

American (or Know-Nothing) Party Platform 1856

The American (or Know-Nothing) Party sought to reduce immigration to the United States, especially the immigration of Catholics who were arriving from Ireland to urban areas of the Northeast. The Know-Nothing Party took its name from the nativist (or anti-immigrant) secret society from which it grew. The society's members denied the existence of the organization by "knowing nothing" about it. Although the Know-Nothings nominated former president Millard Fillmore in 1856, support for the party declined in popularity after the election.

Resolved, That the American democracy place their trust in the intelligence, the patriotism, and the discriminating justice of the American people. . . .

3. *Americans must rule America*; and to this end *native-born* citizens should be selected for all state, federal, and municipal offices of government employment, in preference to all others. *Nevertheless*,

4. Persons born of American parents residing temporarily abroad, should be entitled to all the rights of *native-born* citizens.

5. No person should be selected for political station (whether of native or foreign birth), who recognizes any allegiance or obligation of any description to any foreign prince, potentate, or power, or who refuses to recognize the federal and state constitution (each within its sphere) as paramount to all other laws, as rules of political action. . . .

7. The recognition of the right of *native-born* and naturalized citizens of the United States, permanently residing in any territory thereof, to frame their

constitution and laws, and to regulate their domestic and social affairs in their own mode, subject only to the provisions of the federal constitution, with the privilege of admission into the Union whenever they have the requisite population for one Representative in Congress: *Provided, always*, that none but those who are citizens of the United States under the constitution and laws thereof, and who have a fixed residence in any such territory, ought to participate in the formation of the constitution or in the enactment of laws for said territory or state. . . .

9. A change in the laws of naturalization, making a continued residence of twenty-one years, of all not heretofore provided for, an indispensable requisite for citizenship hereafter, and excluding all paupers and persons convicted of crime from landing upon our shores; but no interference with the vested rights of foreigners.

10. Opposition to any union between church and state; no interference with religious faith or worship; and no test-oaths for office. . . .

13. Opposition to the reckless and unwise policy of the present administration in the general management of our national affairs, and more especially as shown in removing "Americans" (by designation) and conservatives in principle, from office, and placing foreigners and ultraists [abolitionists] in their places; as shown in a truckling subserviency to the stronger, and an insolent and cowardly bravado towards the weaker powers; as shown in reopening sectional agitation, by the repeal of the Missouri Compromise; as shown in granting to unnaturalized foreigners the right of suffrage in Kansas and Nebraska; as shown in its vacillating course on the Kansas and Nebraska question; as shown in the corruptions which pervade some of the departments of the government; as shown in disgracing meritorious naval officers through prejudice or caprice; and as shown in the blundering mismanagement of our foreign relations.

14. Therefore, to remedy existing evils and prevent the disastrous consequences otherwise resulting therefrom, we would build up the "American Party" upon the principles hereinbefore stated.

Walter Raleigh Houghton, *Conspectus of the History of Political Parties and the Federal Government* (Indianapolis, IN: Granger, Davis, 1880), 45.

PRACTICING Historical Thinking

Identify: Identify two features of the American Party's platform that are consistent with the United States Constitution.

Analyze: Who is the intended audience for this platform? Is it the same audience that was intended for the Sedition Act (Doc. 5.18) and the Alien Act? Refer to your textbook and your notes for information on the Alien Act.

Evaluate: To what extent is this party's platform inconsistent with international trade relations, such as those brokered by Commodore Matthew Calbraith Perry (Doc. 10.3)?