

THESIS

“DIE AT HOME”: A CONTEXTUALIZATION AND MAPPING OF THE NEW YORK CITY  
DRAFT RIOTS OF 1863

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Spring 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### “DIE AT HOME”: A CONTEXTUALIZATION AND MAPPING OF THE NEW YORK CITY DRAFT RIOTS OF 1863

This thesis attempts to contextualize and explore the New York City Draft Riots of 1863 – one of the deadliest instances of civil insurrection in American history – in order to prove that the violence of the riots was neither completely undirected nor uniform. At the heart of this argument is the simple idea that violence is never random. The first two chapters contextualize the Draft Riots within the greater experience of New York’s Irish population, both in the Civil War and at home in New York City. The final two chapters, through a spatiotemporal analysis, seek to isolate patterns within riot violence in order to better understand the differing targets and tactics of rioters throughout the unrest.

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## Introduction

On July 13, 1863, a rebel column marched through the heart of downtown Manhattan. Not two weeks had passed since Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had punched into Northern territory in a daring gambit to inflict a decisive blow against the Union. For New Yorkers, jarring as the news of the Confederate invasion may have been, two-hundred miles of distance and the Army of the Potomac still provided some sense of comfort. In Gotham, rebellion had still seemed a distant threat. Now, at the head of the insurrectionary mass, a captured Union flag flapped mockingly, while a number of blue-uniformed corpses provided the column with a gruesome vanguard.<sup>1</sup>

On Mulberry street, the location of the police headquarters, the mood was one just shy of panic. The New York militia had deployed to Gettysburg in an attempt to stop Lee's furious offensive, leaving New York City's metropolitan police force the only group with sufficient numbers to mount any sort of defense of the downtown. However, Police Superintendent John Kennedy, clinging desperately to life after a severe mauling earlier that day, was too incapacitated to lead, leaving the force shaken and confused. Chief police clerk Seth Hawley, entering the commissioner's room, put the situation plainly, "Gentlemen, the crisis has come. A battle has to be fought now, and won too, or all is lost."<sup>2</sup> The small war-council assembled in the commissioner's room picked seasoned police veteran Sergeant Daniel Carpenter to lead the attack against the rebel mass. When the sergeant asked what he was to do with prisoners, the acting Superintendent Thomas Acton, near mad with stress, screamed, "Prisoners? Don't take

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<sup>1</sup> Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 64.

<sup>2</sup> Joel Tyler Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712 to 1873: Including a Full and Complete Account of the Four Days' Draft Riot of 1863* (Miami: Mnemosyne, 1969), 171.

any! Kill! Kill! Kill!”<sup>3</sup> Having been issued his orders, Carpenter offered a laconic reply: “I’ll go, and I’ll win that fight, or Daniel Carpenter will never come back a live man.”<sup>4</sup>

The above is not historical fiction. It is not a neo-Confederate fantasy of a timeline in which Lee had triumphed over Meade at Gettysburg, and neither is it a *Gangs of New York*-esque over-the-top exaggeration of blood and thunder events designed to entice modern audiences. The above is simply one of the many desperate moments that made up the first terrible day in what would become known as the New York City Draft Riots.

The connection between the thousands of rebels who marched down Broadway and the rebels who accompanied Lee in his invasion of the North is misleading, but deliberately so. Daniel Carpenter’s opponents in the streets of New York were not Confederate Southerners, but rather the working-class Irish inhabitants of the city. However, the wealthier inhabitants of New York, unable to believe that the Irish were capable of inflicting such a blow to their city, were convinced that the entire affair was a diabolical plot orchestrated by Southern agents.<sup>5</sup> Northern forces had managed to defeat Lee at Gettysburg, but the subsequent escape of the Virginian and his army further heightened Northern anxieties about a long, costly war which had yet to produce a war-ending victory over the Confederacy. The eruption of rioting at such a critical time in the course of the conflict would ensure that the response to and memory of the unrest would be marked with suspicions of Confederate involvement.

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<sup>3</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 74. Although such a reaction may seem overblown, Acton’s mental health suffered so much as a result of the Draft Riots that he needed a five-year leave of absence to recover. See “Thomas C. Acton is Dead.” *The New York Times*, May 02, 1898. For a slightly calmer depiction of the scene, see Augustine Costello, *Our Police Protectors: History of the New York Police From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York: Costello, 1885), 205. Acton was still living when Costello published his narrative, which may account for the more collected depiction of the Commissioner.

<sup>4</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 172.

<sup>5</sup> Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 369.

In actuality, however, the Draft Riots were far from a Southern invention. Instead, the New York City Draft Riots, rather than being an orgy of murder and destruction orchestrated for the benefit of an alien power, were a diverse, complex, and bloody representation of the objectives and frustrations of the various groups that made up New York's Irish population. The initial success of the riots, which were ostensibly provoked by the commencement of the draft in New York City, horrified contemporaries. Rioters effectively paralyzed New York as they torched government buildings, killed African-Americans, and even targeted New York's transportation and communication infrastructure. Only after four days, when authorities were reinforced by troops from Gettysburg, was the carnage finally put to an end.

The Draft Riots remain to this day, after the Civil War itself, the deadliest insurrection in American history<sup>6</sup>, yet are largely forgotten or misunderstood by the public and scholars alike. This problem of "collective amnesia"<sup>7</sup> in regards to the Draft Riots is as old as the violence itself, and must be explored in order to fully grasp the development and gaps remaining in the historiography. Despite the trauma that the rioters inflicted on their city, New Yorkers had already by 1864 begun the process of erasing the Draft Riots from their collective memory. "When in late 1863 Northern military victory began to appear imminent," writes Iver Bernstein, author of *The New York City Draft Riots*, "an anachronistic reading back of national unity in a grand cause encouraged many Northerners to repress further the recollection and meaning of

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<sup>6</sup> Conservative estimates put the death toll at around 105, and even this number is probably far too low. More inflated estimates put the death toll among rioters alone at well upwards of 1,000 dead. For such an example see Albon P. Man, "Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863," *The Journal of Negro History* 36, no. 4 (1951), 375. For the more conservative casualty list, see Cook's *Armies of the Streets*, 213-18. This disparity speaks not only to the difficulty in accurately tracking certain critical details of the rioting, but also to the magnitude of the carnage.

<sup>7</sup> Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4.



draft resistance in New York.”<sup>8</sup> While exact motives varied, rich and poor alike soon distanced themselves from the embarrassing memory of the rioting.

With no group that had participated in the riots willing to preserve the memory of the violence, significance and context were eventually blurred, and any memory of the Draft Riots was soon resigned to only the most grisly scenes. Further confusing the issue, the disproportionate violence inflicted upon African-Americans throughout the riots led some to categorize the entire event as a race riot.<sup>9</sup> This, combined with earlier accounts characterizing the predominantly Irish rioters as “wild and savage,”<sup>10</sup> has ensured that the riots continue to be remembered as an orgy of mindless, undirected killing. This has long proved problematic for those wishing to undertake a sober study of the Draft Riots, prompting historians such as Adrian Cook to sheepishly admit that their research often “reads like a blood-and-thunder penny dreadful.”<sup>11</sup>

In fact, however, the Draft Riots were far from the common depiction of unorchestrated murder and plunder. Certainly, the draft apparatus and the city’s African-American population suffered a disproportionate share of horrors during the several days of unrest. However, rioters also paid deliberate attention to strategic interests. These interests, which included, among other things, targets of a communication, transportation, and logistical nature, were not limited to isolated incidents, but occurred repeatedly and throughout the city. It was these sort of deliberate attacks that convinced panicked New Yorkers, who recognized the dire threat posed by such strategic targeting, that the entire affair had been orchestrated by Confederate agents.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> Albon P. Man, "Labor Competition and the New York Draft Riots of 1863," *The Journal of Negro History* 36, no. 4 (1951): 375, Accessed 02/11/2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2715371>.

<sup>10</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 153.

<sup>11</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, ix.

<sup>12</sup> Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), 369.

A small number of historians have attempted to revisit this nuanced and complex nature of the Draft Riots, pushing back against what Bernstein calls the “poverty of analysis”<sup>13</sup> that has for so long defined the field. Iver Bernstein’s foundational *The New York City Draft Riots*, for example, attempts to place the violence within its political and societal context. In Bernstein’s narrative, rioters are rehabilitated as multi-dimensional actors, with complex backgrounds, tactics, and motives. Bernstein’s work would itself not have been possible without the research and writing of Adrian Cook, whose 1974 *Armies of the Streets* provided the most holistic depictions of the Draft Riots since Joel Headley published *The Great Riots of New York* in 1873. Other studies of nineteenth-century New York, such as Tyler Anbinder’s *Five Points*, have also made strides in demonstrating the political, economic, and social intricacies that governed New York’s working class.<sup>14</sup>

However, despite the efforts of the above authors, the Draft Riots remain poorly understood. The Draft Riots resulted in more deaths than several actual Civil War battles,<sup>15</sup> but have been completely neglected by recent scholars of the conflict. To illustrate just how long the silence has lasted, the newest historical monograph concerning the Draft Riots specifically is older than the author of this thesis. Bernstein’s account was published in 1990, and, after almost three decades, no historian has published a serious monograph specifically addressing the Draft Riots. The lack of attention paid by historians to the Draft Riots is shocking, especially in light of developments within the study of Civil War history itself. To the chagrin of some more traditionally-minded scholars, many historians of the American Civil War have, in order to better

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<sup>13</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: Free Press, 2001)

<sup>15</sup> For at least one example of such a battle, see the Battle of Blackburn’s Ford, which resulted in only 19 Union dead. See “The Fight At Blackburn’s Ford,; Official Report of Col. Richardson.” *The New York Times*, August 18, 1861. With the death toll of the Draft Riots resting somewhere between 100 and 1,000, the unrest was markedly bloodier than several smaller battles between the Union and the Confederacy.

understand the conflict, shifted the focus of their work from the battlefield to the homefront. Recent scholars of the Civil War have produced literature establishing the importance of the environment, Confederate guerillas, railroads, and rural Indianans in order to better understand the conflict.<sup>16</sup> They argue, and rightly so, that the battlefield cannot be fully understood outside of the context of the homefront. Given this historiographical shift, and the fact that the Draft Riots occurred at such a massive scope and in a city as vital to the Union war effort as New York City, almost thirty years of historiographical silence on the topic is mystifying. The Draft Riots represented a radically violent manifestation of homefront Union disunity at a time in the conflict when the war was far from decided. The study of such an important event is vital, and, as it stands, the Draft Riots remain a gaping hole within the historiography of the Civil War.

This gap is worsened by the fact that what little scholarship that exists on the riots is far from perfect. Previous studies of the Draft Riots tend to start their analyses with the beginning of the violence, provide minimal background to the situation of New York's Irish in the time leading up to the riots, and tend to recount rather than analysis the violence. With events of substantial scale and magnitude, such as a battle, a guerilla campaign, or even a riot, violence must be placed within its geographic, spatial, and historical context to be properly understood. It is in the relationship between violence and the surrounding timing and location of occurrences that the patterns and structures of the greater event can be discerned. Rioters sought not only to remove the offending symbols of the draft and the war, they sought to cripple any ability of New York's infrastructure to respond. The effect that these strategic attacks had on the success and

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<sup>16</sup> See respectively, Lisa Brady, *War Upon the Land: Military Strategies and the Transformation of Southern Landscapes during the American Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), Daniel Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), William Thomas, *The Iron Way: Railroads, the Civil War, and the Making of Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) and Nicole Etcheson, *A Generation at War: The Civil War Era in a Northern Community* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

selection of assaults on “hard” targets, such as an armed police precinct station, or on “soft” targets such as unarmed African-Americans, has yet to be explored in any capacity.

Simply put, the research opportunities afforded to historians have changed since 1990. The increasing availability of geographic information systems (GIS) has given new opportunities to historians wishing to reexamine or retool existing hypotheses. No historian has, to date, attempted to apply a geospatial approach to the Draft Riots. However, Andrew Fialka successfully utilized a similar GIS approach in order to study the structure and pattern of Confederate guerilla violence during the Civil War, publishing his findings in *The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory, and Myth*.<sup>17</sup> Much like the belligerents in the Draft Riots, the violence perpetrated by the guerillas initially appeared almost random. The application of a spatiotemporal lens, however, proved that guerilla actions followed a basic pattern. Examining the unrest through such a lens effectively shifts attention away from only the most grisly attacks, and illustrates more clearly the city-wide strategic patterns and structures that shaped the violence.

