for other Christian sects were passed unanimously by the General Assembly. Only after England traveled to Columbia to lobby for his bills and delivered an impassioned two-hour address before a joint session of the legislature were the articles approved.35

Thus, in the mid-summer 1835, Bishop England was in the center of doomed negotiations with a dictator reviled by the bishop's white Protestant neighbors and by many within his own flock. During the bishop’s negotiations with Haiti, white Charlestonians made their feelings known to England, who complained of feeling like a stranger in Charleston. Once returning to Charleston from Haiti, the dejected bishop remarked poignantly, “the dogs that were set to guard negroes began to bark at me, though previously they had allowed me to pass.”36

Clearly Bishop England had understood the attitude of the whites in his diocese much better than had the Holy See. Even with his misgivings, the bishop accepted the mission in obedience to the pope. In doing so, his obedience reinforced among Protestant Americans their


36 Quotation cited in Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 368.
fears concerning the influence of the Holy See on Catholics in the United States. The willingness of a Catholic prelate to treat with a black man as an equal and to do so at the Rome's direction reaffirmed nativist distrust of Catholicism and demonstrated a threat to the South's domestic institutions. It is little wonder that England felt a chill in the air in the summer of 1835 as he stopped in his own see while in the midst of his ongoing mission to Haiti. With its cargo of antislavery literature addressed to social and religious leaders including Bishop England, the arrival of the *Columbia* in Charleston at the end of July 1835 was the catalyst that prompted some townspeople to make connections between the bishop’s diplomatic work, the anti-slavery movement, and the Catholic threat to America’s political and social structure.

The Haitian mission was not the only endeavor in the first half of the 1830s that brought Bishop England and his activities to the attention of disapproving southern whites. In the timing of two efforts to establish schools in Charleston, England miscalculated the mood of the Charleston community. Both the Haitian diplomatic mission and the attempts to establish two schools were fresh topics when the *Columbia*'s anti-slavery cargo was delivered to the Charleston Post Office. The first of the two school projects involved the Ursuline order, the second a school for free black children.
Catholic Schools in Charleston

Early in his episcopate Bishop England realized the need for parochial schools to provide a Catholic education for the young men and women of his diocese. He also believed the best hope for the success of American Catholicism was in a native-born clergy. To these objectives the bishop envisioned a diocesan educational system in which all the schools in the diocese under Catholic teachers would be affiliated with a Philosophical and Classical Seminary in Charleston. Additionally, he sought to establish elementary and secondary schools anywhere in the diocese that Catholics could guarantee proper support for the institutions. In Bishop England's plan, the main school in Charleston would be a college-seminary, with a diocesan theology school for training young men for the priesthood. He also apparently intended to append to this educational system a school or schools for the free black children of Charleston. For any bishop in a new diocese, these plans would involve significant challenges. In Charleston, a poor diocese in which Catholics were a minority held in suspicion by a Protestant majority, England’s vision was quixotic.\textsuperscript{37}

Nonetheless, Bishop England was a man of vision, energy, and perseverance. He accomplished the first part of his grand project when in January 1822 he opened an academy called the Philosophical and

\textsuperscript{37}Guilday, \textit{Life and Times of John England}, I, 485.
Classics Seminary and a theology school eventually known as the Seminary of St. John the Baptist. The boys’ school received much public support, initially opening at a time when the College of Charleston was in decline. However, many Protestants withdrew their sons from the academy when they learned that the priests who taught the academy boys also taught the seminarians theology. With but a handful of students, the academy continued. The unrest in the summer of 1835 brought additional hardships for Catholic schools in Charleston, and the academy eventually was forced to close, leaving the faculty to concentrate their efforts on the seminarians preparing for the priesthood.38

Regarding Bishop England’s decision to close the Philosophical and Classical Seminary in 1837, Father Jeremiah O’Connell blamed the school’s failure in part to the reopening of the College of Charleston. The priest’s contention is valid inasmuch as the Catholic school had managed to keep its doors open beyond 1835 largely because the College of Charleston—the city’s only other institution of higher learning—was in a serious decline under the dour leadership of Jasper Adams. But even the closing of the College of Charleston in 1836 did not boost enrollment at the Catholic academy, and a couple of years later, the revived interest

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handiwork of Protestant ministers in the withdrawal of students from the school. The undercurrent of opinion that led Protestants to remove their sons from the Catholic school exemplifies the religious bigotry that surfaced in the summer of 1835.  

In addition to the boys’ academy, Bishop England sought the means to open a girls’ school. Believing his Sisters of Charity to be sufficiently occupied with the operation of an elementary school, the bishop sought to bring another women’s order to Charleston. During his trip to Europe in 1832 he had stopped in Boston where he met the ill-fated Ursulines of Charlestown. In Ireland he also visited the Ursuline Convent at Blackrock. Much impressed by what he observed at the two convents, he asked the superior of the Blackrock Convent for a few volunteers to travel with him to Charleston. Returning to the United States in 1834, Bishop England escorted three Irish nuns and a postulant from the Order of St. Ursula. Near the cathedral, in a Broad Street house formerly occupied by the Sisters of Charity, the Ursulines set up their convent and opened a school for girls called the Ursuline Academy.  

