

# Inquiring Minds topic – 20 November 2015

Bruce McNaughton, Moderator

## The Trump Syndrome

Friends, let's consider this subject not as Republicans, Democrats or independents. No, let's discuss this as political scientists would in a colloquium. Consider this as exploration and search for larger truths.

Here are some questions for your consideration and comment:

- Is this something new in our political history?
- Does Trump ism suggest the decline of political order in a party. The end of discipline?
- Should the parties return to smoke filled rooms and big conventions picking their candidates? Should we continue with primaries and caucuses?
- Is Trump ism the triumph of show biz personality, hype and low comedy? Or is it an honest reaction to the failure of our political leadership, or a little of both?

Please remember this is not about Trump as a candidate but the circumstances that produce the situation where his candidacy is a reality. If you insist on extolling or demeaning "The Donald" as a voting choice, I will interrupt your declamation.

Attached are two articles for your reading pleasure. One is from the New York Times (thanks to Dr. Kaplan's sharp eye) and another is a history of the Know Nothing Party from the Britannica Online Encyclopedia.

- Bruce McNaughton, moderator

# How Trump Has Upended the Story Line

[www.nytimes.com/2015/10/27/us/politics/how-trump-has-upended-the-story-line.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/27/us/politics/how-trump-has-upended-the-story-line.html)

By ANAND GIRIDHARADAS

**The American television punditocracy — the pollsters, political consultants and other talking heads who become as ubiquitous as air every election cycle — can be incestuous and herdlike. Its members spend a lot of time in New York and Washington greenrooms, preparing their assessments about “real Americans,” whom some pundits have even encountered, maybe at a highway rest stop.**

**To watch their punditry in recent months has been to observe a tortured passage in comprehending the presidential candidacy of Donald J. Trump.**

**First they were fascinated. Then they were in disbelief, explaining that polls weren’t always accurate. Then they were merely skeptical: The consensus was that it would be hard for him to win, but a few people started hedging their bets and comparing him to Ronald Reagan. Now the tone has shifted again, to acceptance: More and more, it is said that he may become the Republican nominee.**

**Mr. Trump is an entertainer, bringing a rawness and wildness to the presidential race that no other candidate can come close to matching. His campaign is a cult of personality, and has been reported as such.**

**And yet, win or lose, Mr. Trump could have a lasting effect on American politics, thanks to an ad hoc ideology and electoral coalition, animated by the anxieties of a post-Cold War, globalized world.**

**That world has been disorienting for many middle- and working-class Americans. Work vanishes to faraway lands, and they are made to train their foreign replacements. A new fluidity in sexual, gender and cultural norms upsets traditional understanding. White Americans face the prospect of losing their majority status. The ultrarich seize on the opportunities of the new order and corner a growing proportion of the national income. Young voters hear they will be the first generation of Americans to fare worse than their parents.**

**The atmosphere of change and anxiety provides a ripe opportunity for politicians. But Republican orthodoxy has limited the exploitation of working-**

**class fears. The party mainstream is firmly in favor of free trade, low marginal-tax rates at the high end and legal immigration.**

**Mr. Trump has dispensed with that orthodoxy. Reflecting the populist drift of the far right of the Republican Party, he has deftly played into the central fears of many voters: that their job security, cultural identity and general assumptions (and those of their children) are under assault from a variety of forces at home and abroad. And while he contends that sometimes the problem is too much government, he has been known to break from traditional Republicans and say the problem is too little government.**

**His immigration plan, to build a wall on the border and deport undocumented immigrants, may be unfeasible and, as some argue, inhumane. His pledge to impose tariffs on foreign countries to keep factories in America may be a hard sell in Congress. His plan to raise taxes on hedge-fund managers who stash wealth in the Caribbean may be a nonstarter. What these impulses have in common, however, is a belief that in the 21st century, American freedoms are threatened not only by overbearing government, as his Republican colleagues tend to emphasize, but also by a more complex and diffuse set of forces.**