The use of such technology, however, necessitates transparency. The lack of an accurate, available primary report of the Draft Riots means that much of the data collected for this project comes from secondary sources. The authors of these secondary accounts had collected and pieced together their narratives from archives scattered all across New York State. Due to my own geographic and financial situation, being a Coloradan and a graduate student, personal access to these archives is currently impossible. As such, I was forced to rely on the keen scholarship and depictions that preceded me.

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<sup>17</sup> Andrew William Fialka "Controlled Chaos: Spatiotemporal Patterns Within Missouri's Irregular Civil War" in *The Civil War Guerrilla: Unfolding the Black Flag in History, Memory, and Myth*. (University Press of Kentucky)

The database that I created for this project tracked every instance of violence as recounted in these secondary accounts. They track the location, time, date, and characteristics of an attack. These characteristics included the success or failure of a given action, whether the action was racial, strategic, or a clash with government forces, and other incidents of violence on persons or property. Because of this, any given incident may have more than one characteristic, such as the mob's attack on the Union Steam Works, which was, among other things, a strategic attack and an attack on a hard target. In all, the database has slightly over one-hundred entries.

It should be noted that GIS is not as accurate as its scientific nature would suggest. Some entries in my database had to be estimated, such as when an author would explain that an attack occurred near a certain street corner. For the program to work properly, I would have to move that entry from "near" the street corner to the street corner itself. I faced a similar problem with times that were recorded, for example, as "around noon." The lack of an accurate official record also means that not all data could be included in my final database. Some data was vague, or missing key geospatial attributes (e.g. time, location). However, these individual attacks matter little when stepping back to view the overall patterns that I argue exist throughout the paper. The reasonable estimation of the location and time of an attack should be of little concern when stepping back to see city-wide patterns.

The methodology utilized in the production of this particular article would never have been possible without the contributions of Joel Headley, Iver Bernstein, and Adrian Cook. Their careful descriptions of when and where violence occurred throughout the Draft Riots allowed for the creation of GIS-ready datasets. Although this article may at times criticize the approach or focus of these authors, their work has been unquestionably foundational. The maps included in this article were all created in ArcGIS using data provided by the above authors. Instances of

violence as found in the secondary literature were catalogued, with special interest given to the location, time, and nature of the violence. This means, unfortunately, that not every single instance of violence could be recorded. Again, GIS requires accurate values for both time and space, and if one or both of those factors are missing an incident cannot be plotted. Given the relatively small geographic area and short timespan, however, almost all of the instances were recorded with a wealth of geospatial data. The amount of incidents also means that larger patterns and trends will still be discernable even if missing one or two instances of poorly recorded violence.

Through the application of tools such as GIS, the riots can be transformed from a series of gory still-frames to an organic and visual reenactment of the action as it occurred. In trying to understand how the Draft Riots developed, understanding the relationships between acts of violence is critical. With well-defined geographical borders and oftentimes well-preserved records, urban centers lend themselves especially well to the spatiotemporal approach of GIS. Now more than ever, historians find themselves equipped methodologically and technologically to begin attempting to understand the basic patterns of the New York City Draft Riots.

Before this GIS-approach can be applied to the patterns of violence, however, the tensions that led to the violence must be contextualized. To downplay the fury directed towards the draft would be a mistake, as it was undoubtedly the commencement of conscription which sparked the proverbial powder-keg. However, the assumption that the Irish of New York City rioted with only the provocation of the draft – almost at a whim – is grounded in the same racially-fueled worldview that perceived all Irish as brutish and wild, if admittedly capable fighters. It is a stereotype that emerged when the first Norman invaders did battle with the Gaelic clans, and persists in some ways to this day. To understand the Draft Riots, however, this ancient

prejudice must be discarded. New York's Irish only rioted after a series of external and internal forces convinced them that support of the war and dominant social order was not only no longer in their favor, but actively destructive to their prosperity and way of life. The actual violence of the riots can not be responsibly explored until these forces are established and explained.

Histories of the Draft Riots often begin their analysis on the first day of violence, starting with the commencement of the draft and the outbreak of rioting. However, if the entire conceit of this argument is that violence is not random, then any attempts at analysis are incomplete without first contextualizing the conditions that made the violence possible. The attack on the Ninth District Provost Marshall's Office makes no sense without understanding the anger towards the draft. The anger towards the draft, for example, makes no sense without understanding the fortunes of the 69<sup>th</sup> New York Infantry. The fortunes of the 69<sup>th</sup> make no sense without understanding the developments in the Civil War up to 1863. Thus, the first two chapters of this thesis will be dedicated to answering why the Draft Riots happened, while the final two will be directed towards understanding how they happened.

Chapter One, which follows this introduction, will examine the ways in which New York City's Irish population perceived and participated in the war. Chapter Two is concerned with the living conditions of working-class Irish New Yorkers, and argues that the material status of the Irish in the years preceding the Civil War must be understood if the Draft Riots are to be understood. This chapter will also attempt some environmental analysis, exploring the access of Irish New Yorkers to calories, and will argue that growing Irish anxieties regarding this access helped shape some of the violence during the riots themselves. Chapter Three is concerned with the outbreak of rioting within the downtown portion of Manhattan, and will argue that geographic realities, in addition to economic and social rivalries, helped shaped the violence

there. Chapter Four examines the distinct shape that the Draft Riots took in the uptown, and argues that uptown rioting took an entirely different form than violence elsewhere in the city.

In order to understand those objectives and frustrations unleashed that July – and ultimately better understand the violence itself – it is not enough to attempt to place the riots solely within its own context. Pains must be made to understand the effects which the war and the draft had on New York Irish population. Levels of destitution and poverty among the Irish must also be established, along with the history of rioting and street violence rampant in New York's poorer neighborhoods. Once all this is done, the violence of the Draft Riots itself must be analyzed, both in the context of the experience of New York's Irish and in the context of the violence itself. Such an approach will help to provide a more sober understanding of the true objectives of those July rioters, muddled by attention provided without context and to only the grisliest of scenes.



## War: New York's Irish and the Civil War

Vital to understanding the New York City Draft Riots is, perhaps unsurprisingly, the commencement of the draft, but this itself would make little sense without an understanding of the Civil War's progression up until the summer of 1863. Drunk off the excited anticipation and patriotic fervor of the early days of 1861, few Northerners could have foreseen the weariness and despondency which would come to plague the Union war effort by the time of the Draft Riots. Instead, following P.G.T. Beauregard's bombarding of Fort Sumter, Northern citizen-soldiers eagerly rallied around the flag.

At the outset of the conflict, a belief remained pervasive among both the rank-and-file and the officers that the war would be resolved relatively quickly. Most believed that the war would be a traditional, European-style conflict, and would be resolved by one decisive victory. As Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh write in their *A Savage War*, "the collapse of Austria and Prussia in the immediate aftermath of [Napoleon's] stunning victories at Austerlitz (1805) and Jen-Auerstedt (1806) exercised a profound influence over European and, hence, American thinking."<sup>18</sup> A Sisyphean pursuit of this Napoleonic "decisive victory" would bedevil commanders on both sides through the entirety of the war. So entrenched was this belief that in the early spring of 1862, secretary of war Edwin Stanton would order the closure of Northern recruiting offices, confident that the Union armies had more than enough men for what he believed would be a soon to be finished conflict. Only the later horrors of battles such as Shiloh and Antietam would finally begin to disabuse generals and politicians of the notion that the war could be won in a single confrontation. Himself bearing witness to the human destruction

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<sup>18</sup> Williamson Murray and Wayne Wei-Siang Hsieh, *A Savage War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 4.

of Shiloh, Grant would write that “up to the battle of Shiloh I, as well as thousands of other citizens, believed that the rebellion against the Government would collapse suddenly and soon, if a decisive victory could be gained over any of its armies...indeed, I gave up all idea of saving the Union except by complete conquest.”<sup>19</sup>

However, in 1861, naïve to the mass slaughter that was to come, young Northern men eagerly flocked to the Northern cause, content in the belief that a decisive victory would soon allow them to return to their homes, carrying with them the honor of having fought successfully for the preservation of the Union. Despite the fact that many Southern soldiers would dismiss their Northern opponents as “mudsills,” or impoverished city-dwellers unaccustomed to shooting or riding, the North was still in 1861 a mainly rural society, and citizen-soldiers flocked to the Union cause from both the city and the country. From New England, descendants of the Puritans joined with Midwesterners and immigrant newcomers in the wearing of the blue, united by a common desire to see the preservation of the Union.

The growing Irish-American population of the North proved no exception to this patriotic surge. The memory of Irish-American participation in the war effort, embodied by the heroic service of Irish units such as New York’s “Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>,” remains popular and celebrated to this day. Here it becomes difficult to reconcile the fact that the Irishmen who fought so hard at Fredericksburg and Antietam came from the same New York City neighborhoods as the Irishmen who violently fought government forces throughout the Draft Riots. To understand this apparent disconnect, and how New York City’s Irish population went from supporting the war to violently protesting against it, the unique set of competing loyalties possessed by Irish-Americans must be explored.

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<sup>19</sup> Ulysses Grant, *Memoirs of General U.S. Grant, Complete* (New York: Charles L. Webster and Company, 1885), Ch. XXV.

Before the attack on Fort Sumter Irish support for the Union cause was not a foregone conclusion. The Irish population in America during this period was aligned overwhelmingly in support of the Democratic party, and remained hostile to abolitionists and Republicans. What is more, many of the recent Irish immigrants still possessed a great deal of loyalty to Ireland, and remained concerned with the liberation of that country, or, at the very least relief for its Catholic inhabitants. Southern slaveholders courted Irish opinion by stepping in support of the Irish nationalist Daniel O’Connell in his attempt to repeal the Act of Union between Great Britain and Ireland, and “American branches of O’Connell’s Loyal National Repeal Association were accepting of their donations and public support. Southern politicians and public leaders offered their support, the most prominent being Robert Tyler, President John Tyler’s son.”<sup>20</sup>

Thomas Francis Meagher, future general of the Irish Brigade, was typical of Irish-American attitudes in the days leading up to the war. Meagher remains one of the more colorful figures to emerge from the conflict. Born in Waterford, Ireland, Meagher grew to be an Irish nationalist, and would come to involve himself in the same repeal movement which Southern slaveholders had supported. Eventually, Meagher came to believe that only violence could free Ireland of the English yoke, and he participated in the failed Rebellion of 1848. Captured and sentenced to death, his sentence was commuted to transportation to the penal colony of Van Diemen’s Land.

Meagher managed to escape from Van Diemen’s Land, and made his way to the United States. He was originally sympathetic to the Southern cause, but the attack on Fort Sumter meant that “Irish-American opinion in the North swung solidly behind a union. Meagher came to believe that his loyalty to the United States was as significant as his work for Irish freedom. In

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<sup>20</sup> Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 26.

this respect, he captured the feeling of many Irish-Americans who...could not remain inactive in a conflict that threatened to destroy the nation.”<sup>21</sup>

Despite their antagonism to the Republicans and their abolitionist allies, Irish-Americans such as Meagher recognized the good that the Union had done for their people. The United States, with its new industrial factories hungry for cheap labor, had provided a home for the millions of Irish driven from their homes by the devastation of the Great Famine. Moreover, while neither the United States nor its leading citizens were especially fond of Roman Catholicism, the freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution meant that Irish Catholics were able to practice their religion relatively openly. Even with the brutal and sometimes violent bigotry of the Know Nothings and nativist mobs, the possibility of advancement for Roman Catholics was far better than it would have been in Ireland, which was still shackled to the seething anti-Catholicism of the English Crown. For a Roman Catholic such as Phillip Sheridan to rise to the rank of General in the Union Army would have been unthinkable in the British Army at that time. Finally, and importantly, Irish-Americans such as Meagher initially came to support the Union for the simple reason that a unified United States placed a check on the power and influence of the hated British. As Susannah Ural Bruce writes in *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865*, “[Meagher] would remind Irishmen to fight as much out of gratitude to America for serving as a refuge for Irish exiles as to preserve the nation because Ireland’s oldest enemy Great Britain wished to see it destroyed.”<sup>22</sup>

Of course, New York’s Irish population was not entirely motivated to support the war effort out of such high ideals as gratitude towards the Union or loyalty to Ireland. Much of the early support of New York City’s Irish population to the war effort came from the practical

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<sup>21</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 52.

benefits that services provided to local families and communities. As Ural notes, “even if Irishmen could find economically competitive work, it was usually for short periods of time, followed by long stretches when their wives or the poor houses could support them. In contrast...recruiters reminded Irishmen that their work in the military was steady.”<sup>23</sup> Steady pay and enlistment bonuses pumped much needed money into the impoverished Irish neighborhoods of New York City. Furthermore, the Irish recruits believed just as readily as the rest of the American population that the war was to be a short, relatively bloodless affair. With the ghoulish experiences of Fredericksburg and Antietam still in front of them, the Irish recruits were confident that following a quick, decisive Union victory, they would earn their pay, take their bounties, and bring much needed money back to New York City. Finally, although still uneasy about the abolitionist tendencies of the Republicans, there had been no promise of emancipation at the outset of the war, and volunteers still undoubtedly believed that most African-Americans would remain enslaved in the South following the conflict, far from any position to challenge the already tenuous economic position of New York’s Irish laborers.