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In advertising the new school's opening at the beginning of 1835, Bishop England was careful to note that the sisters would not recruit Protestant students but would receive those who, applying for admission, were qualified academically. Furthermore, the bishop took pains to explain that no religious instruction would be offered to Protestant students. These policies were similar to those in place in the boy's school and, for that matter, in most Catholic schools in America at the time. In this manner, the bishop hoped to reassure Charleston's Protestants, while attracting as many fee-paying students as possible.\textsuperscript{42}

Unfortunately, the Ursulines, regardless of their own qualifications as teachers, had been ignominiously cast as villains in Rebecca Reed's runaway bestseller of 1834. The Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, had been burned only five months before the Irish Ursulines set up house in South Carolina, and the trials for the accused perpetrators was still six months away when the Charleston school opened.\textsuperscript{43}

In the anti-Catholicism that emerged in the early 1830s, the American public demonstrated an almost perverse interest in convent

\textsuperscript{42}United States Catholic Miscellany, December 13, 1834.

\textsuperscript{43}Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 47.
life. Rooted in gender-based cultural expectations, this nineteenth century interest in the lives of cloistered Catholic women is a fertile area for gender studies pointing perhaps to the unease that Protestants felt in conforming to socially accepted patterns of behavior. Regardless of the psychological reasons behind Protestant interest in convents, the issue of religious or monastic life continued to fascinate and repulse Protestant Americans throughout the antebellum period. Books such as Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent* and Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures* provided so-called exposés to a receptive public and huge profits to New England and Midwestern publishing houses.44

Bishop England's address at the reception of the postulant in January 1835 evidences his concern for the opinion of the Charleston community. In his sermon, which was printed subsequently in the *Unites States Catholic Miscellany*, England spoke of the suspicions that motivated many in the congregation to attend the service. Bishop England believed that most Protestant Americans were fair-minded and willing to give Catholic apologists a hearing. Through his newspaper columns and public addresses, the Charleston bishop attempted to correct errors in the commonly held misinformed opinions about Catholicism. By way of this method of candid discussion of religion and

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history England believed he could create a more tolerant atmosphere for American Catholicism.45

England's approach to Protestant animus is evidenced in the address he made at the ceremony in which the nuns of Charleston's Ursuline convent formally received their first novice and the end of her postulancy.46 The bishop began by apologizing to Miss Wolfe, the candidate, for speaking to the Protestants assembled. He reminded the postulant and other Catholics present that:

we are surrounded by friends who feel a reasonable curiosity to understand that which they have never before had the opportunity of beholding, and upon whose minds, generally speaking, very extraordinary impressions have been made respecting the nature and circumstances of that state upon which you desire to enter.

Explaining the interest that Charleston's Protestants had in the ceremony, the bishop noted:

They are desirous of information; and if they crowd around us, it is not because of an idle desire to witness an


46 In religious life, a postulant is one who lives as a member of the community without vows for a year or two. After this period of discernment, if the postulant chooses to enter the order and the community approves, the postulant takes temporary vows and is received as a novice into the community. For the next two or three years, the former postulant, lives as a member of the community. After further time of discernment, the novice may seek to take permanent vows with the community. Typically three vows are taken: poverty, chastity, and obedience. However, some orders have different or additional vows that nonetheless promote a lifestyle of prayer, spirituality, and service.
unmeaning pageant, but from the reasonable and praiseworthy motive of better understanding....

England proceeded to deliver a discourse on the various types of vocation in Christian life.\textsuperscript{47}

Without mentioning the Charlestown, Massachusetts, convent raid, the bishop noted the hostility and violence that nuns encountered in a society unaccustomed to religious orders. In this ceremony, held in the wake of the Charlestown convent raid of August 1834 and the publication of Rebecca Reed's \textit{Six Months in a Convent}, Bishop England was defending both his decision to establish a house of Ursulines in his see, the legitimacy of cloistral life for women, and most importantly, the Catholic Church's place in American culture.

Even so, the timing of the Ursulines' arrival in South Carolina was less than fortunate, and the events of 1835 would deprive the nuns of many potential students. While the administration of the diocese suffered in Bishop England's absences during his ongoing diplomatic mission, the bishop also was deprived of up-to-date news of his diocese. England's travels abroad and his preoccupation with the diplomatic mission may well explain his failure to appreciate the full extent of the anti-Catholic prejudice aroused by the happenings in Charlestown, Massachusetts, and the publication of \textit{Six Months in a Convent}.