**In the face of Republican near-consensus on the free market, Mr. Trump says, in his own way, that government can play a unique role in writing the rules of the marketplace and restraining the market when it fails people.**

**Such ideas have grown unfashionable in our market-venerating era. A cool new utilitarianism has gained currency: If a million people lose \$50,000-a-year jobs through trade, but 100 million save \$501 a year by buying cheaper Chinese stuff — the surplus of which they spend on other things, in that way generating more jobs — the market consensus tells us we are better off.**

**But pain is not transferable. One hundred savers at Walmart and one laid-off worker may cancel themselves out on a balance sheet, but in politics they are additive. Mr. Trump has, in his own way, understood that. Win or lose, that understanding could endure.**

## Know-Nothing party



A portrait of a young man representing the nativist ideal of the Know-Nothing party.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (Digital File Number: LC-DIG-pga-02603)

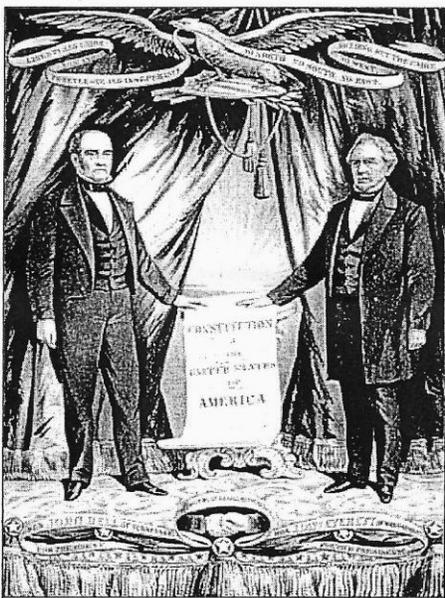
**Know-Nothing party**, byname of **American Party**, U.S. political party that flourished in the 1850s. The Know-Nothing party was an outgrowth of the strong anti-immigrant and especially anti-Roman Catholic sentiment that started to manifest itself during the 1840s. A rising tide of immigrants, primarily Germans in the Midwest and Irish in the East, seemed to pose a threat to the economic and political security of native-born Protestant Americans. In 1849 the secret Order of the Star-Spangled Banner formed in New York City, and soon after lodges formed in nearly every other major American city.

Members, when asked about their nativist organizations, were supposed to reply that they knew nothing, hence the name. As its membership and importance grew in the 1850s, the group slowly shed its clandestine character and took the official name American Party. As a national political entity, it called for restrictions on immigration, the exclusion of the foreign-born from voting or holding public office in the United States, and for a 21-year residency requirement for citizenship.

By 1852 the Know-Nothing party was achieving phenomenal growth. It did very well that year in state and local elections, and with passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 it won additional adherents from the ranks of conservatives who could support neither the proslavery Democrats nor antislavery Republicans. When Congress assembled on Dec. 3, 1855, 43 representatives were avowed members of the Know-Nothing party.

That, however, was the peak of Know-Nothing power. At the American Party convention in Philadelphia the following year, the party split along sectional lines over the proslavery platform pushed through by Southern delegates. Party presidential candidate Millard Fillmore carried just one state

(Maryland) in the 1856 election, and congressional strength dropped to 12 representatives.



Campaign poster for the Constitutional Union Party, with John Bell (left) and Edward Everett, 1860.

Caught in the sectional strife disrupting all national institutions, the American Party fell apart after 1856. Antislavery Know-Nothings joined the Republican Party, while Southern members flocked to the proslavery banner still held aloft by the Democratic Party. By 1859 the American Party's strength was largely confined to the border states. In 1860 remnants of the Know-Nothings joined old-line Whigs to form the Constitutional Union Party and nominated John Bell of Tennessee for president. Bell finished fourth in popular votes in the four-man contest of that year, won by the Republican Abraham Lincoln.

Two other groups that took the name American Party appeared in the 1870s and '80s. One of these, organized in California in 1886, proposed a briefly popular platform calling mainly for the exclusion of Chinese and other Asians from industrial employment.