Put simply, New York’s Irish-American population initially supported the war because it initially allowed for the easy possession of competing loyalties. Irish volunteers could serve the Union, and at the same time feel as though they were serving for the benefit of the Irish nation. What is more, they could also provide for their local communities through participation in the war effort, gaining access to stable income which could be sent home to their family members living in the poverty of New York City. It is only by 1863, when these loyalties began to break down and prove incompatible that Irish support for the war began to waver, and the tensions that would lead to the Draft Riots began to appear.

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 33.

Long before the riots broke out, however, glimpses of the fragility of the competing loyalties among New York's Irish population were already beginning to appear. An excellent example comes from 1860, when the Prince of Wales – Queen Victoria's son and the future king of Great Britain – visited New York City. The whole of the city was swept up in excitement over the royal tour, except, unsurprisingly, the local Irish population. Either ignorant or unsympathetic to the obvious conflict in loyalty, the division commander of what was then the 69<sup>th</sup> New York State Militia ordered the Irish outfit to parade for the prince. The commander of the 69<sup>th</sup>, Michael Corcoran – himself an exiled Irish rebel – and his men refused to appear, leading to Corcoran's subsequent arrest and court martial, and calls for the 69<sup>th</sup> to be summarily disbanded.<sup>24</sup>

Of course, the above incident seems downright innocent compared to the later insurrectionary feeling of the Draft Riots. However, it is important to note that, during the visit, New York's Irish militia felt more compelled to answer to their sense of local and ethnic loyalties than to their duty to the United States. When confronted by a situation which no longer allowed for the easy possession of multiple loyalties, the Irish of the 69<sup>th</sup> chose to privilege their identity as Irish over their identity as faithful Americans, even if that meant reprisal and punishment.

By 1861, however, to fight for the Union seemed to be an overall boon for Irish-Americans. To fight for the Union was to fight for the Irish, both in Ireland and in New York City. With the attack on Fort Sumter, all calls to disband the 69<sup>th</sup> New York State Militia fell silent, and Governor Edwin Morgan promptly cleared Michael Corcoran of all charges. With the bad blood of the Prince of Wales incident having been absolved, New York's Irish prepared to go to war. New Yorkers were shocked by the enthusiasm that their city's Irish population

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 45.

initially showed for the war, with a *New York Times* headline boasting “The 69<sup>th</sup> Off to War – Five Thousand Men More Than Required.”<sup>25</sup> The *Times* would go on to note “with approval on the fact that member of the Irish and native-born community were organizing a fund for the families of the regiment, noting that over fifteen hundred dollars had already been contributed, including \$250 from members of the stock exchange.”<sup>26</sup> So far, the multiple loyalties of New York’s Irish population remained harmonious with the war effort.

When the 69<sup>th</sup>, bearing both the Irish Harp and Union flag aloft, eventually made its way past Saint Patrick’s cathedral as they marched off to war, they were met with massive, jubilant crowds of Irish-Americans looking to wish their friends, relatives, and countrymen well. The crowds of excited Irish-Americans roaming New York City’s streets that day in 1861 provided a strange prelude to July 1863, when many of the same faces would be seen on the streets again, but with a much less patriotic intent. Among the massive crowd, someone held a sign high, admonishing the soldiers of the 69<sup>th</sup> to “Remember Fontenoy.”<sup>27</sup>

The admonishment tied the service of the New Yorkers of the 69<sup>th</sup> to the Wild Geese, the famed army of Irish mercenaries who, driven from their homeland, fought in the service of foreign powers. The Wild Geese were led by Patrick Sarsfield, who, in a Shakespearean twist, was an ancestor of the 69<sup>th</sup>’s own Michael Corcoran.<sup>28</sup> Deployed against British forces at Fontenoy, during the course of the War of Austrian Succession, the Wild Geese “charged under the war cry of ‘Cuimhnigid ar Luimneach’ (Remember Limerick), and smashed through the British lines, forcing a retreat.”<sup>29</sup> To “Remember Fontenoy” was to place the soldiers of the 69<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 63.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 63.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 49.

<sup>29</sup> Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever the Green in Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 31.

not in the American martial tradition, but rather to place them in the rich and long tradition of Irish mercenary service to foreign powers.

The comparison of the Irish soldiers of the 69<sup>th</sup> to the Irish Brigade at Fontenoy is even more poignant when it is remembered that Corcoran and many of his men were Fenians, or Irish nationalists bent on liberating Ireland through military insurrection. Ural writes that “for some Irish men, especially the radical Irish nationalists in America known as the Fenians, military service offered experience they could apply to their anticipated war for an independent Ireland.”<sup>30</sup> Many of New York’s Irish initially saw the Civil War as little more than a training ground for young Irish patriots exiled in the Union. Again, the belief in the coming decisive victory meant that New York’s Irish population could rest assured that Erin’s future warriors would return relatively intact. Dead Fenians could do little to liberate Ireland, after all.

Here are visible the first stirrings of the dual-loyalty that would drive Irish participation in the Union cause, but would also help spark the Draft Riots. The New York recruits wore the same uniforms as Union recruits from elsewhere in the North, but the invocations of Fontenoy and the French Irish Brigade hinted that New York’s Irish population had different motivations and goals than other communities in the North. The men wore the Union blue and fought for the Northern cause, but New York’s Irish still viewed their service as primarily for the benefit of the Irish people, both in America and back in Ireland. Those members of New York City’s Irish population who did not don the blue, but still cheered for the 69<sup>th</sup> as it marched off to war, were undoubtedly acutely aware that the Irish harp flapped just as proudly over the soldiers’ heads as the Stars and Stripes.

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<sup>30</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 2.



The men of the 69<sup>th</sup> got their first taste of combat in the summer of 1861, at the Battle of Bull Run. Despite the sordid affair being characterized by generally incompetent leadership, a lack of training, and a nearly complete absence of professional military organization, the boys from New York showed the Confederates that “mudsills” could fight just as hard as rural soldiers. The Irish Brigade made two separate assaults on Confederate positions during the battle, and, despite a lack of real training, performed admirably under fire. Again, it is important to note the valor and bravery of these New York Irish recruits. The 69<sup>th</sup> was an outgrowth of New York City’s Irish population, and if competing loyalties remained harmonious, then the Irish could continue to support the war with enthusiasm.

Back in New York City, praise for the brave conduct of the Irish soldiers came from every direction. The men of the 69<sup>th</sup>, having taken off their shirts in the Virginian heat, had charged into Confederate positions bare-chested, and romantic depictions of the assault blended with middle class imaginations of savage Celts charging naked and ferocious into the fray. It was still a play on Irish stereotypes, yes, but now at least those stereotypes painted the “savage” Paddy in a more noble and generous light. *Harper’s Weekly* published a print of the charge, replete with half-naked, muscular Irish New Yorkers carrying both the Union flag and Irish Harp into the heart of the rebel position, and commented that the “gallant regiment performed prodigies of valor.”<sup>31</sup> The poxy and ape-like illustrations of New York Irishmen during *Harper’s Weekly’s* coverage of the Draft Riots looked nothing like the proud, strong soldiers depicted in 1861.

The New York Irish had been bloodied at Bull Run, but spirits remained high. Soldiers were still able to serve competing loyalties without issue, casualties remained manageably low,

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<sup>31</sup> “Charge of the Sixty-Ninth.” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 10, 1861.

and the Irish Catholic population at home was gaining increased respect and acceptance because of the service of their volunteers in the field. Steady pay was still being earned that could be sent home, the Fenians were earning invaluable battlefield expertise, and all still believed that the war would be resolved quickly. However, as the war dragged on and bodies began to pile high, the situation began to deteriorate.

During McClellan's abortive campaign into Virginia, the Irish Brigade engaged the enemy at Fair Oaks, Gaine's Mill, and Malvern Hill. In the Seven Days Battles, the Irish suffered losses of seven hundred officers and enlisted soldiers, growing their fame at the cost of increasingly significant casualties.<sup>32</sup> At Antietam, despite glowing praise for the actions of the Irish during a critical phase of the battle, the Brigade lost a horrifyingly high sixty percent of its soldiers.<sup>33</sup> Even worse was the Battle of Fredericksburg, where in addition to every single officer being wounded or killed, the 69<sup>th</sup> New York lost 112 of the 173 men who had entered the fighting.<sup>34</sup>

Once again it becomes important to remember Fontenoy and the Fenians. If New York's Irish population saw the service of their volunteers through a mercenary lens, and saw participation in the Civil War as a chance to earn military experience for the eventual liberation of Ireland, these casualty lists were disastrous. The promise of decisive victory had not been fulfilled, and many of the future liberators of Ireland now lay deep beneath the Virginian dirt. What is more, incompetent Union leadership had ensured that many of the battles in which the Irish had fought and died were Confederate victories, making the sacrifice of the Irish Brigade seem all the more hollow. With the high numbers of casualties now an unavoidable reality, any

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<sup>32</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 102.

<sup>33</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 119.

<sup>34</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 132.

potential to one day fight for Ireland now meant avoiding the carnage of the Civil War. Despite their renown on the battlefield, the Irish Brigade had failed New York's Irish community by allowing so many of their young soldiers to be sacrificed for the Union cause. The anger towards the failure of the officers of the 69<sup>th</sup> to live up to local expectations would be manifested during the Draft Riots, when Irish rioters ransacked the home of Colonel Nugent, a former officer of the 69<sup>th</sup>, and took the time to slash photographs of both Nugent and Meagher – an impotent act of violence committed against two men who had led so many from their neighborhoods into slaughter.<sup>35</sup>

Additionally, on a more human level, the senseless losses of so many fathers, brothers, sons, and friends undoubtedly saddened and angered the Irish neighborhoods of New York City. Those neighborhoods were by no means ignorant to the carnage, thanks to the newsman and the telegraph. A rapid advance in communication capability in the antebellum period, launched by the expansion of the telegraph system, had facilitated a “communications revolution on which the increasing reach and sophistication of newspapers and magazines depended.”<sup>36</sup> The population of New York City, although hundreds of miles from the battlefield, was now able to access accounts of the grisly battles and increasingly high numbers of casualties from newspaper accounts. The shocking realities of industrialized war and death began the rapid process of unraveling the competing loyalties of New York City's Irish population.

Fredericksburg was fought in the final days of 1862. The high numbers of casualties among New York's Irish soldiers would combine with three choices made by the Union government in 1863 to produce the anger and discontent among New York City's Irish population that made the Draft Riots possible. While the Federal government only adopted the

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<sup>35</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 180

<sup>36</sup> Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 45.

three decisions out of realist necessity, those decisions would make it impossible for the competing loyalties of New York's Irish population to remain harmonious. Those three decisions which finally convinced New York City's Irish proclamation to become violently hostile towards the Federal government were as follows: the removal from command of General McClellan, the Emancipation Proclamation, and, of course, the commencement of the draft.