Regardless of the bishop’s miscalculation, the Ursuline convent was established in Charleston; and the nuns continued to operate the school for a number of years. However, the Ursuline school apparently was never a successful business venture and represented a drain on the diocesan budget. Although much beloved by the Catholics of Charleston, the Ursulines left the city for Ohio in 1846, soon after Ignatius Reynolds became bishop of the diocese.48

At about the same time Bishop England was attempting to establish a secondary school for white girls, he also decided to open a school for free black children in Charleston. Several such schools already operated in Charleston, some led by free blacks such as Thomas Bonneau and Daniel Payne, others by local Protestant churches, including St. Philip’s Episcopal Church’s biracial school. No doubt, the bishop was concerned primarily for the children of the few free blacks in the city’s Catholic parishes.49

48Madden, Catholics in South Carolina, 54 and 56-9.

49Henry Allen Bullock, A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present (New York: Praeger, 1970), argues the value of education among slaves, who were able to read works such as David Walker’s Appeal published in 1829, calling for a general revolt. The efforts that whites took to suppress the education of slaves demonstrates the widely held value blacks, free and slave, placed on an education, (13-14). Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, Black Masters: A Free Family of Color in the Old South (New York: Norton, 1984), 108-09 cites the schools of Thomas Bonneau, who died in 1831, and Daniel Payne, who opened his school in the early 1830s. Johnson and Roark also mention (108) the biracial school at St. Philip’s Church. See also Cyprian Davis, The History of Black Catholics in the United States (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 46-48.
Although it was illegal to teach slaves or for slaves to operate a school, a number of bondsmen, often with the aid of free blacks or sympathetic whites, found ways to get an education. Among his first students, Daniel Payne could count three adult slaves he taught at night. In a society where slaves were not supposed to be able to read, at least one slave could hire out his services to read newspapers to illiterate whites.\textsuperscript{50}

Throughout the first third of the nineteenth century, free black teachers and white Protestant ministers operated schools for free black children. Thomas Bonneau’s school for free black children had opened in 1807 and had afforded an education to many free blacks in Charleston, including Daniel Payne. By 1834 several schools remained and had been operating openly without interference from local authorities for some time. In that year the South Carolina General Assembly made it illegal for free blacks to operate schools. After the new legislation, Daniel Payne left Charleston for Philadelphia, but others continued to teach free black children.\textsuperscript{51}

Wanting a school that would provide an education, with religious instruction, to Catholic free black children in Charleston, Bishop England established his school in January 1835. If the Sisters of Charity

\textsuperscript{50}Bernard E. Powers, Jr., \textit{Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822–1885} (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 16.
had too much to do to begin a secondary school for girls, they were not so busy that they could not operate a school for free blacks.\textsuperscript{52}

In the aftermath of the raid on the post office, many white Charlestonians sought to clamp down on the education of the city's blacks. A group of leading men approached Bishop England regarding the school he had opened for free black children. It is interesting to note that these men representing the concerned citizens of Charleston slated no other school for closing. Sensing that motivations based on religious prejudice were behind the request but recognizing the potential for violence, the bishop "answered that if they made the same application to those of other religions who had schools I would comply, though I disapproved of their proceeding." Thus, Bishop England joined other religious leaders in discontinuing Charleston's schools for free black children.\textsuperscript{53}

Significantly, the Charleston newspapers carried the news of the bishop's refusal to be singled out in a demand to close his school for free black children. Here is the only indication provided by independent media that Charleston's anti-abolitionist fervor could take on anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant tones. Having destroyed the antislavery

\textsuperscript{51}Ibid., 54

\textsuperscript{52}Madden, \textit{Catholics in South Carolina}, 46-7.

papers, Charlestonians sought to eradicate any menace to their domestic tranquility. In the midst of the crisis, while whites were agitated and fearful, someone insisted that the Catholic school for free-blacks be closed. As noted by Catholics, this suggestion singled out the school established by Bishop England and staffed by his diocesan order, the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, while ignoring the several Protestant schools that educated Charleston’s free-black children. In his acquiescing to the city’s leadership, Bishop England signaled the Irish Catholic community’s support of the southern way of live with its institution of racial slavery, while forcing his Protestant opponents to close their own schools for free blacks. This bishop, in spite of his own personal concerns for the blacks of his diocese, chose to take a significant step in the cultural and political assimilation of Irish Catholics within the white community of Charleston, rather than defend his recently opened school for free black children.54

Summary

In the summer of 1835, the choice Bishop England made to close the Catholic school for free black children was the only option that did not carry a threat of violence against Catholics. In meeting the demands of Charleston’s whites to close the school, the bishop demonstrated a

54Charleston Courier and Charleston Mercury, August 10, 1835.
subtle ability for irony in his temperate insistence that his school not be singled out. He may have hoped his suggestion would dampen the ardor of the whites’ militant pro-slavery faction and others calling for the closing of the Catholic free black school. However, white Charlestonians upset about the New York Anti-Slavery Society’s postal campaign were not in a mood of moderation and careful consideration. The Charleston government closed the schools for free blacks, and the city’s political leaders sent recommendations to the state house in Columbia for similar statewide legislation.

