

Duty to Warn

Xenophobia, the Know Nothing Party of the 1850s and the Trump/Pence NeoFascist Republican Agenda for 2017

By Gary G. Kohls, MD

Glossary

Xenophobia = *an intense or irrational dislike or fear of people from other countries*

Nativism = *the policy of protecting the interests of native-born or established inhabitants against those of immigrants*

Summaries of the First 4 Points of Lawrence Britt's 14 Characteristics of Fascism That Apply to the Trump/Pence GOP

1. Powerful and continuing expressions of nationalism. *From the prominent displays of flags and bunting to the ubiquitous lapel pins, the fervor to show patriotic nationalism, both on the part of the regime itself and of citizens caught up in its frenzy, was always obvious. Catchy slogans, pride in the military, and demands for unity were common themes in expressing this nationalism. It was usually coupled with a suspicion of things foreign that often bordered on xenophobia.*

2. Disdain for the importance of human rights. *The regimes themselves viewed human rights as of little value and a hindrance to realizing the objectives of the ruling elite. Through clever use of propaganda, the population was brought to accept these human rights abuses by marginalizing, even demonizing, those being targeted. When abuse was egregious, the tactic was to use secrecy, denial, and disinformation.*

3. Identification of enemies/scapegoats as a unifying cause. *The most significant common thread among these regimes was the use of scapegoating as a means to divert the people's attention from other problems, to shift blame for failures, and to channel frustration in controlled directions. The methods of choice—relentless propaganda and disinformation—were usually effective. Often the regimes would incite “spontaneous” acts (aka “false flag operations”) against the targeted scapegoats, usually communists, socialists, liberals, Jews, ethnic and racial minorities, traditional national enemies, members of other religions, secularists, homosexuals, and “terrorists.” Active opponents of these regimes were inevitably labeled as terrorists and dealt with accordingly.*

4. The supremacy of the military/avid militarism. *Ruling elites always identified closely with the military and the industrial infrastructure that supported it. A disproportionate share of national resources was allocated to the military, even when domestic needs were acute. The*

military was seen as an expression of nationalism, and was used whenever possible to assert national goals, intimidate other nations, and increase the power and prestige of the ruling elite.

The pre-Civil War 1850s was an era when there was serious political instability and economic uncertainty partly because of the fear of a rising immigrant population without a concomitant increase in job opportunities. There was, as yet, no stable two party political system in the US. Because of these realities, a relatively new, very inexperienced political party, popularly known as the Know-Nothing Party, came out of nowhere and won 43 seats in the US Congress in the national election of 1856.

Although the existence of the new party was no secret, the names of its members were a closely kept secret. “I don’t know” was the preferred answer when the press asked about the party’s behind-closed-doors meetings and conspiratorial agendas. And so the pejorative label “know-nothing” was quickly applied to the group. It was a well-deserved title.

The Know-Nothings were originally named the Native American Party, although the name obviously did not refer to the real, non-white “native” Americans who had occupied the land for the previous 10,000 years – and then had it stolen from them. What the party meant by the designation “native” was “native-born”, and membership was limited to white people who were born in the USA. Only white Protestants were allowed in the party and specifically excluded Roman Catholics, most of whom were recent immigrants from Europe. They party soon changed its name to the American Party.

In other words, the Know-Nothings were the first “America First” political party and nativism and virulent xenophobia were essentially dogma. By today’s standards, it was a white supremacist party and its members would have been good Ku Klux Klan folks when that “Christian” organization came into existence after the racist South “lost” the Civil War - pledging on their honor to “rise again”, a pledge still taken quite seriously 150 years later by Confederate Flag-waving southerners in the Tea Party wing of the GOP.

The fact that they actually chose “Native American Party” as their official name at their onset was evidence for why they may have deserved their “know-nothing” nickname, for they appeared not to know the history of the genocidal way that their American ancestors had dealt with the real native Americans just a generation earlier. What was particularly ironic is that their ancestors had at one time been non-native-born immigrants themselves. But what else would one expect of fearful, illiterate and brain-washed know-nothings?

Because of the rash of European migrants in the mid-1850s (many of whom couldn’t speak English) there was naturally a lot of fear of job competition with desperate poor people who would work for subsistence (or lower) wages. So an often hysterical fear of those foreigners arose and politicians exploited those fears. This “xenophobia” and the resultant violence that that

fear generated was largely directed at the Roman Catholicism that was practiced by the immigrants that came from Ireland and southern Germany.