It may at first seem odd that the replacement of General George McClellan would help drive New York City's Irish population to a state of insurrectionary rage. He had, after all, led the Army of the Potomac – and by extension the Irish Brigade – through the disastrous Peninsula Campaign and helped in the creation of the bloodbath that was Antietam through his unimaginative, ineffectual leadership. Murray and Hsieh summarized McClellan the military leader as “hesitant, cautious, fearful, wildly exaggerating enemy numbers, and in the end pusillanimous.”<sup>37</sup> Being, as noted, hesitant and cautious, McClellan moved slowly and constantly delayed his army while he frittered over the supposed strength of his Confederate opponents. By 1863, following McClellan's failures at Antietam, President Lincoln had finally had enough of the “young Napoleon,” and ordered him removed from command. It was militarily the right choice, and the eventual appointment of more aggressive and daring battlefield commanders such as Ulysses Grant would eventually help bring the war to an end. By all rights, the Irish should have cheered the sacking of the incompetent general. His bumbling and indecisiveness had undoubtedly cost hundreds of Irish soldiers their lives, and had certainly prolonged the deadly conflict. However, what Lincoln, Murray, and Hsieh saw as cowardice and needless hesitancy, Irish soldiers saw as a genuine effort to preserve their lives in the face of a government which constantly demanded more battle and bloodshed. So deep was this sentiment

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<sup>37</sup> Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 247.

that as McClellan left the Army of the Potomac following his removal from command, an order came from the officers of the Irish Brigade for the men to “throw down their green battle flags in an act of devotion.”<sup>38</sup> The love of New York’s Irish for McClellan was so strong that it would later shine through during the Draft Riots, as a gang of rioters took a brief intermission from wrecking havoc in order to pay a “friendly visit” to general’s house on East 31<sup>st</sup> Street, where they shouted enthusiastic “huzzahs.”<sup>39</sup>

McClellan’s canning was not the only decision to spring from the Battle of Antietam which drove New York’s Irish population closer to rioting. Following the battle, Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, abolishing slavery in the Confederacy. Again, like the firing of McClellan, it was the right choice, both from a moral and pragmatic viewpoint. In addition to helping end a vile institution, emancipation struck at the heart of the slave-based Southern agrarian economy, and help keep the anti-slavery but pro-Confederacy British out of the war. Instantly, the majority of the New York Irish recoiled violently from the news that a war effort that, while having started out in defense of the Union, had also become a conflict over the end of slavery. The Irish population was overwhelmingly opposed to the emancipation of African Americans, and many had only volunteered to fight in the first place because they believed that the conflict had been about preserving the Union, not determining the fate of slavery. At the heart of the Irish opposition to emancipation was the same ugly racism that convinced many that whites were superior to blacks and that African Americans were little better than animals. However, for New York’s Irish population this racism was enflamed and given a sense of dire urgency by the very real economic threat that African Americans presented to the already impoverished Irish.

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<sup>38</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 19.

Many poor Irish, themselves considered racially inferior by Anglo-Saxons, lived in dangerous proximity to the levels of poverty experienced by New York's African Americans. The closeness in condition combined with racial attitudes to bring economic and racial anxieties to a fever pitch. Both the Irish and the African-Americans originated from rural areas – Ireland and the South respectively – and were thus only fit for low skill labor and factory work in the city. This meant that the two groups became fierce economic rivals, competing for the same work. The Irish still held the economic edge in New York – thanks to what at the time was considered a slight racial superiority as well as sheer numerical advantage – but the Emancipation Proclamation spread panic that African Americans would rush North following the war, throwing the already precarious economic situation of New York's Irish into question. There was some historical precedent to this anxiety, as during the late 1840s and 1850s, “free blacks were economically and socially more secure” than the Irish in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City.<sup>40</sup> Tragically, the anxiety would manifest itself during the Draft Riots, and multiple atrocities would be committed against the African American population by Irish New Yorkers incensed and frightened by the Emancipation Proclamation.

Finally, the last decision made by the Federal government that made the Draft Riots all but inevitable was, of course, the passage of the Enrollment Act, which began the draft. Once again, from the perspective of winning the war, it is difficult to fault Washington for its decision to implement conscription. By the mid-nineteenth century, the plausibility of the mass mobilization of citizens with no previous battle experience had been proven by the French implementation of the *levée en masse* during the French Revolutionary Wars. Furthermore, industrially produced weapons were increasingly easy to handle, meaning that a massed volley

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<sup>40</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 31.

from green draftees could now be almost as deadly as one by professional soldiers. By 1863, the Federal government was beginning to wake up to the reality that there would be no decisive victory to end the conflict. What is more, the Confederate States themselves had begun conscription in 1862, and it was critical that the Union could continue to maintain numerical superiority over its foes. The massive casualty lists of industrialized slaughters of the likes of Antietam meant that the Northern army could not sustain itself purely based on citizen-soldiers volunteering for the war. Even more pressing were the geographic realities of war against the South. As Murray and Hsieh note, “the area encompassed by the Confederacy is greater than the territories of Britain, France, Spain, Germany, and Italy combined.”<sup>41</sup> This massive geographical area would need to be occupied in order to break the Southern will to resist and quash the rebellion. Only the draft, made law in March 1863, could provide the manpower necessary for such an ambitious occupation. Bearing in mind the military and geographic realities of the Civil War, the decision to begin the draft makes sense.

From the perspective of New York City’s Irish population, however, the draft – in the context of emancipation, the replacement of McClellan with commanders more agreeable to losing men, and the sacrifice of many of their loved ones and neighbors – was an outrage. To add even more egregious insult to injury, Washington had placed a provision in the Enrollment Act which allowed prospective draftees to buy their way out of conscription for three hundred dollars. For the decisions makers in Washington who authored the act, three hundred dollars seems like a reasonable and fair amount, but to the already impoverished New York Irish such an amount was impossibly high. The main economic competition for the Irish, African Americans, were ineligible for the draft based on their lack of citizenship, while the middle and upper classes

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<sup>41</sup> Murray and Hsieh, *A Savage War*, 61.

could simply pay their way out of the fighting. New York's Irish population thus arrived at the conclusion that they would be forced to bear the brunt of the draft. Once drafted, they would be thrown into a Union military shaped increasingly by the aggression of the likes of Grant and not by the caution of McClellan. Furthermore, they now knew that they would be fighting and dying to free the slaves, and few were willing to die in order to increase their number of economic competitors in an already tight market. It was not that New York's Irish had suddenly become craven – they would prove their desperate courage throughout the rioting – but they refused to continue to support a war that no longer supported them.

At the outset of the Civil War, New York's Irish population could easily support the war while also supporting Ireland and their local communities in the city. However, as the war dragged on, these loyalties were tested and strained by the realities of the conflict. By the summer of 1863, decisions made by Washington had made it all but impossible for the competing loyalties of New York's Irish to coexist. To serve the Union now potentially meant ignoring other loyalties, or even potentially betraying them. All loyalties now severed, the stage was set for violence.



## Famine: Irish Neighborhoods in New York City

John Francis Maguire was concerned. The Irishman – a Member of Parliament for Cork City – had heard disturbing rumors concerning those of his countrymen who had sought out new lives in the United States. Maguire had been distressed to hear that the American Irish were living in a shameful state in their adopted homeland. He had heard stories of Irish immigrants freezing and starving to death in their own waste, unprotected by the dilapidated and inadequate housing they were afforded. He had been shocked by the tales of vice, violence, and sin perpetrated by rural Irish farmhands turned urban American toughs. Worst of all, Maguire had heard rumors that the Irish were abandoning their Roman Catholicism once they arrived on foreign shores, buckling in the face of the overwhelming hegemony of American Protestantism.<sup>42</sup> Determined to judge the veracity of these disturbing rumors for himself, Maguire set off on a journey to the United States, recording and publishing his findings in *The Irish in America*.

The rumors that Maguire had heard about the American Irish were, like many rumors, caught somewhere between truth and fiction. Maguire was relieved to find the American Catholic Church healthy and able to provide for the spiritual needs of Irish immigrants, and happily reported on the condition of prosperous Irish immigrants in cities like Halifax, Nova Scotia, of which he wrote that “in no city of the American continent do the Irish occupy a better position or occupy a more deserved influence.”<sup>43</sup> Arriving in New York City, however, Maguire’s mood became much more subdued as he observed the situation of his countrymen residing there. The urban conditions there, especially in terms of sheer human density, shocked the Irish parliamentarian. “The evil of overcrowding is magnified to a prodigious extent in New

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<sup>42</sup> John Francis Maguire, *The Irish in America* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868), ix.

<sup>43</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 3.

York,” he wrote, “which, being the port of arrival—the Gate of the New World—receives a certain addition to its population from almost every ship-load of emigrants that passes through Castle Garden.”<sup>44</sup>

Maguire was further saddened to learn of the vice and suffering which accompanied such conditions in New York City. He was disturbed to hear reports of “rows, riots, turbulence, acts of personal violence perpetrated in passion,” and admitted that such reports were “more numerous than they should be in proportion to the numerical strength of the Irish population.”<sup>45</sup> Maguire was a man who loved his people, and although he did attribute some of the problem with the supposed Irish propensity to drink, he did not blame Irish vice or criminality on racial inferiority. Instead, Maguire pointed to the conditions in which his exiled countrymen were forced to live, spitting that “as stated on official authority, there are 16,000 tenement houses in New York, and in these there dwell more than half a million of people! This astounding fact is of itself so suggestive of misery and evil, that it scarcely requires to be enlarged upon.”<sup>46</sup>

Maguire was right. The level of anger and resentment that manifested itself in acts of extreme violence throughout the Draft Riots cannot be understood without first understanding the situation of those who committed those acts. How rioters lived, in neighborhoods such as Five Points, is just as important as understanding how they died. The circumstances of Irish New Yorkers, beginning with their emigration from Ireland, had contributed to the creation of conditions that made New York City’s Irish population desperate enough to rise up violently against a much more powerful governmental body. Understanding these conditions not only helps explain why the Irish chose to riot, but will also help illuminate why certain acts of

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<sup>44</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 218.

<sup>45</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 284.

<sup>46</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 219.

violence developed as they did. This chapter will establish the condition of New York City's Irish population in terms of background, living conditions, and economic and caloric situations, all of which are vital to understanding the eruption of the Draft Riots.

In the years preceding the outbreak of the Civil War and the Draft Riots, Irish Catholic immigrants, desperate to escape the conditions of their native island, had flooded American urban centers. These immigrants appeared in American cities in a state of abject destitution, the level of which was shocking to New Yorkers. Watching as the emaciated figures, clothed often in thin rags, entered into American harbors, many "native born" Americans reacted with a mix of horror and disgust. Prominent New Yorker George Templeton Strong made no effort to hide his feelings when he commented that "It was enough to turn a man's stomach to see the way they were naturalizing this morning. Wretched, filthy, bestial-looking...Irish, the very scum and dregs of human nature filled the office so completely that I was almost afraid of being poisoned by going in."<sup>47</sup>

The combination of Celtic heritage and Roman Catholicism convinced some that the wretchedness of the Irish was all but inevitable. It an acceptable belief that the Irish were mentally and spiritually inferior to those of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic stock. "Paddy" was seen as little more than an oversized child, physically strong but brutish, simpleminded, and too spiritually weak to avoid the deleterious effects of alcohol. "Biddy," meanwhile, was perceived to lack the propriety and morality necessary for acceptable American femininity. Furthermore, Irish adherence to Roman Catholicism meant that many American protestants could further attribute the state of the Irish to popish ignorance and priestly slavery. The state of the Irish when arriving in New York City confirmed and helped entrench many of these assumptions, especially

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<sup>47</sup> George Templeton Strong, *Diary of George Templeton Strong* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 94.

when the Irish were compared to the oftentimes better-off German immigrants arriving at the same time.

Of course, it was neither inferior blood nor Catholic mysteries that accounted for the sorry state of the Irish when they arrived in New York City. Centuries of violent conflict between the Irish and the English had left most of Ireland's native inhabitants destitute and landless. In order to exploit their Hibernian holding, break the power of local, rebellious landowners, and discourage Catholicism, the English seized land, granting it as large estates to protestant Anglo-Saxon nobles. The English denied the Catholics property rights and herded them onto the new estates, where their labor could be exploited for the benefit and profit of the English landholders. That labor consisted primarily of unskilled agricultural toil, meaning that few Irish Catholics possessed occupational skills useful outside of a rural environment. Typical laborers were so unskilled that they were unable to even fish in order to supplement their diets.<sup>48</sup>

The English attitude for their Irish Catholic tenants ranged from disinterest to near-genocidal disdain. Concerned more with profit than with providing a humane wage to their Catholic workers, the English landowners ensured that "the most a laborer could expect to earn annually in wages was £1 10s. or perhaps £2 5s. in a very good year. This was equivalent, in 1845, of about \$8 or \$13 per annum."<sup>49</sup> To survive with such terrible wages, Irish Catholics were forced to grow their own food to survive. While Ireland was a relatively rich island agriculturally, the best meat and produce was sent to England, and the Irish themselves were forced to subsist almost entirely off of potato crops. Potatoes, an import from South America, were easy to grow and were able to supply Catholic laborers with the calories necessary to

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<sup>48</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 50.

survive and work. So dependent was the Catholic population on the crop that “an adult laborer typically ate fourteen pounds of potatoes per day.”<sup>50</sup>

While a diet based almost wholly on potato consumption was undoubtedly monotonous, it provided enough calories to keep the Irish Catholic population alive. By 1846, however, this system was met with catastrophic failure in the form of the potato blight. Fungus repeatedly exterminated the island’s potato crop with horrific results to a laboring population that depended so entirely on the potato for survival. As Ireland’s best meat and agricultural produce continued to be exported to England, disease and famine killed at least a million Irishmen. Apocalyptic accounts of emaciated corpses rotting in the streets are common from this period, ensuring that such caloric trauma would not be readily forgotten.

