then they get up a fight among themselves in the style of old Ireland, and perhaps kill one another, expressing great indignation and surprise when they find that they must answer for it though they are in a free country. By degrees, the more thirfty get and keep money, and diving deeper into the continent, purchase lands; while the intemperate and irreclaimable vanish from the surface.

The Americans complain, and justly, of the disorderly population which Ireland throws into the bosom of the Union, but there are many reasons why they should be borne with. They, with the poor Germans, do the work which without them could hardly be done. Though the fathers may be irreclaimable, the children become good citizens—and there is no finer race in the world, both for powers of mind and body, than the Irish, when favored by education and under proper control.

In one thing the emigrant Irish of every class distinguish themselves above the people of other nations, and that is in the love and kindly feeling which they cherish towards their native land, and towards those whom they have left behind—a fact proved by the large sums which are yearly transmitted from them to the mother country, in aid of their poverty-stricken relatives.

### 3. The Burning of a Convent School (1834)

The swelling tide of Irish-Catholic immigrants in the Boston area intensified a long-festerering prejudice against the Catholic Church. A half-dozen riots occurred before public indignation vented itself against an Ursuline convent school in Charlestown, outside Boston. Responding to ill-founded tales of abuse suffered by incarcerated nuns, a well-organized mob of about fifty men sacked and burned the four-story brick building on August 11, 1834. (Ironically, more than half of the fifty-seven pupils were Protestant girls.) Neither the authorities nor the hundreds of approving spectators made any attempt to restrain the mob. In retaliation, angry Irish laborers began to mobilize, but were restrained by Bishop Fenwick. The following editorial from the Boston Atlas expresses the widespread condemnation voiced in the press and among responsible citizens. What did this journal find most disturbing about the outrage?

From all we can learn, the violence was utterly without cause. The institution was in its very nature unpopular, and a strong feeling existed against it. But there was nothing in the vague rumors that have been idly circulating to authorize or account for any the least act of violence. We should state, perhaps, that during the violent scenes that were taking place before the convent—while the mob were breaking the windows and staving in the doors of the institution—and while the fire was blazing upon the hill as a signal to the mob—one or two muskets were discharged from the windows of the nunnery, or some of the buildings in the vicinity.

What a scene must this midnight conflagration have exhibited—lighting up the inflamed countenances of an infuriated mob of demons—attacking a convent of women, a seminary for the instruction of young females; and turning them out of their beds half naked in the hurry of their flight, and half dead with confusion and terror. And this drama, too, to be enacted on the very soil that afforded one of the

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3Quoted in *Miles' Weekly Register* 46 (August 23, 1834): 437.
earliest places of refuge to the Puritans of New England—their descendants might wax strong and mighty, and in their turn be guilty of the same persecution in the New!

We remember no parallel to this outrage in the whole course of history. Turn to the bloodiest incidents of the French Revolution . . . and point us to its equal in unprovoked violence, in brutal outrage, in unthwarted iniquity. It is in vain that we search for it. In times of civil commotion and general excitement . . . there was some palliation for violence and outrage—in the tremendously excited state of the public mind. But here there was no such palliation. The courts of justice were open to receive complaints of any improper confinement, or unauthorized coercion. The civil magistrates were, or ought to be, on the alert to detect any illegal restraint, and bring its authors to the punishment they deserve. But nothing of the kind was detected. The whole matter was a cool, deliberate, systematized piece of brutality—unprovoked—under the most provoking circumstances totally unjustifiable—and visiting the citizens of the town, and most particularly its magistrates and civil officers, with indelible disgrace.

[Local sentiment undoubtedly supported the mobsters. The subsequent trial of the ringleaders was a farce: insults were showered on the prosecution, the nuns, and the Catholic Church. Only one culprit was convicted, and he was pardoned following a petition by forgiving Catholics. The Massachusetts legislature, bowing to intimidation, dropped all efforts to provide financial recompense. Catholic churches in the area were forced to post armed guards, and for a time insurance companies refused to insure Catholic buildings built of inflammable materials. The Ursuline sisters of Charlestown finally moved to Canada, and for thirty-five years the blackened brick ruins of the school remained a monument to religious bigotry.]

4. A Southerner Defends the Catholics (1854)

The great flood of Irish Catholics, uprooted by the potato famine of the mid-1840s, further aroused many "native Americans." The newcomers not only worsened already stinking slums but became voting tools of the corrupt political machines. "Nativist" resentment found vent in the powerful Know-Nothing (American) party, which undertook to elect only "natives" to office; to raise the residence requirement for naturalization from five to twenty-one years; and to exclude Roman Catholics from office, on the popular assumption that orders from the pope took precedence over their oath to support the Constitution. Yet Know-Nothings found little support in the South. Relatively few Catholic immigrants went there, and in addition the Catholic Church did not cry out against slavery, as did the leading Protestant denominations of the North. Representative William T. S. Barry of Mississippi, a Presbyterian with Episcopalian leanings and one of the South's great orators, here defends the Catholics in a justly famous speech. In the light of his remarks, assess the following statements: persecution strengthens the persecuted; proscriptionists become the proscribed; intolerance has no logical halfway stopping point.

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*Congressional Globe, 33rd Congress, 2d session, Appendix, pp. 58-59.*