The young and inexperienced Know-Nothing Party reactionaries were unashamedly racist and also religiously pious, and it turned out to be a flash-in-the-pan reality as more and more moderate and open-minded Americans rejected the vile nature of the party's agenda.

<<<A Party of Religious Fanatics and Unprincipled Demagogues>>>

A Catholic Bishop, J. L. Spalding, said that the Know-Nothings were *"the depraved portion of our native(-born) population....It was not the American people who were seeking to make war on the church, but merely a party of religious fanatics and unprincipled demagogues who as little represented the American people as did the mobs whom they incited to bloodshed and incendiarism. Their whole conduct was un-American and opposed to all the principles and traditions of our free institutions."*

The know-nothing movement reached its peak in the mid-1850s, and by 1859 it had essentially disappeared from national politics. But the ideology obviously did not disappear.

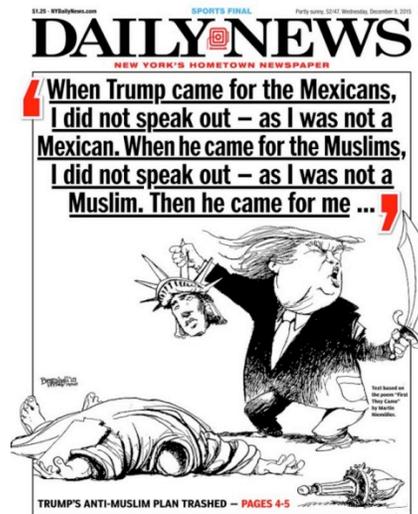
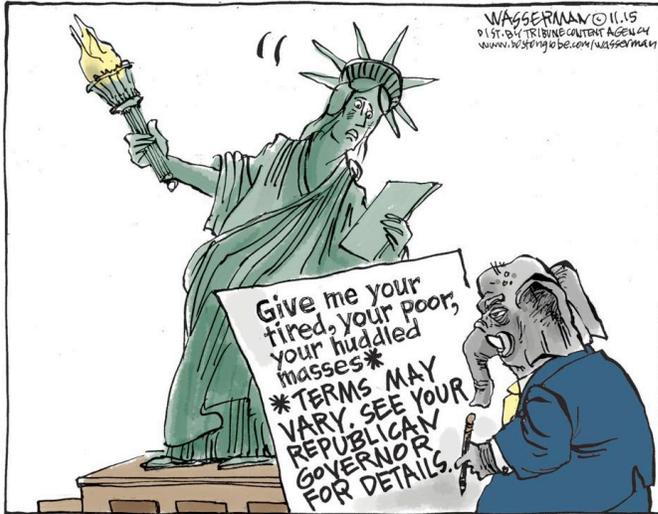
The irrational fear of foreigners and fear of foreign religions that characterized the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s has a lot of similarities to the "America First" party of Donald Trump's xenophobic GOP and the white supremacist Tea Party that sprang up after Barack Obama became America's first black president.

Just like today's right-wing parties in America, the Know-Nothings were again energized by the perception that America's immigration policies were too liberal. And a lot of narrow-minded voters throughout American and world history have easily become irrational haters of misunderstood or falsely demonized foreigners. And those fears are typically fanned by media outlets that thrive on controversy. Xenophobia became – and will always be easily made to be – "normal". Racial conflict still sells newspapers and biased TV news shows.

<<<Xenophobia is Incompatible with Sermon on the Mount Christianity>>>

Of course, the Know-Nothing Puritanical/Calvinistic Protestants, never having been carefully taught the primacy of the ethics of Jesus as summarized so well in the Sermon on the Mount, were not very likely to be truly merciful to the stranger or to lovingly feed the hungry immigrant or offer shelter to the homeless.

The helpless refugees who came to America's "welcoming" shores may have been trying to escape political persecution, pestilence, poverty, homelessness and starvation or they may have been innocent victims of war, simply trying to psychologically or spiritually heal from their traumatizing experience suffering under war's killing soldiers, secret service torturers and ruling tyrannical elites who were trying to maintain their wealth and power by any means possible.



Emma Lazarus' famous anti-tyranny poem (apparently now newly obsolete in the brave new world of America's xenophobic Republican Party supporters) is engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty that has inspired so many millions of refugees since it was gifted to America by France in the 1870s. The plaque says *"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me."* But the Statue of Liberty wasn't there in the 1850s.