For many Irish, emigration from their native island seemed like their only recourse for survival. Some Irish journeyed to Great Britain or Canada, but more decided to escape the Crown’s rule entirely by emigrating to the United States. Those who managed to afford the cost of travel could rarely then afford clothes warm enough for the cold Atlantic crossing, compounding the already serious ill-effects of hunger and disease. The combined experiences of their exploitation in Ireland, starvation, and a hard transatlantic voyage produced the pitiful image of the Irish wretchedness that distressed and disgusted American contemporaries. Despite the poor condition in which many arrived in America, if they survived the voyage at all, hundreds of thousands of Irish Catholics continued to see their prospects in America as brighter than the situation in Ireland. By 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, Irish-born residents made up 203,740 of New York City’s 793,186 total population, accounting for twenty-six percent of the city’s total population.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 52.

<sup>51</sup> Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle*, 13.

These Irish immigrants, impoverished as they were, often lacked the monetary means to leave the port of their arrival. Most naturally gravitated to the worst parts of town, where rents were cheap and they could surround themselves with their fellow Irish migrants. There, they were forced to live in cramped, unsanitary conditions, where diseases like cholera spread easily and to deadly effect. What is more, crime, prostitution, and gang violence were rampant in those low-income low-rent areas, further enforcing the idea that the Irish were immoral savages incapable of possessing republican virtue. For the Irish migrants, the dirty enclaves of New York City, steaming with pestilence, filth, and crime, could not have been more alien from the small agricultural communities in which many had been born. Some of the accounts of the horrifying condition of Irish neighborhoods undoubtedly sprang from anti-Irish prejudice, but to dismiss all of the gruesome details of those accounts as racist fabrication would serve to downplay the actual misery and squalor that Irish migrants were forced to endure. However, trapped as they now were in the grey and pestilent catacombs of Gotham, at least they had a chance to survive.

One of the most common destinations for Irish migrants in New York City was the Five Points, a poor neighborhood located in the “bloody Sixth” Ward of downtown Manhattan. Residential life in the Five Points was characterized by massive, rotting tenement buildings. These buildings were purposefully cramped and dilapidated, with Tyler Anbinder noting that “the owners of old buildings paid less in taxes than owners of sparkling new structures, providing landlords with additional incentive to subdivide old buildings into many small apartments and spend little or nothing to maintain them.”<sup>52</sup> Once again, Anglo-Saxon profits proved more important than Irish lives, and large immigrant families were soon crammed into crumbling buildings with little protection from extreme heat, cold, or the spread of disease. So

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<sup>52</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 18.

efficient was this mass consolidation of humanity into such wretched conditions that soon, “with the exception of one or two sections of London, Five Points was the most densely populated neighborhood in the world.”<sup>53</sup>

This high-density crowding and mass immigration proved difficult for the infrastructure of New York City to handle. Gotham had experienced a rapid and unprecedented growth, with population numbers exploding from 30,000 in 1790 to around 800,000 by 1860.<sup>54</sup> Roughly a quarter of that number had been born in Ireland, and were now crammed into claustrophobic and unhygienic neighborhoods such as Five Points. John Maguire railed against this overcrowding in the account of journeys through America, writing “the dwelling accommodation of the poor is yearly sacrificed to the increasing necessities or luxury of the rich. While spacious streets and grand mansions are on the increase, the portions of the city in which the working classes once found an economical residence, are being steadily encroached upon.”<sup>55</sup> Maguire was right to be angry: the rapid growth combined with the poverty of the immigrant population to ensure that the city found itself unwilling or unable to keep poor Irish neighborhoods clean. In Five Points, “street traffic mashed...household refuse together with the droppings of horses and other animals to create an inches-thick sheet of putrefying muck, which when it rained or snowed became particularly vile.”<sup>56</sup>

Making matters more squalid, most residents of Five Points lacked any sort of sewer access, before and throughout the Civil War. As such, the bodily fluids of the neighborhood’s miserable inhabitants congregated in wretched cesspools that would then connect to the sewer

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<sup>53</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 75.

<sup>54</sup> Gergely Baics, *Feeding Gotham: The Political Economy and Geography of Food in New York, 1790-1860* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 12.

<sup>55</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 82.

lines via troughs. If this was not painful enough – especially in the hot summer months – “the connection between the trough and the sewer line often became clogged. Raw sewage often sat festering in the backyards of the tenements for weeks and months at a time.”<sup>57</sup> Add to this the sight and smell of rats and insects scurrying over the piles and through the pools of excrement and rotting animal stock to complete one’s mental illustration of life in an Irish neighborhood. Legislation would not pass until 1867 that would mandate that all newly constructed buildings tap into sewer lines, but the legislation did not include pre-existing buildings, such as the tenements in which most of New York’s Irish population made their homes.<sup>58</sup>

Such conditions were ideal for facilitating the rapid spread of cholera, an infection of the intestine caused by the fecal contamination of water or food. Inadequate sewage and dense neighborhoods meant that poor Irish neighborhoods were some of the most at-risk areas for deadly cholera outbreaks. In fact, during the 1866 cholera outbreaks, when city health officials finally began to document the residences of cholera victims, they demonstrated that mortality rates were “nearly twice as high for the densely packed and poor ward 6, consisting of the infamous Five Points, than for the more thinly populated and elegant ward 15.”<sup>59</sup>

Not all American-born protestant resident of New York City turned a blind-eye to the suffering of the Irish immigrants in neighborhoods like Five Points. Many well-intentioned citizens turned their efforts towards relief, and attempted to provide food or clothing to the city’s destitute newcomers. Some reformers, however refused to stop at addressing the temporal wants of Irish immigrants, and firmly believed that the suffering of the residents of poor Irish neighborhoods sprang from supposedly inferior spirituality. Such reformers saw Roman

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<sup>57</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 86.

<sup>58</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 85.

<sup>59</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 212.



Catholicism as the root of Irish immigrant poverty and, with the help of immensely wealthy donors, began to secure imposing physical spaces within Irish immigrant communities from which they could direct their proselytizing efforts. In many ways, such reformers and missionaries attempted to exploit the tenuous economic situation of Irish immigrants as a way to win more converts, provoking resentment and eventual violence.

In the Irish Catholic Five Points, the large Five Points Mission and the House of Industry were two such protestant missions. These missions did participate in charitable outreach – giving out food and second-hand clothing in times of economic stress – but their commitment to proselytization efforts – especially those aimed at children – angered the local Catholic immigrant community. Oftentimes, the aid given to children was contingent on enrollment in the mission school, where the mission would unsurprisingly attempt to disabuse students of their Roman Catholic beliefs. In one account, a poorly-clothed seven-year-old went to a protestant mission seeking a quilt to defend against the cold New York weather. The child was instead given some potatoes, and the missionaries informed her that she would receive “additional assistance if she would attend the mission school. Otherwise, they would do little more for her.”<sup>60</sup> Catholic adults in communities such as Five Points recoiled violently at what they saw as manipulative targeting of their children, with Anbinder recounting in one case a Catholic adult “confronted a child about to enter the charity, took a newly-bound bible from the younger’s hands, tore a page, ignited it, and lit both his cigar and the rest of the Bible with it.”<sup>61</sup>

Many New York Catholics interpreted the missions as protestant attempts to exploit Irish economic hardship to gain converts. The targeting of children was particularly insulting, and tempers further flared when some protestant missionaries began to view adoption of Catholic

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<sup>60</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 254-255.

<sup>61</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 253.

children as an acceptable strategy to encourage conversion. The Civil War had left so many Catholic children fatherless that New York Catholics started their own adoption service in 1863.<sup>62</sup> The protestant missions also began to attempt to intervene in the adoption of Irish youths, sending Catholic children to protestant homes where it was believed that their material and spiritual needs could be better addressed. Many missionaries undoubtedly believed that they were simply providing disadvantaged youths with better, healthier lives with families outside of the city, but “by the mid-1860s, Irish Catholics came to believe that the Five Points Mission and House of Industry sold orphaned children into virtual slavery.”<sup>63</sup>

A more comedic take on the growing tensions between the working-class Irish Catholic and middle-class protestant populations of New York City comes from John Maguire. Maguire recounts how a protestant pastor constantly harassed a female Irish Catholic servant, apparently believing the prodding to be all in good fun. The pastor had just finished insulting the girl over Catholic sacraments when:

Stopping next to his chair, and looking him steadily in his face, while she grasped the tureen of rich green-pea soup more firmly in her hands, she said: 'Now, sir, I often asked you to leave me alone, and not mind me, and not to insult me or my religion, what no real gentleman would do to a poor girl; and now, sir, as you want to know what I pay for absolution, here's my answer!' and, suiting the action to the word, she flung the hot steaming liquid over the face, neck, breast—entire person—of the playful preacher!<sup>64</sup>  
The above anecdote may seem playful, but is revealing to growing Irish anger with

American efforts to enforce hegemonic Protestantism in Irish Catholic communities. A mission as space was a physical manifestation of this hegemonic pressure, and such protestant missions would be the target of Irish anger during the New York City Draft Riots. During the unrest, when the Magdalen Asylum – a home for elderly prostitutes – was burned down by rioters, the

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<sup>62</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 265.

<sup>63</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 264.

<sup>64</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 336.

superintendent and workers there “were not sure why they had become targets.”<sup>65</sup> Once again, later Draft Riot violence only makes sense within the context of the economic situation of Irish immigrants in New York City. Economic hardship among Irish Catholics had prompted charity and kindness from many American-born protestants, but it also opened the door for missionaries to exploit the tenuous situation of Irish New Yorkers in order to win converts for their denominations.

At was in 1860 at one such protestant mission that Abraham Lincoln would experience the misery of Irish neighborhoods, when he undertook a curious tour of the Five Points. Confronted by the misery and want, especially among the children who made the neighborhood their home, the president was reportedly moved to tears.<sup>66</sup> The misery of Irish neighborhoods such as the Sixth Ward was a stain upon the American conscience, but neither the president nor the general public felt scrupulous enough to check the tendency of tenement owners to place rents and profits above humane conditions. No matter how putrid or horrific the conditions of Irish neighborhoods were, nor how many presidential tears were shed, the Irish still did not live rent free. A roof over one’s head in Five Points was still considered better than no roof at all. The anxious struggle of Irish immigrants to find work to support themselves and their families is key to understanding the forms which Draft Riot violence would later take, and the unprecedented fury with which that violence would be conducted.

Again, it must be stressed that the Irish were rural tenant farmers by tradition, ill equipped in terms of skill or training for employment in an industrialized city. As a consequence of this, New York City’s Irish population were forced into an assortment of low-paying jobs. These jobs were often dirty, dangerous, and lacking in any kind of job security. A male Irish

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<sup>65</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 236.

laborer could expect to earn as little as a dollar a day for his labor, while a more skilled working-class profession, such as ship's carpenter – a trade generally restricted to native born protestants – could make as much as fifteen dollars a week.<sup>67</sup> This low pay was further compounded by the fact that Irish laborers often worked as few as four days a week, and were especially vulnerable to seasonal lay-offs. Maguire himself glumly noted that “It is true, there are seasons when there is a glut of work, when the demand exceeds the supply...but there are also, and more frequently, seasons when work is slack, seasons of little employment, seasons of utter paralysis and stagnation.”<sup>68</sup>

This was reflected in Irish bank accounts, with Anbinder noting that “deposits during the summer and early fall ran far ahead of those in the rest of the year. Five pointers made almost three times as many deposits per month in July and August as they did in February, March, and April.”<sup>69</sup> Hot weather meant plenty of work for the city's Irish longshoremen and construction workers, but rain and cold weather in the winter could mean extended periods of unemployment. This was especially disastrous to Irish immigrants unaccustomed to cold American winters. In Ireland, peat could be gathered for fuel at no cost, but in New York City the Irish found themselves forced to pay high prices to keep their decrepit tenements warm throughout the cold winter months. Unemployed and unable to afford the coal to heat their buildings, the Irish suffered immensely, with at least one woman freezing to death in the winter of 1860-61, her body subsequently eaten by rats.<sup>70</sup>

The horrible effects of unemployment were universal, but the actual kinds of jobs that were available to the Irish varied often by geography. In Five Points, located in the downtown

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<sup>67</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 114.

<sup>68</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 336.

<sup>69</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points* 115.

<sup>70</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 88.

part of the city, most of the neighborhood's Irish men found work as laborers. The neighborhood's male residents worked as longshoremen, street sweepers, construction workers, and so on. The area's Irish women typically found work in the needle trades or as household servants, and occupied a more precarious economic position than the men, earning as little as one dollar a week.<sup>71</sup> Such occupations were not unique to Five Points, and Irish men and women throughout the downtown found themselves similarly occupied. In the uptown, conversely, Irish men found work as industrial workers in the area's massive machine shops. In the Eleventh Ward alone, Bernstein records nineteen metalworking or machine building shops employing ten or more employees. Three of these locations employed over four hundred workers, and one, Novelty Iron Works, employed over one thousand of the Ward's residents.<sup>72</sup> During the New York City Draft Riots, laborers and industrial laborers – often but not always divided by the uptown-downtown divide – would prioritize radically different targets and tactics, undoubtedly at least partially because of their differing occupational experiences.