The choices, while seemingly made without hesitation, must have been one the bishop weighed with some purpose. During the Post Office Raid, the threats against Bishop England and the city’s Catholic institutions were not random calls for violence. Some in that crowd on the night of July 29, motivated by a combination of factors, sought to strike at those whom they regarded as enemies of both the institution of slavery and the safety of their community. Certainly, chief among the mob’s concerns was their fear of slave insurrection, but some were also motivated by religious and ethnic bigotry. These influences converged in the anti-abolitionist mob’s threats against Charleston’s Irish Catholics. Age old attitudes about religion and ethnic differences played heavily in the formation of the prejudice expressed in the threats against Bishop England and the cathedral, convent, and school.
Bishop England's decision to open the school for free blacks was the latest in a series of events centering on either him or some other prominent Catholic. The abolitionist advocacy of Catholic Ireland's champion, Daniel O'Connell, beginning with his first term in the British House of Commons, troubled southern slaveholders who were already given to anti-Catholic sentiment. Like other Americans, southern whites were suspicious of Catholic immigrants arriving in large numbers after the War of 1812 and were deeply concerned that the newly enfranchised Catholic immigrant citizens held loyalties to the pope—who represented a sovereign and foreign power. Americans, including Carolinians and Georgians, were affirmed in their prejudice and anti-Catholic bias when Pope Gregory XVI consistently demonstrated an anti-democratic philosophy. The pontiff's Mirasi vos, proclaimed in August 1832, was Gregory's most thoroughgoing pronouncement on political systems and gave much ammunition to American nativists and anti-Catholics.

Pope Gregory, in his commitment to missions, sought to reestablish normal relations with the black republic of Haiti. Apparently impressed with the Irish-born American prelate for Charleston, the pope appointed John England to serve as papal legate to Haiti. Aware of the problems this appointment would cause for himself in his diocese, Bishop England attempted to beg off the assignment, but in the end accepted the charge, seeking to make the best of a bad situation. Taken away from his diocese and disappointed in the attempts to station a
bishop coadjutor in Charleston, England spent most of 1834 between Haiti and Rome. He arrived in Charleston at the end of 1834, with three Irish Ursuline nuns and their postulant brought to begin a school.

In Charleston, Bishop John England, while sensitive to American anti-Catholicism, endeavored to establish the Catholic Church in a region that was overwhelmingly Protestant. In an effort to keep families in the faith and to make non-Catholics more knowledgeable and more tolerant of the Church, England opened schools in Charleston for white boys, white girls, and free black children. All three of these schools faced animosity from the Protestant majority within the city.

Significantly, the girls’ school opened in early 1835 under the auspices of the Ursuline nuns brought to Charleston by Bishop England within four months of the widely publicized Charlestown, Massachusetts, Ursuline convent raid and while Rebecca Reed’s fraudulent exposé of Ursuline monasticism was on the bestsellers’ list.

Similarly, the Catholic school for free blacks opened in January 1835 as the anti-slavery forces in the North were preparing to increase the pressure on southern slaveholders. At annual meetings later in the year anti-slavery societies decided to blanket the South with treatises and other papers sent through a postal campaign. The first of the anti-slavery literature arrived in Charleston on the fateful trip of the steam packet Columbia at the end of July 1835. In their rage to combat
abolitionism, Charlestonians targeted the recently opened Catholic school for free blacks.

When one considers the potential for violence and the number of false steps and misunderstandings between the Catholic minority and the Protestant majority in Charleston in 1835, one is surprised that the results were not more catastrophic. Bishop England and his flock faced down the threat of armed conflict in their resolve to stand vigil at the cathedral through two nights of demonstrations and mob meetings. The more or less peaceful resolution was not a foregone conclusion, and one is left, in concluding a study of the Charleston Post Office Raid and its meaning to southern Catholics, to attempt some explanation for the unlikely events that actually unfolded at the end of July 1835.
CHAPTER SIX

Summary and Conclusions

In the light of the relatively peaceful outcome of Charleston's 1835 anti-abolitionist demonstrations, a few questions were raised at the beginning of this study, regarding a possible relationship between anti-abolitionism and anti-Catholicism. Bishop John England wrote his friend Paul Cullen that some among the crowd at the post office raid wanted to lynch the bishop and torch the cathedral and the surrounding church-owned buildings. At first brush, one is left to ask why someone in the anti-abolitionist crowd should draw a connection between northern anti-slavery societies and the local bishop and other Charleston Catholics. What had these Catholics done to promote or to appear supportive of abolitionism? Moreover, why threaten the cathedral, but not the other Catholic parish church in town. While the cathedral was obviously the visible center of Catholicism in the region, were other factors such as ethnicity and Anglo-American perceptions of ethnic differences also at play in the crowd's threat focused on the cathedral, which was the parish of recent Irish immigrants. Finally, if Catholics
indeed represented a threat to Charleston's domestic security, why did white Charlestonians fail to strike against this subversive but small group of people?¹

