

**KNOW-NOTHINGS IN 21ST CENTURY & MY IRISH ANCESTORS  
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**M**y great grandparents, Jeremiah and Ellen Lyons, from County Waterford were numbered among the “half of Ireland’s population emigrated in the face of famine” in the mid-19th century as the Know Nothing party peaked. ([Paul Krugman: Know Nothings for 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Jan. 16, 2018](#))

By the time they had arrived in Chicago from New York, after building the railroads along with Chinese contract laborers, the sound of a new voice began to be heard on the prairie. In a letter to his friend in Springfield, Illinois, a young man on the rise wrote: “I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can anyone who abhors the oppression of Negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation, we began by declaring that ‘all men are created equal.’ ... When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read ‘all men are created equal, except Negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics.’ ” Signed: A. LINCOLN – August 24, 1855.

It may be a long time before we ever again see a person of moral integrity and intellect presiding in the Oval Office to stop “our progress in degeneracy.” But if Pres. Trump’s continuing racist and lying behavior is not recognized as rooted in the banality of evil, it does provide clear evidence that the banality of the vulgar is the new norm for our chief executive.

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