One of the reasons for this difference in targeting can be found in the economic competition between downtown Irish and African-American workers. In the heavily industrial uptown Eleventh Ward, only 225 African Americans were listed as residents in the 1860 census. Comparatively, in the downtown Fourteenth, Eighth, and Fifth Wards, each bordering the heavily Irish Five Points, the numbers of African-American residents stood at 1,075, 2,918, and 1,396 respectively. Even those large downtown populations were still paltry compared to the numbers of Irish-born residing in New York City at the time, but African-American men still provided the struggling Irish laborers of Five Points with unwanted economic competition. With the Irish only slightly higher than African-Americans in New York's social and economic

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<sup>71</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 122.

<sup>72</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 284.

system, the two groups had to compete for the unskilled jobs that native-born New Yorkers or even German and English immigrants would not take. As Anbinder notes, “more than half the Irish were unskilled workers, compared to only one in twenty-five Germans. Most of the unskilled workers among the American-born population were African-Americans or the children of Irish immigrants.”<sup>73</sup>

With both groups having come from overwhelmingly agrarian societies, and both groups thus lacking the occupational skills of Germans or native-born white protestants, this competition is unsurprising. However, with African-Americans numbering only 12,000 of New York City’s residents, compared to the city’s 200,000 Irish, the actual extent of successful competition prior to the Civil War must be taken with a grain of salt. More likely, Irish laborers treated African-American laborers as convenient scapegoats during frequent times of unemployment or economic instability. The presence of African-American males around Irish-dominated job sites was undoubtedly a cause of anxiety, but not yet for alarm.

For a point of comparison, one should look no further than the anti-abolition riots of 1834. For the most part, the actors who were cast and the stage that was set was similar to that which would be seen during the Draft Riots: Irish-American immigrant workers attacking African-Americans in downtown New York City. The New York Irish of 1834, although not yet numbering among their cohort refugees from the Great Famine, were still relatively impoverished and had grown jealous of what limited economic success African-Americans had managed to achieve. Incensed by a group of African-Americans gathering at Chatham Street Chapel to commemorate the anniversary of slavery’s abolition in New York, Irish workers confronted the group, leading to a brawl.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 113.

<sup>74</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 10.

Soon, rioting and racially-fueled violence had erupted out throughout New York City's downtown. Given the similarities in participants, targets, and location, one may at first assume that the riot violence in 1834 would resemble the downtown violence that would break out on the same streets less than thirty years later. However, the violence of the Abolition Riots took an entirely different form than the violence of the Draft Riots would take. Rather than attempting to kill their competition outright, Irish rioters in 1834 contented themselves with attacking buildings: the public physical markers of African-American presence and progress. Targets included African-American residences, the African-American Mutual Relief Hall, John Rolloson's porter-house, Thomas Mooney's barbershop, St. Phillip's African Episcopal church, the African Baptist church and another porterhouse, this one owned by Robert Williams.<sup>75</sup> White targets mainly included abolitionists, and the mob marched on the houses of Lewis Tappan and Reverend Cox, but rioters also took the time to storm the Bowery Theater in protest of remarks made by the playhouse's stage manager, an Englishman, in a more traditional performance of Irish ethnic hatreds.<sup>76</sup> This list of targets is incredibly revealing to the motivations of the mob. The sight of black men operating successful businesses, such as the porterhouses of Rolloson and Williams or Mooney's barbershop, had no doubt enraged many poor Irish whites who themselves had failed to reach a similar level of economic success. Churches were a further sign of even marginal community success, and provided the African-Americans of Five Points with not only a place to worship, but a space for fellowship and communal unity. Attacks were seemingly relegated to the prosperous portions of the African-American community in Five Points, with Anbinder noting that "signs of African-American economic independence clearly galled [the rioters], for while the black-occupied hovels of a particularly decrepit alley known as

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<sup>75</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 11-12.

<sup>76</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 85.

‘Cow Bay’ were left untouched, the few black-owned business in the neighborhood were devastated.”<sup>77</sup> Economically anxious Irish rioters seemed to believe that by destroying the manifestations of African-American economic success, they could restore a social order more amenable to their prejudices and goals, casting out the successful black business owner and their abolitionist allies at once. Covetous jealousy had, in this case, undoubtedly provoked the violence.

Strangely, as enraged as they were, the 1834 rioters did not actually seem to attempt any murder. In the Abolition Riot, Irish rioters seemed intent on erasing all signs of African-American life from downtown neighborhoods, but were less concerned with actually taking African-American lives. By 1863, property was still targeted, but Irish laborers were no longer content to just burn buildings. In that later violence, rioters hunted down and murdered African-American men wherever they could find them. Absent from the 1834 violence was the ghoulish torching and mutilating of African-American corpses that would mark downtown racial violence during the Draft Riots. With so many Irish having arrived following the famine and ensured Irish numerical domination over the unskilled labor market, the question of how had economic tensions had been so radically and violently intensified must be explored.

The question of how the violence became so much more fevered and murderous in less than thirty years cannot solely be understood through a lens of economic competition. As previously noted, the Irish were quickly outnumbering their black competitors throughout the city. Instead, this radical intensification of violence must be understood through the fear bred by that competition. By 1863, the fears of Irish laborers concerning African-American labor competition had spiked to the point that Irish laborers would embark on a racially-motivated

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<sup>77</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 12.



campaign of wholesale murder during the riots. Historians have generally and correctly linked this spike in Irish panic with the Emancipation Proclamation and the threat of a large black migration to urban centers such as New York City. However, this thesis will argue that such an understanding of Irish fears is incomplete without an exploration of the precarious nature of Irish calories.

At first glance, the violence of the Draft Riots may seem unconnected to the decision of New York City's government to liberalize and deregulate the city's public markets – a process begun in the 1830s and completed around 1856. Economic concerns have rightfully been diagnosed as one of the key contributing factors to the outburst of violence during the Draft Riots, but to understand the level of fear that these economic concerns caused – which was powerful enough to turn the property destruction of 1834 into the wholesale butchery of 1863 – one must explore where working-class Irish dollars went.

The provisioning of the household and the ability to provide food for themselves and their dependents were central to the economics of working-class Irish New Yorkers. As Anbinder notes, “working-class families in the second half of the nineteenth century devoted a much greater share – easily one half of their income – to food than they did to any other basic necessity, including housing.”<sup>78</sup> The monetary focus that working class Irish families paid to their caloric intake is unsurprising, given their history. Many of the city's Irish had been born in Ireland, and many of that number had come to America as a direct consequence of the Great Famine. Many had seen their loved ones die of starvation, and had witnessed first-hand the disease and suffering that accompanies great hunger. They were no doubt determined to never experience a similar form of suffering again, and allocated their limited income accordingly.

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<sup>78</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 203.

Because of this prominence in food-related spending for working-class budgets, it is vital to understand the changing political economy of food in New York City, and the negative effects that these changes would hold for the city's poor Irish inhabitants.

Before liberalizing reforms, the food economy of New York City revolved around a system of public markets. Such public markets were common in the urban centers of the Early Republic, and allowed local governments to possess some oversight over the quality and price of foodstuffs sold in their cities. Gergely Baics, in *Feeding Gotham: The Political Economy and Geography of Food in New York City, 1790-1860*, concludes that “insofar as food quality and equity were worthy principles of urban government, the public markets of Early Republican New York City played a positive role in organizing residents’ food access.”<sup>79</sup>

Despite the positive impacts that a public market system had on the food consumption of New Yorkers, the system was not to last. Distrust of government economic intervention paired with a trend towards economic liberalization and privatization to ensure that the system experienced a slow decline starting in the 1830s. By 1843, legislation was passed by the New York legislature to end the exclusive right of the public markets to control the sale of meat throughout the city. As Baics writes, “instead of limiting the sale of fresh meat to licensed market butchers, the council now permitted anyone to open a private shop...deregulation in effect meant the disintegration of the very foundation of the municipal provisioning model.”<sup>80</sup>

Such developments were cheered by New York politicians and leaders as victories for the free market and competitive capitalism. However, deregulation of the public markets was not a victory for all New Yorkers. The loss of food regulation was especially hard on the city's working class, particularly in regards to meat consumption. Privatization and deregulation had

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<sup>79</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 93.

<sup>80</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 22.

allowed prices to soar, even as the population of the city swelled and demand increased exponentially. “In other words,” writes Baics, “the caloric intake of working-class New Yorkers must have compared unfavorably, not only to the better-off citizens at the time but also to laboring people from a generation earlier.”<sup>81</sup>

Many wealthy New Yorkers undoubtedly shrugged off the suffering that the new free market system brought to working-class New Yorkers as the inability or unwillingness of European immigrants to conform to a capitalist system. In fact, the experiences of immigrants to the new free-market system of provisioning in New York City varied wildly. The city’s many German immigrants, for example, were able to continue an informal system of standards and quality in Gotham’s *Klein Deutschland*. “Capitalizing on Old World skills as food purveyors,” writes Baics, “and supplying a traditionally meat-eating ethnic clientele, German butchers became successful small entrepreneurs.”<sup>82</sup> Skills and occupational trades learned prior to immigration meant that many Germans were able to carve out some success in the new free-market food economy, and ensured that some informal level of standards and quality would persist in the tight-knit German community.

For New York’s Irish population, however, deregulation spelled disaster. Again, their past as rural agricultural laborers hurt the Irish, with most of them lacking any of the Old World skills that the Germans had brought with them to Gotham. As Baics notes, “In the German Lower East Side, an ethnic food economy could at least mitigate the risks stemming from poverty and the lack of third-party oversight. In most poor neighborhoods, like the Irish Five Points, such informal institutions of quality control were generally absent.”<sup>83</sup> Lacking this

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<sup>81</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 207.

<sup>82</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 216.

<sup>83</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 229.

“ethnic food economy,” working-class Irish were forced to put themselves at the mercy of the greater free-market provisioning system of New York City, even as that system ensured higher prices and worsening quality.

Unfortunately for the Irish, this lack of regulation or control meant that food became more expensive and worse in quality. Maguire himself noted this, writing solemnly that “there are too many mouths for the bread of independence; and thus the bread of charity has to supplement the bread which is purchased with the sweat of the brow.”<sup>84</sup> Without government oversight, inept or unscrupulous butchers could sell diseased or unsanitary meat to working-class Irish consumers, saving the better, hygienic cuts for better paying customers. Bad meat brought with it food-borne disease, which, when compounded with the squalid and already-diseased living conditions of most Irish immigrants, drove high mortality rates even higher. What is more, more expensive, poorer quality food would fail to provide Irish workers with the sufficient levels of calories and nutrients for hard labor. Baics himself surmises that “the increased risks of food-borne diseases and deficient nutrition produced by this environment must have played their part in escalating mortality.”<sup>85</sup>

If hunger and squalor provided the powder, the Civil War would furnish the spark. Not only had the Irish become disenchanted with the war effort for the reasons explored in the first chapter, but the conflict made the food situation in Gotham deteriorate further. “By 1862,” writes Anbinder, “prices skyrocketed while wages for the poor remained relatively stagnant. The retail price of tobacco and whiskey tripled. Food prices also jumped.”<sup>86</sup> Irish workers were already spending half of their precarious and uncertain income on provisioning themselves and their

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<sup>84</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 217.

<sup>85</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 211.

<sup>86</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 308.

families with food. The Civil War and the changing food economy of New York City had already made it drastically difficult for the Irish working-class to obtain sufficient calories, but at least they still had access to work that kept some food, no matter how diseased, on their tables. Many Irish New Yorkers perceived the Emancipation Proclamation to threaten even that, as downtown laborers began to see fevered visions of black masses descending on the city and destroying what shaky dominance the Irish had enjoyed in the unskilled labor market. Economic competition with African-American was without a doubt at least partially a conflict over the control of increasingly limited calories. This addition of a caloric conflict to racial and economic tensions must be partially to blame for the increased violence and death found during the Draft Riots compared to the abolition riots. Many of the Irish who rioted in the summer of 1863 had undoubtedly already experienced starvation before during the potato blight, and possessed a murderous determination to never experience it again.

