Anti-Immigrant Crusade in a Nation of Immigrants: The History of American Nativism

While the constant influx of immigrants characterizes the history of the United States, intolerance with foreigners who seemed to threaten the cultural, economic, and political fabric of society from the perspective of native-born Americans has equally shaped the American immigration experience. My research has focused on the social and legal history of “nativism,” or intense hostility toward foreigners, in the United States. This presentation provides an overview of my scholarship from my first book, which reinterprets the origins of American immigration control based on a study of anti-Irish sentiment in nineteenth-century New York and Massachusetts, to my current project, a synthetic history of American nativism that traces the evolution of anti-foreigner sentiment in the United States from the foundation of the nation to the present debate over illegal immigration.