The Charleston Post Office Raid of July 29, 1835, was an anti-abolitionist demonstration by a crowd that, in comparison to mobs in other Jacksonian era events, would seem to have been organized, focused, and controlled. The post office, other than a broken window, was not damaged, and the Exchange Building, where the post office was located, was not torched. While someone in the excitement of the moment shouted for the crowd to move down Broad Street to burn the Catholic cathedral and to lynch Bishop England, it would appear that those leading the assault on the post office convinced their followers to disband until the following evening. Of course, news that the Irish Volunteers had assembled at the Cathedral of St. Finbar in defense of their church and their bishop would have served as a deterrent for many in the post office mob. Still, the control exercised by the crowd at the post office is remarkable.²


While the mob leaders kept tight rein on their group at the post office, there remains the fact that some in the crowd called for violence against Charleston's Catholics. In other words, some in this anti-abolitionist crowd either were straying from their mission to suppress anti-slavery sentiment or were making connections between the activities of northern anti-slavery societies and the Catholic Church. Given the reaction from the Irish Volunteers and the pains to which Bishop England went to explain publicly the Catholic Church's support for slavery and to denounce personally the anti-slavery postal campaign, it seems clear that the city's Catholics feared their neighbors had reasons to see a connection between Catholicism and the anti-slavery forces.3

Chapter Two revealed the events leading up to the first wave of immigration to the United States and the reemergence of anti-Catholicism during the Jacksonian period. While the two events were not unrelated, their relationship was not that of simple cause and effect. The colonists who first settled the Carolinas and Georgia brought with them a cultural legacy of anti-Catholicism stemming from Britain's Protestant Reformation. Even so, anti-Catholicism had waned considerably by the time of the American Revolution, when the Carolinas

3Bishop England defended slavery in a public meeting two nights after the raid at the post office and wrote to the editors of Charleston's daily newspapers denouncing the actions of the northern anti-slavery societies. See the Charleston Courier and the Charleston Mercury for July 31, 1835 and August 1, 1835.
and Georgia, along with most of the other ten former English colonies, rescinded legislation that had proscribed the open and free practice of Catholicism. This period of religious toleration proved short-lived. The spirit of revival that swept the infant nation during the Great Awakening and the emergence of evangelical Protestantism rekindled sectarian differences and anti-Catholicism.

In the Atlantic world, Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo in 1815 marked the end of a quarter century of fighting for a war-weary Europe. At the same time, Britain and the United States came to an agreement, ending the Anglo-American War of 1812. The resulting peace encouraged ocean trade. The increase in ocean traffic, combined with Britain's postwar relaxation of restrictions against Irish Catholics, prompted Irish emigration. Most of the Irish leaving the Emerald Isle journeyed to the United States, in search of freedom and opportunity.

The Irish, of course, were hardly the only non Anglo-American whites in the Diocese of Charleston. Upsetting the notion of the white South's cultural homogeneity, a study of antebellum Charleston reveals an assortment of ethnicities including the Anglo-Americans, French Huguenots, San Domingan French, Irish, and Germans. One of the primary binding forces among these various groups was their white racial identity. The San Domingan refugees arrived in Charleston between 1791 when the slave revolt began in the island colony and 1809 when the Spanish government evicted French refugees in Cuba. By 1835
the San Domingans had been in Charleston for a couple of generations and had long since established themselves in the community. Although the larger number of Irish Catholics immigrated after 1815, a few were present in Charleston during or immediately after the American Revolution. These Irish Catholics and the first arrivals after the War of 1812 had also had time to put down roots in Charleston. The personal contacts these Catholics had developed in the decades before the post office raid no doubt went far in ameliorating religious prejudice and allaying concerns of Protestant Charlestonians.

Several differences existed between immigration patterns before and after the War of 1812. In the antebellum period, the level of immigration escalated to such a rate that by the eve of the Civil War; the percentage of foreign born within the population of the United States was at its highest level. Also, the largest part of those arriving in the United States after 1815 were poor Irish farmers and farm laborers, who brought few if any skills for urban employment. These Irish immigrants and others arriving in the antebellum period were increasingly Catholic, and by the second decade of the period Catholics were a majority of each year's arrivals. The experience of the Irish under British rule had fostered a profound Irish Catholic identity, which created a loyalty to Catholicism that would frustrate nativist and anti-Catholic assumptions about citizenship in the American republic. Indeed, many Protestant Americans found the increasing number of Roman Catholics among the
population to represent a serious threat to the nation’s democratic institutions.