It takes a desperate man to charge a well-armed and well-trained mass of soldiers with nothing more than a blunt object for a weapon. It takes a desperate woman to rain rocks upon the heads of police officers as they storm the doors to her residence. It takes desperate people to rise up against the governments of their city and their nation, armed with little more than their anger. Before all that sounds too heroic, it also takes desperate people to torture their neighbors to death. The Draft Riots cannot be understood without understanding desperation, and to do so requires understanding the tenuous situation of the Irish in New York City. As John Maguire solemnly concluded: “his enemies were many, his friends few, his defenders less. Poor Pat had indeed a sad time of it.”<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Maguire, *The Irish in America*, 450.

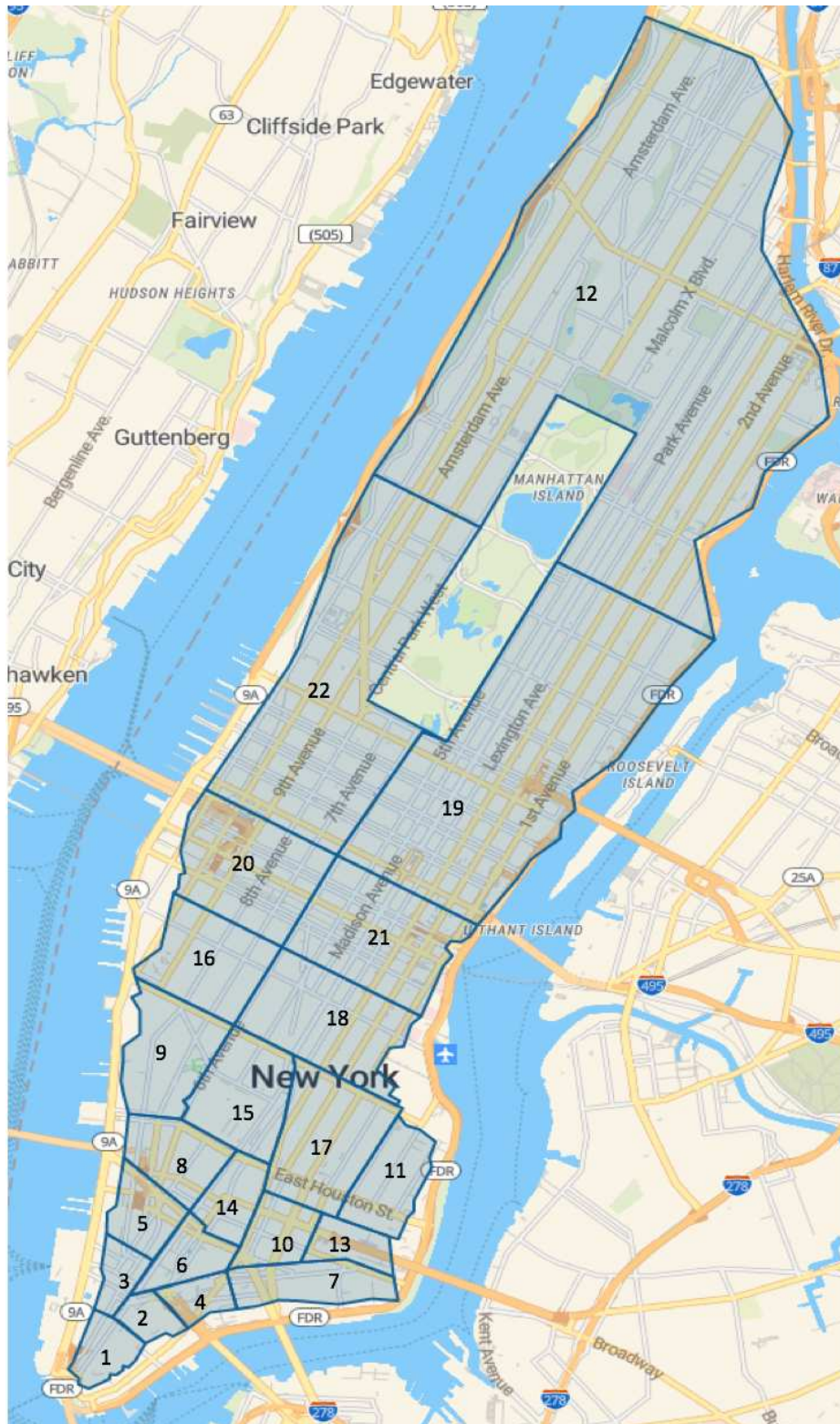


Figure 1 – ward map

## Death: The Riot in the Downtown

Hugh Boyle was, by all accounts, an aggressively unextraordinary individual. The twenty-seven year old laborer lived at 24 Mott Street, in New York's Sixth Ward, or, as it is more commonly known, the Five Points. Boyle had brown hair, blue eyes, and, like thousands of other young American men, was mustered for duty in the Union Army in December of 1864. In fact, the only interesting thing about Hugh Boyle is that, out of the 161 men drafted from the Five Points, he was the only man to report for duty.<sup>88</sup>

The strange anecdote of Hugh Boyle becomes stranger when noting the role his neighborhood would play in the bloody Draft Riots. For contemporary New Yorkers cognizant of their city's economic and cultural geography, the Five Points neighborhood would have probably been seen as the natural and likely source of violent civil insurrection. The neighborhood, located in the "Bloody Sixth" Ward of downtown Manhattan, was famous for its crime, poverty, predominantly Irish culture, and colorful history of rioting. With the anti-abolitionist riot in 1834, a flour riot in 1837, and a police riot in 1857 all having erupted from Five Points, it would have been to logical to assume that any anti-draft action would begin there as well.<sup>89</sup> The New York City Metropolitan Police also saw the danger the neighborhood posed, and had established the center of their operations – the Central Office – in the middle of the Five Points. Indeed, the neighborhood is so burned into the collective memory as the paragon of nineteenth-century urban violence that Martin Scorsese chose it as the location for his own highly imaginative retelling of the Draft Riots, *Gangs of New York*.

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<sup>88</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 318.

<sup>89</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 24.

This was the Five Points – a scene of squalor, misery, disease, and hunger. It seems logical that the Draft Riots would begin in those tenement catacombs, and that it would rage there more intensely than in any other ward in the city. Widespread antipathy towards military service, embodied by Hugh Boyle’s fellow draftees, would seem to support this theory. However, when violence over the draft did eventually erupt, it neither began in the Five Points, nor did it rage in the same ways as it did in other sections of the city. This difference in rioting prompted Anbinder to write that the “the bloodshed and destruction in Five Points were relatively mild compared to the mass murder and whole devastation found uptown.”<sup>90</sup> GIS mapping seems initially to support this, with comparatively fewer incidents of violence occurring in the neighborhood than elsewhere in the city (fig. 2). It would then be logical to assume that Five Pointers, rather than fighting in their own neighborhoods, had traveled to other parts of the city to participate in rioting there. But, as Anbinder also notes, “of the hundreds of rioters arrested, primarily in uptown wards where rioting was most fierce, only two of those whose residence could be established lived in Five Points.”<sup>91</sup> This requires some explanation.

While the supposed shortcomings of the Civil War had made New York City’s Irish population mutinous across the board, the violent forms that insurrectionary feeling would take were shaped by local needs and conflicts, as well as the urban geography of New York City. Jonathan Coit, although writing on the 1919 Chicago race riot, touches on a timeless message when he notes that “acts of violence are complex events in which responses to underlying conditions are shaped by the circumstances of the riot themselves.”<sup>92</sup> Anbinder’s statement that Draft Riots violence in the downtown was “mild” is unintentionally misleading. The violence in

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<sup>90</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 315.

<sup>91</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 315.

<sup>92</sup> Jonathon Coit, “‘Our Changed Attitude’: Armed Defense and the New Negro in the 1919 Chicago Race Riot” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressivism* 11, no. 2 (2012): 225.



the Five Points may appear “mild” only if one simply assumes that Five Pointers were rioting in the same way as Uptown rioters.

Certainly, several instances of violence did occur in the Five Points during the four days of rioting. When examining every instance of Draft Riots violence, mapped out across the entire city and over all four days, two major clusters of action become apparent (fig. 2). The first clustering of violence is in the uptown wards, stretching between both waterfronts. The uptown, as defined here, consists of the part of the city north of Fourteenth Street, in addition to the Eleventh Ward. This is where the rioting had begun, and where, with the final clashes between federal troops and rioting diehards, it would end. The second cluster of violence is located in the downtown, with the exception of the Eleventh Ward south of Fourteenth Street and encompassing several wards including Sixth. For a ward map of Manhattan, see Figure 1. Previous historians of the riots, such as Anbinder and Bernstein, have defined the borders as such, and I see no reason to diverge from such a definition here. The downtown violence, however, had taken a markedly different tone from the rioting elsewhere. Two distinct riots had emerged, and, while both stood united in a general opposition to the draft and Republican rule, the targets, the tactics, and even the makeup of the rioters themselves would vary between the uptown and downtown conflicts.

This theory of viewing Draft Riots participants as being divided into two separate camps is not entirely new. Iver Bernstein, in his *The New York City Draft Riots*, argues that violence differed during the Draft Riots mainly due to differences in the rioters themselves. While predominantly Irish Catholic across the board, certain areas of rioting, Bernstein argues, were typically dominated by factory-employed industrial workers, while laborers, such as longshoremen and quarrymen, dominated the development of violence in other parts of the city.

Industrial workers were more inclined towards direct confrontation with government forces, with Bernstein writing that “such confrontation with the authorities became the special cachet of industrial worker riot activity.”<sup>93</sup> In other words, Bernstein argues that occupation is what determined a rioter’s targets and tactics. A GIS reading of all direct clashes between the mob and government forces seems at first to confirm Bernstein’s theory, as such violence does indeed cluster in the uptown, where the massive machine shops could be found (fig. 3). Instances where both the mob chose to stand and fight government forces are notably higher in the uptown. The theory is seemingly further confirmed by a reading of hard and soft targets chosen by the mob throughout the rioting. Hard targets were targets that had some measure of active defense, such as an occupied police precinct station. Soft targets, such as an unarmed African-American, were relatively easy to opportunistically hit and run. Again, a GIS reading shows a noticeably higher number of hard targets selected in the uptown wards, with downtown rioters mainly contenting themselves with soft targets (fig. 4).

If one is to follow Bernstein’s argument, a clear pattern of two distinct rioters begins to emerge. The first is the uptown rioter, an industrial worker. This rioter destroyed telegraph lines, tore up railroad tracks, and engaged in pitched battle with government forces. They would eventually erect barricades, fight from house to house, and continue to struggle violently with government forces until the last day of fighting. The second rioter was the downtown laborer. Not keen to engage in largescale confrontation with government forces, this rioter would seek out soft, easy to hit targets, such as brothels or unarmed African-Americans. Each of these rioters would contribute to the distinctive natures that would come to define both the uptown and downtown rioting. However, the question must be asked if these uptown and downtown rioters

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<sup>93</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 35.

behaved differently solely based on their occupational sensibilities. I will argue that, while occupation played an important and deadly role in shaping the Draft Riots, it is incomplete when used as the only lens through which to view the violence. Any occupational analysis must be tempered by an examination of New York City's urban geography. The following chapters will explore how and why violence developed differently in the downtown and uptown sections of the city, and will attempt to establish why in the downtown they killed over race, and why in the uptown they killed over space.

In order to further explore this theory, this thesis will examine how and why draft violence developed where it did. While this thesis seeks to support Bernstein in his general conclusion that violence differed throughout the Draft Riots, Bernstein's work is more concerned with the occupational explanations for differences in riot violence, while this thesis seeks to better demonstrate the geographical differences that helped to define the unrest. Such approaches need not be mutually exclusive, and I maintain that both are necessary to develop a greater understanding of violence that is too often dismissed as random or mindless. That in mind, the interplay between occupation and location will be explored further in the pages that follow. Therefore, while the following chapters will build on Bernstein's admittedly excellent work, and will seek to support his basic premise in an attempt to broaden our understanding of the events, they will also attempt to provide greater context to uptown and downtown violence in their own distinct geographic times and spaces. It is important to understand how the Draft Riots developed as a whole, as it is impossible that downtown rioting developed completely autonomously of uptown rioting, and vice versa. However, such holistic summaries already exist and it would be of little historiographic value to recreate them here.<sup>94</sup> Instead, each "front" of riot violence will

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<sup>94</sup> For such summaries, see Headley's *The Great Riots of New York: 1712-1873*, Bernstein's *The New York City Draft Riots*, or Cook's *Armies of the Streets*.

be examined independently, in order to shed light upon the unique forms and characteristics of violence that developed in both uptown and downtown rioting. Then, the violence will be further analyzed within the context of space and time in an attempt to determine why and how the violence occurred. This chapter will concern riot violence in the downtown, while the following will explore the ways in which the riot developed in the uptown. Before any of that is done, however, the ways historians have previously explored violence in the downtown must be explored.