So rather than welcoming beaten-down refugees into the New World, the Know-Nothings had their armed thugs administer beatings, shootings, and torchings of Catholic homes and Catholic churches. They even tarred and feathered a Jesuit priest, sending a clear message to other tired, poor, abused refugees who happened to have been indoctrinated into an "alien" religion.

The clear message was that they should self-deport – or else.

<<<The Know-Nothing's Xenophobic "America First" Political Party was not Actually America's First>>>

The Federalist Party of the early 1800s (frequently boasted about by the likes of the NeoCon Newt Gingrich) was probably the first xenophobic political party in the history of America.

During the administration of the Federalist Party president, John Adams, (POTUS # 2 - 1798-1802), that party pushed for the passage of America's first Alien Act, which allowed the president to deport any and all "aliens" that he regarded as potential threats to the republic.

Even more draconian laws, which are still on the books, were passed during World War I and in the Constitution-shredding Bush-era laws that were hastily passed immediately after 9/11/01. And, it must be mentioned, on New Year's Eve, 2011, when nobody was looking, President Obama signed the "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012" (NDAA 2012).

In the provisions of what is supposed to be the next year's appropriations bill (that decides how many more hundreds of billions of dollars of bankrupting national debt) with which the Pentagon will be further strangling the US economy for the next year, native-born citizens can now be imprisoned in hidden prisons, without charge, if they are deemed a threat to national security!

And there were other such "America First" movements to follow the Know-Nothings. As one example, American aviation hero Charles Lindbergh, who had been wined and dined and duly bamboozled by Adolf Hitler when he and his wife toured Germany in the mid-1930s, led an American First movement that truly believed in the political methods of Adolf Hitler.

Lindbergh's followers trusted a sociopath who was famous for his serial lying, just like most corporate lobbyist-duped politicians habitually do in America. They believed that America should be isolationist-minded and not interfere with movements such as European fascism and its obvious xenophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-Slavic, anti-minority agendas. To Lindbergh and his followers, America First meant that America should do what is selfishly best for America and keep its hands off of the problems of non-American issues, no matter how evil.

<<<The History of Xenophobia in American Politics>>>

The recent resurgence of the Christian Militia, Christian Dominionists, Christian Theocrats, the Pseudo-Christian Tea Party populist movements and now Trump's and Pence's xenophobic drum-beat should give all true patriots pause. Trump's campaign rhetoric has successfully recruited millions of short-sighted voters to his cause and, in the last couple of election cycles these groups have come out of nowhere to wield significant, albeit often dysfunctional power in the US Congress. Many of these xenophobic and racist-leaning legislators have come from formerly pro-slavery and segregationist states. The perceived rapidity of the movement should also remind us about what Christian supremacist and Islamophobe Ralph Reed of the right-wing Christian Coalition (decidedly not a Sermon on the Mount-type Christian) once said:

"What Christians have got to do is take back this country, one precinct at a time, one neighborhood at a time and one state at a time. I honestly believe that in my lifetime, we will see (America) once again governed by Christians....and Christian values....I want to be invisible. I do guerilla warfare. I paint my face and travel at night. You don't know it's over until you're in a body bag. You don't know until election night." -- Ralph Reed (Republican Christian Coalition executive director 1987-1989)

But the beneficiaries of all acts of genocide, just like the beneficiaries of inherited wealth, are typically unaware of the fact that they don't deserve the land or the privileges that accrued to them from the criminal acts and cruelty of their forefathers (or the deadly indulgent parenting style of their parents in the case of many punitive conservatives like Trump). The real aboriginal people who had possessed the land for 10,000 years before white supremacists like the Catholic conquistadors stumbled upon the continent in the 1500s.

America's true history is blood-drenched, putrid, genocidal, anti-democratic and un-Christ-like in the extreme, and it contradicts the wide-spread and deeply-indoctrinated (albeit false) "Christian" belief that America has always been "a shining city on a hill" that is blessed by God.

One has to be a historically-illiterate know-nothing to believe that.