While increased immigration following the War of 1812 saw a dramatic rise in the number of Catholics entering the United States and an reemergence of American anti-Catholicism, John England’s consecration as first bishop of Charleston proved to be a happy appointment for the Holy See. His experience as a Irish parish priest at Bandon among a distrustful Protestant majority, his work as a professor and rector at St. Mary’s Seminary, his newspaper editorship at the Cork Mercantile Chronicle, and his political activities in the cause of enfranchising Irish Catholics equipped John England to handle the many problems he faced as spiritual leader of a Catholic minority in the American South, while also making him truly appreciative of American republicanism. Bishop England’s charm, intelligence, high-mindedness, and American patriotism went far in winning approval for the prelate and the church in the Carolinas and Georgia, even if his personal views on slavery were unpopular among many whites in the diocese. England’s membership in various literary and philosophical societies and his 1826 speech to a joint session of the United States Congress testify to the high esteem in which the bishop’s contemporaries held him.⁴

Bishop England's accomplishments and efforts notwithstanding, Charleston's Catholics found themselves targets for potential violence as other white Charlestonians reacted to the anti-slavery postal campaign. The post office raid set off a chain of events that underscored the firm resolve of southerners to resist any threat to their domestic institutions, particularly slavery. The Protestant majority within Charleston's white population demonstrated a willingness to strike out against any threat—real or perceived—to the South's way of life.

Nativism was as influential upon Protestant Charlestonians worldview as anti-Catholicism. Although Charleston and other southern cities received fewer immigrants than northern cities, immigration to the South was concentrated in the region's port cities. As a result, southern port cities were more cosmopolitan and ethnically diverse than the large expanses of the rural South. Along with a significant but small foreign presence, Charleston featured a large black population, free and slave. While most free blacks worked as skilled artisans with a large degree of self-autonomy in a repressive system, urban slaves also enjoyed a larger degree of freedom in their day-to-day existence in the urban setting.\(^5\)

The loss of control that many white Charlestonians sensed as they lived among a black majority should not be overlooked. The potential for servile insurrection always lurked in the back of the minds of Charleston whites. It should also be remembered that European immigrants and blacks, whether free or enslaved, lived in close proximity to each other in the poorer sections of the city. Immigrants also competed with blacks for employment and were often antagonistic towards the city's blacks.

However, whites of a higher socio-economic standing perceived the day-to-day interplay among blacks and poor European immigrants differently. It is likely that whites of property and means, observing the economic hardships and goals shared by blacks and poor immigrants, assumed the races of the lower classes possessed a common outlook or worldview. Thus, for some in the crowd at the Charleston post office, poor immigrant Catholics represented a threat to Charleston's social harmony and the white economic hegemony that rested warily on a foundation of black slavery.⁶

The immigrant status of most Carolina and Georgia Catholics was explored in the third chapter. Diocesan records and Bishop England's fundraising reports point to the immigrant status of most Catholics. Further, Bishop England's reports clearly reflect his observation that most of the Catholics to whom he ministered in his three-state diocese were Irish. Antebellum census records indicate that the foreign-born were a small percentage of the overall population, but a slightly larger percentage of the white population. Moreover, the county-by-county reports from the census records demonstrate that the foreign-born population was concentrated in a few urban areas, especially Charleston, the commercial and social center for the South Carolina lowcountry, which was a region with a black majority.

Whites in Charleston and the South Carolina lowcountry, living among a black majority whom they held in slavery, were uneasy about the foreign born among their own numbers. The recent immigrants tended to poor, Catholic, and propertyless. In short, these relatively new arrivals had no particular interest tying their loyalties to the status quo. Charleston's white Protestants worried that poor Irish immigrants might

riot with their black neighbors should the slaves and free blacks raise an insurrection. For southern Catholics, most of whom were immigrants, the last few days of July 1835 proved a coming of age in their adopted land.

Although the threatened violence against the bishop and Catholic properties never materialized and the immediate crisis passed, controversy was far from resolved. The anti-Catholic threats made at the post office on the evening of the raid were rooted in ethnic and religious bigotry that could potentially divide whites. For many white Protestants, the Irish and other immigrant Catholics in Charleston were doubly foreign by virtue of their places of origin and their religion. Anti-Catholicism and nativism blended inasmuch as Catholicism was a badge of foreignness to many Protestant Americans, including not a few Charlestonians, whose perception of Catholicism was greatly influenced by the large number of Irish Americans, including the Irish living in the poorer wards of their own city.

Catholicism's foreignness and the threat it represented to the southern way of life were reinforced by the anti-slavery rhetoric of leading Catholics abroad. While he remained a very popular figure for Irish Americans, Daniel O'Connell's call upon them to join the abolitionist movement had little influence among the Irish American community for a number of reasons. The Irish in America had been recreated as a new
economic and political creature, with social considerations beyond their previous experience in a Catholic Ireland subjected by Protestant Britain. Most of the Irish in northern cities were anti-abolitionists for several reasons, not the least of which was economics. Unskilled and semi-skilled Irish immigrants competed directly with free blacks in urban centers for jobs and were none too eager to see thousands of emancipated slaves released from southern plantations and free to come North and enter the job market. While not as numerous as their northern counterparts, southern Catholics in similar situations also supported the slave institution. Additionally, slavery subjected blacks and reinforced assumptions white Americans had about race. The Irishman in America was no longer a member of the subjected race; rather, their status was enhanced in relation to the still-lower status of the slave. Finally, the Protestant ministers who led the anti-slavery movement in the United States were often the men who spearheaded the anti-Catholic rhetoric and demonstrations in antebellum America. It is not surprising that the American Catholic Church's leadership were reluctant to lend support to the abolitionist movement, in spite of their ties to Ireland and their friendships with Daniel O'Connell and other Irish leaders.

The unforeseen effect of O'Connell's appeal, however, was the reaction of American Protestants. Even as southern whites were upset that the appeal had been made at all and feared that O'Connell's words
would win Irish American approval, northern abolitionist leaders were flummoxed, if not apoplectic, over the failure of O'Connell's call to garner significant support among Irish Americans. Anti-Catholic and nativist tendencies among southern whites and abolitionist leaders were thus reinforced, while Irish Americans remained largely pro-slavery.7

While the post office raid became a defining moment when Charleston's immigrant Catholic community joined with the other whites in their public support of slavery and the southern way of life, anti-Catholicism and nativism were not ended. Indeed, in 1839, four years after the Charleston post office raid, Pope Gregory XVI's encyclical, In Supremo, condemned slavery and the slave trade. This papal letter further antagonized southern whites, and a response to it—and the criticism it received from United States Secretary of State John Forsyth—occupied much of Bishop England's last two years. While, Pope Gregory reinforced Protestant America's anti-Catholic prejudices in a series of decisions reflecting his authoritarian nature and his distrust for republican ideology, the religious prejudice was already actively present in American society. The pontiff's actions and opinions served only to arouse suspicions and stir up pre-existing animosity.

7Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 45-46 mentions the support Know Nothings received from anti-slavery advocates because of the pro-slavery stance taken by most Irish Americans.
In the end, Bishop England was perhaps the greatest Catholic influence on the post office rioters and other Charleston Protestants. Already known to tolerate slavery as an evil institution unfortunately entrenched in the southern way of life, the bishop had undertaken the Holy See’s diplomatic mission to Haiti after his 1832 trip to Rome. White Charlestonians scarcely believed the bishop could meet as equals with the former slaves who ruled the Caribbean nation. Bishop England’s acceptance of this task at once underscored American perceptions of Catholics as docile subjects of an autocratic Rome and called into question southern Catholics loyalty to the region’s way of life and the institution of slavery.

Away from his diocese during much of the three years leading up to the post office raid, Bishop England seriously misjudged the mood in Charleston and the South. Southerners had been very much disturbed by the high tariffs passed through Congress in 1832, leading the Palmetto State to invoke the doctrine of nullification. The Nullification Crisis passed without bloodshed or disunion, but white South Carolinians were resolved to protect slavery and their socio-economic system at all costs. Within the short span between the Nullification Crisis and the post office raid, Bishop England brought attention to himself and his church in actions that antagonized his Protestant neighbors. In Haiti England accepted a black man for the priesthood and, upon returning to Charleston, opened a school for free black
children at the beginning of the summer of 1835. While in retrospect his concerns for Haitians and blacks in his own diocese are understandable, England’s efforts were viewed at the time by white Charleston Protestants as a concerted attempt to undermine the status quo in South Carolina.

Furthermore, Bishop England made arrangements in 1834 to establish an Ursuline convent in Charleston. Throughout the twelve months immediately preceding the July 1835 post office raid, Charlestonians were reminded daily of the Massachusetts Ursuline convent’s destruction in the August 1834. Newspapers carried news of the event and the ensuing trials, along with advertisements for the virulently anti-Catholic book, *Six Months in a Convent*, which had sparked the violence against the Ursulines in New England. The arrival of Irish Ursulines in South Carolina in January 1835, just five months after the destruction of the Ursuline convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, only added to the distrust and suspicions that Charleston, South Carolina white Protestants harbored toward Bishop England and other Catholics.

Symptomatic of the lingering unease in Charleston was the tarring and cottoning of a barber, Richard Wood, also known as R. W. Carrol, who was taken from his shop near the corner of Queen and East Bay only a block from the Exchange Building. Wood was treated to this painful vigilante act on August 21, just three weeks after the hysteria over the antislavery mailing, when some whites suspected he was
receiving stolen goods from Charleston blacks. He may have been a relative newcomer to the area, since his name is not found in the index of the 1830 Census for South Carolina, but immigration records for the period are incomplete. Wood may have been connected with the Irishman, James Parsons Carroll, who had been admitted to citizenship in 1792. With no record of R. W. Carrol or Richard Wood it is difficult to say much with certainty regarding his background and station. However, given the treatment he received and the white townspeople's presumption that he had illegal business contacts with blacks, it is likely that Wood was a resident of one of Charleston's poorer wards where whites and free blacks lived and worked shoulder to shoulder. In other words, in the summer of 1835, he was just the sort of man to arouse the suspicions of the city's slaveowning whites, who were already alarmed at the antislavery campaign's postal assault on their way of life.