America's gruesome history has been censored out of America's school books ever since history books began being printed. Lying about the past has been true of all pseudo-patriotic nations since the beginning of time. The textbooks from my history classes never mentioned the mass slaughter of America's First Nation's peoples. Nor was there anything taught about the gruesome history of slavery or of the lynchings of black African-Americans at the hand of white supremacists. No history teacher in America is ever likely to get to the section on the war crimes committed by American soldiers during the Vietnam War before the semester ends.

Indeed, the history of our nation's origins has been profusely sugar-coated. Most of us grew up believing most of the false history that desperately need to be re-learned in this time when America is so profoundly hated for those wartime atrocities and injustices that we innocents are being sheltered from. Ever since the homicidal white supremacist, Christopher Columbus (and his greedy, sex-starved crew) began raping and pillaging the aboriginal inhabitants and their resources in 1492, the patriotic story/lie has been told again and again until we sheeple eventually believed that it was true.

<<<The Political Platform of the Know Nothing Party>>>

Following is the platform of the Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s: It might sound familiar. Only the type of religion might be different now.

- Severe limits on immigration, especially from predominantly Catholic countries.
- Restricting political office to native-born Americans.
- Extending the residency requirements for citizenship from five to twenty-one years.
- Limiting public office to native-born individuals.
- Restricting public school teachers to (white) Protestants.
- Mandating daily Bible readings in public schools (to be read from the Protestant version of the Bible).
- Restricting the sale of liquor.

Article III of the Know-Nothing Party's founding document declared that ***"a member must be a native-born citizen, a Protestant either born of Protestant parents or reared under Protestant influence, and not united in marriage with a Roman Catholic....no member who has a Roman Catholic wife shall be eligible to office in this order"***.

When a Know-Nothing Party member was admitted into the secret organization, he was required to take the following oath:

"In the presence of Almighty God and these witnesses, you do solemnly promise and swear that you will never betray any of the secrets of this society...that you never will permit any of the secrets of this society to be written, ...that you will not vote... for any man for any office. ... unless he be an American-born citizen, in favor of Americans ruling America...that you will not, under any circumstances, expose the name of any member of this order nor reveal the existence of such an association; that you willobey the command of the....president or his deputy."

The candidate that the Know-Nothings ran for president in 1856 was Whig Party POTUS Millard Fillmore (who served under president General Zachary Taylor as Vice President from 1849 – 1850). Fillmore served as POTUS from 1850 – 1853 when president Taylor died in office..

Fillmore had quit the disintegrating Whig Party after 1853 and accepted the nomination of the Know-Nothings in 1855, but, even though he wasn't as xenophobic as the rest of the party, his "America First" campaign slogan was "I know nothing but my Country, my whole Country, and nothing but my Country." He lost in a landslide because voters had finally seen the criminal excesses of the xenophobic party's agenda and repudiated it at the polls.

The Know-Nothings won only one state in the Electoral College balloting that year and the once national party soon slipped into obscurity.

The Know-Nothings had conveniently forgotten that their ancestors were responsible for crimes against humanity, and they didn't seem to feel any remorse for Democratic president Andrew Jackson's "Trail of Tears" atrocities which would have easily met the 20th century's definition of crimes against humanity. The same could be said of the POW death camps of both the Confederate and Union Armies in the soon-to-erupt War Between the States.

The sorry state of the GOP voters' questionable intelligence, the absence of basic scientific knowledge and the ease with which they have been led to believe obviously false campaign rhetoric has been breath-taking.

And their apparent studied ignorance on such issues as climate change, the threat of rising sea levels, the obvious environmental degradation, the pollution of air, water and soil from their corporate paymasters, the stubborn racism, and their obvious lack of knowledge of history, science, international relations, drug policy, privatized prisons, gun violence, income and wealth inequality, access to medical care, etc, etc has been appalling and lends further credence to making the comparisons with the Know-Nothings.

Sad.

Dr Kohls is a retired physician from Duluth, MN, USA. He writes a weekly column for the Duluth Reader, the area's alternative newsweekly magazine. His columns deal with the dangers of American fascism, corporatism, militarism, racism, malnutrition, Big Pharma's psychiatric drugging and over-vaccination regimens, and other movements that threaten the environment, health, democracy, civility and longevity of the populace. Many of his columns are archived at http://duluthreader.com/search?search_term=Duty+to+Warn&p=2; http://www.globalresearch.ca/authors?query=Gary+Kohls+articles&by=&p=&page_id= or at <https://www.transcend.org/tms/search/?q=gary+kohls+articles>