It is not surprising to find that the tensions revealed in the crisis of July 1835 were not assuaged in the resolutions passed and the actions taken in the wake of the arrival of the pamphlets on the Columbia. Something more profound had already begun to influence Protestant perceptions, and upon this wellspring Bishop England drew. Although

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8Pease and Pease, Web of Progress, 162 for information regarding the "cottoning and tarrying" of Richard Wood. See also South Carolina 1830 Census Index and Admiralty Journals, United States Court of Admiralty, 1795-1857 and United States District Court Journals, Charleston, South Carolina, 1789-1860, Brent Holcomb, transcriber, South Carolina Naturalizations, 1783-1850 (Baltimore, Md.: Genealogical Publishing, 1985), 5.
the potential danger to Catholics was real, the moment provided the test of Catholic commitment to American and southern social institutions. The post office raid and the incidents immediately afterwards also tested Protestant America's faith in its own ideas of democratic government with constitutionally protected rights of individuals, including ethnic and religious minorities among whites. Charleston's Irish Catholics became white southerners in the white Protestant South's desire to protect slavery at all costs. (In a bitterly ironic note, at the time of the post office raid and for a decade following, a generation was born, the sons of antebellum white Americans, whose blood sacrifice would be required before the rights of a free citizen could be extended to the enslaved African American).

As the anti-slavery mailing crisis passed, white Charlestonians sought to allay their remaining apprehensions. A citizens' meeting led to the formation of an ad hoc committee of twenty-one local leaders, which studied the various parts of the crisis surrounding the post office raid and, for a time, monitored shipments received at Charleston harbor. This "Committee of Twenty-one" made several recommendations affecting the movement of slaves and the personal liberties of freed blacks. Quickly passed into law locally, these recommendations were proposed for statewide consideration by Charleston's delegation to Columbia.

The call for closing schools for freed black children was among the decisions coming out of the committee's work. A group of "leading
citizens" called upon Bishop England to close the recently opened school for freed blacks staffed by the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, a diocesan religious order founded by the bishop in 1829. The bishop complied with the request only after determining that the pressure to close the Catholic school was not motivated by religious bigotry. In a show of good faith, Charleston's white leadership closed similar schools operated by Protestant sects. In his insistence that all schools be closed if his school closed, Bishop England cleverly forced Charleston's Protestant white elite to make a choice between their religious intolerance and racial bigotry. The white establishment put aside its anti-Catholicism to effect a white solidarity set against the threat of servile insurrection in the wake of the anti-slavery postal campaign. Closing the schools for free black children was part of the larger effort to secure the status quo, a white minority holding a black majority in bondage.9

Bishop England closed his school for free black children as a show of Catholic support for South Carolina's social order. At the same time, the Irish Catholics who made up his flock were demonstrating their own commitment to the southern way of life, even as they competed with free blacks and slaves for the jobs requiring unskilled and semi-skilled labor. Charleston's color line set the Irish above the slave and freed black and made possible his full participation as a citizen.
At the beginning of the antebellum period, the Irish Catholic found his place in America’s white race through his support of racial slavery. By the last decade of the period before the Civil War, America’s slavery institution had persevered for as long as it had, in part because of the immigrants’ support for the nation’s biracial social construct in which the new arrived European, regardless of the hardships he escaped in emigrating, became a member of the master race by virtue of the color of his skin. In 1835 at the time of Charleston’s post office raid, as the abolitionist ideology was only beginning to move into mainstream American thought, the Irish and other immigrants entering the country were viewed by many southerners with deep suspicion.

The Charleston post office mob’s threats against the cathedral and Bishop England carried the potential for violence. In spite of Jacksonian America’s anti-Catholic heritage and continued bias, white Protestant Charlestonians in the summer of 1835 proved quite willing to lay aside religious prejudice in combating the greater threat against them posed by northern anti-slavery societies.

The Irish Catholic response to the anti-slavery threat, witnessed in Bishop England’s comments in print and in a speech and in the Irish Catholic participation at the rally in front of the Exchange Building, demonstrated the Irish Catholic’s commitment to the social and

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economic life of his adopted homeland in the American South. This commitment, in the face of the many events and influences reinforcing anti-Catholic and nativist tendencies among southern white Protestants, preserved the relative peace in Charleston in the wake of the post office raid at the end of July 1835. While the factors of Catholic assimilation into antebellum southern culture and the Protestant reception of Catholic immigrants can be discerned in the events surrounding Charleston's well-known post office raid, the larger issue at work in the raid is that of race and the role of racial identity in social relationships at a time when the United States, while wrestling with the issue of slavery, experienced its first large wave immigration. The ethnic and religious variations from the established Anglo-American Protestant mainstream, provided by the Irish and other Catholic immigrants, rekindled among old-line Americans the prejudices of anti-Catholicism and nativism. These prejudices, in response to the perceived threat of Catholicism to American republicanism, sometimes led to violence. In July 1835 the immigrant Catholic community of Charleston faced such a threat with a willingness to defend themselves and their church property, while reassuring their Protestant white neighbors of their own support for the southern way of life.
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