By separating out downtown from uptown violence, it is impossible to argue that the riot in the downtown was anything other than a race riot. Because of that, the racial components of downtown rioting deserve to be examined in further detail. The tragic case of Abraham Franklin is typical of the kind of violence downtown laborers inflicted on their black neighbors. The twenty-three-year-old, though physically disabled, managed to earn a living for both himself and his mother through employment as a coachman. On the third day of the riots, he was praying with his mother in her home when laborer George Glass dragged him out of the room and into the street, where a group of rioters hanged him from a lamppost. The arrival of military forces quickly scattered the crowd, and soldiers cut down Franklin's body. However, once the troops departed, the mob quickly returned and, once again, suspended Franklin's lifeless body from the lamppost.<sup>95</sup>

The murder of Abraham Franklin effectively demonstrates the basic tactics and hallmarks of laborer racial violence during the New York Draft Riots. Note the selection of an easy, soft target – an unarmed, disabled African-American. Note further the rioters' decision not to engage with the military forces that arrived and cut down Franklin's body. Franklin's murder was

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<sup>95</sup> *Report of the Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People, Suffering from the Late Riots in the City of New York* (New York: George A. Whitehorne, 1863) 14.

committed by laborers such as George Glass, and is illustrative of the broader patterns in laborer violence more commonly found in the downtown. As demonstrated by figures 2 and 3, such decisions were usually much more common in the downtown rioting than in the uptown. Attacks like the one on Franklin would come to further define the nature of the downtown violence, separating it further from what was occurring elsewhere in the city.

While racial attacks would occur across the city and throughout the entirety of the Draft Riots, a GIS reading of every act of racial violence committed throughout the Draft Riots shows a distinct pattern (fig. 5). While racial attacks were occurring in both sections of the rioting, the ratio of racial attacks to non-racial attacks in the downtown is significantly higher than in the uptown. In every day of rioting except for the last one, by which downtown rioting had been quelled almost entirely, a greater percentage of the total attacks in the downtown would be racial than they would be in the uptown (fig. 6) (fig. 7) (fig. 8) (fig. 9).

The number and severity of these racial attacks was not random. As previously noted, Irish workers were undoubtedly incensed by the ability of African-American men to avoid the draft. African-American men, being at this time not full citizens, were not obligated to provide for the nation's defense. This coupled with the ability of wealthier men to simply buy their way out of the service, led to an overrepresentation of Irish workers on the draft rosters.<sup>96</sup> For some historians, such as Joel Headley, this, along with the conflation of African-Americans with the war as a whole, was enough to explain the violence. "There would have been no war but for slavery," he writes, "But the slaves were black, ergo, all blacks are responsible for the war. This seemed to be the logic of the mob."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Rohs, Stephen, *Eccentric Nation: Irish Performance in Nineteenth-century New York City*. (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009) 184.

<sup>97</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 153.

For other historians, however, this simple answer was unsatisfactory. Beginning with Albon P. Man, historians began to look at occupation and economics as the primary reason for the targeting of African-Americans. Man, in his 1951 article “Labor Competition and the New York City Draft Riots,” looked at the latent economic factors behind the animosity between New York’s Irish and African-American populations. Man argues that because the Irish were forced to compete with the black population for work, they feared that Emancipation would only serve to bring a flood of black workers to their city, depriving them of work. “Democratic leaders and journalists in this period,” writes Man, “convinced the Irish that in resisting the draft they were simply refusing to fight for their own economic suicide.”<sup>98</sup> The violent riot leadership of small-time Democrats like William Cruise helps give some credence to this claim.

Downtown employers only exacerbated this tension, using it to their own economic advantage. In 1854, for example, waterfront employers slashed the pay of longshoremen from \$1.75 down to \$1.50. The Irish longshoremen went on strike, and black laborers were brought in as scabs. Violence quickly erupted, and the police were forced to intervene.<sup>99</sup> This problem with the longshoremen would only continue, and, starting in January of 1863, pay was slashed yet again. In a predictable pattern, the longshoremen went on strike, and black scabs were hired. This would set the stage for some of the downtown violence seen later that year, when the Draft Riots would break out in July. Bernstein, also noting the proximity between the striking of the longshoremen and the eruption of the Draft Riots, writes “bands of Irish longshoremen, many of whom lived within blocks of the piers they worked, began the first racial attacks Monday afternoon.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Man, “Labor Competition,” 381.

<sup>99</sup> Man, “Labor Competition,” 394.

<sup>100</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 27.

In short, the Draft Riots provided many laborers a pretext to settle old racially-fueled economic and social rivalries. This intersection of the economic and the social quickly began to reflect an element of sexual rivalry. After the mob had murdered Abraham Franklin, a young Irish butcher named Patrick Butler dragged his body through the streets by the genitals while the watching mob applauded.<sup>101</sup> Furthermore, laborers along the docks used the riots as an opportunity to discipline brothels and prostitutes who catered to black clients. Located along the waterfront, where an ever-changing clientele of sailors and workers of all races frequented the bordellos, an environment of sexually-charged racial animosity would have been more palpable than in the uptown.<sup>102</sup> The location of the brothel district in the downtown further explains the differences in targeting between uptown and downtown mobs (fig. 5). As Bernstein notes, “the raids on houses of ill-fame Tuesday night and through the week reflected the special social situation and needs of waterfront labor families.”<sup>103</sup> Leslie Harris in, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626 – 1863*, also writes that “the riots gave all these workers license to physically remove blacks not only from worksites, but also from neighborhoods and leisure spaces.”<sup>104</sup> The fact that a higher ratio of racially fueled violence took place in the downtown is no accident, and an understanding of the longshoremen strike helps explain the ways in which the Riots developed in that area of the city. Violence is never random, nor does it happen in a context-less vacuum. Occupation and economics are vital to understanding the Draft Riots, and Bernstein, Harris, and Man deserve praise for recognizing that.

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<sup>101</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 30.

<sup>102</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 32.

<sup>103</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 279-288.

I agree with the above historians. If I did not think that economic situations were important, I would not have bothered to establish the pre-riot status of Irish neighborhoods like Five Points. Economics and occupation remain vitally important to understanding the Draft Riots. However, a solely economic and occupational lens – without the context of New York City’s urban geography – will always result in an incomplete picture. What makes an Irish industrial workers more willing to engage with government forces than an Irish laborer? What makes a laborer more interested in quickly striking soft targets than hard ones? The answer lies in the urban geography of the city, specifically in regards to the spatial organization of the New York City police system.

At the time of the Draft Riots, Manhattan was divided into twenty-two administrative areas known as wards (Fig. 1). These wards were further subdivided into precincts, which provided the foundation upon which New York City’s metropolitan police force organized itself. Each precinct had its own police station, which was connected by telegraph to the Central Office, the police headquarters, located at 300 Mulberry Street in the Sixth Ward. There was only one station-house per precinct, but rapid communication facilitated by telegraph lines generally ensured that each station-house could, in theory, project power over a fairly large geographic area.

The fact that each precinct only possessed one police station is vital. The uptown wards take up a very large majority of Manhattan's land area. Looking at Figure 1, it is clear that Ward Twelve alone was almost as large geographically as all of the downtown wards put together. In spite of this, only twelve of the thirty-two precinct station houses in the 1863 city directory had uptown addresses.<sup>105</sup> Because of the larger area of uptown and the fewer number of wards and

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<sup>105</sup> J.F. Trow, *Trow's New York City Directory, 1863* (New York: J.F. Trow, 1863) 4.



precincts, the police stations there were rather geographically isolated. The downtown, on the other hand, despite being much more compact, consisted of fourteen wards and boasted twenty police station-houses. The police stations there were all much closer to one another, and had the additional benefit of the Central Office being located in the Sixth.

This imbalance is vital to note. Despite the uptown dwarfing the downtown in geographic size, the lower parts of the city had almost twice as many station-houses and the police headquarters. Both the rioters and the police would be keenly aware of this fact throughout the Draft Riots. When the riots began, one of the first moves uptown rioters made was attempting to completely isolate the remote uptown police stations by cutting their telegraph connections to the Central Office. Acting Police Commissioner Acton, sensing the threat, quickly ordered all police forces to fall back to the Sixth Ward and the Central Office.<sup>106</sup> Both the rioters and the Commissioner knew that the geographically isolated uptown stations simply could not be defended, especially after the loss of their vulnerable telegraph lines. As will be explored in Chapter Four, Acton's decision to withdraw created a vacuum of power that helped shape the ways in which uptown rioting would develop.

In the downtown, however, the precinct stations were much closer geographically and superior numerically. This, combined with the mass of policemen now consolidated in the Sixth, meant that the police could quickly communicate and effectively respond in the downtown in a way they could not in the uptown. This seems to be confirmed by the high amount of mob "failures" in the downtown compared to the high amount of "successes" in the uptown on the first day of rioting (Fig. 10). This would also mean the rioters in the downtown would have to adjust their tactics accordingly. The police were massed near them, had multiple staging and

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<sup>106</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 67.

communication points in the form of station-houses, and could quickly reach rioters on account of the much smaller geographical area of downtown. This means that the downtown rioter decision to avoid conflict and choose easy-to-hit targets could be, at least in part, a consequence of the urban geographical realities of New York City, and not just occupational sensibilities. The decision to target African-Americans undoubtedly sprang from occupational and economic needs and rivalries, but the tactics did not. Likewise, the geographic realities of police uptown weakness may help explain the problems that the government had in restoring order there. GIS is particularly useful in seeing this sort of practical, boots-on-the-ground reality that may otherwise disappear in an analysis based solely on written accounts.

To further investigate this theory, the violence of the downtown “front” must be explored independently. One of the most compelling reasons to study each “front” of the riots independently is Five Points. Following the riots, the *Tribune* gushed over the supposed fact that the residents of “Bloody Sixth” had not participated in riot violence.<sup>107</sup> As demonstrated by Bernstein remarking that the Sixth Ward was “relatively quiet,”<sup>108</sup> in addition to Anbinder’s “mild” comment, this perception continues to the modern day. Looking at all the violence at once, downtown rioting can be easily obscured by the uptown unrest, which started sooner and lasted longer. What is more, uptown violence –with its large, pitched battles between rioters and government forces – commands greater attention purely on the merit of blood spilt. Five Pointers may not have erected barricades or fought Federal troops through tenements, but to brush off their participation in the riots is to conceal the terrible and unique violence that developed in their neighborhoods. By isolating the realms of riot violence into separate geographic spheres, this thesis hopes to combat the myth of the “Unbloody Sixth.”

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<sup>107</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 24.

<sup>108</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 24.

To the benefit of the *Tribune* and Anbinder, it would be at least partially right to claim that the Draft Riots did not start in the Five Points neighborhood of New York City. That dubious honor belongs to the toughs of the uptown, who carefully began their campaign of isolating remote police station-houses by destroying telegraph lines on the march to the Provost Marshall's office on the morning of July 13. In fact, for the first several hours of the Draft Riots, violence remained geographically confined, raging almost exclusively in the Nineteenth Ward of uptown Manhattan. Between nine in the morning to three in the afternoon, only one instance of violence took place outside of the Nineteenth, and it happened in the neighboring Twenty-First Ward, still very much in the uptown.

For downtown residents of New York City, however, the Draft Riots started, in fact, in the infamous "Bloody Sixth." The first act of riot violence in the downtown portion of the city occurred at around three in o'clock, on the corner of Broadway and Chambers, when a mob assaulted an African-American boy of no more than nine years of age.<sup>109</sup> By this time, news of the uptown riot's initial success had undoubtedly reached the lower parts of the city, giving the residents there the confidence to begin a riot of their own. Not only was this the first act of Draft Riots violence perpetrated in the downtown wards, it was the first racially-fueled assault of the unrest. This attack on a mere child was a tragic and cowardly prelude to what was to come.

The fact that downtown violence started in Five Points is astounding, not only because the Central Office was located there, but because Acton had already begun to actively consolidate his forces in that ward. The mob, however, seems to have recognized their unique geographic situation. They knew the police would be able to react quickly and with force, so they planned their own violence accordingly. They did not march forth to fight the same kind of

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<sup>109</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 21.

pitched battles that had been fought and won by the rioters in the Nineteenth. Because of downtown geographical realities, a similar victory would have been impossible. By rapidly engaging weak targets such as a young boy, they had a better chance at accomplishing limited economic objectives and disappearing back into the tenements before the nearby police had a chance to respond.

A few minutes later, downtown mobs descended on African-Americans at Baxter street, beating them. The crowd then turned its attention on Samuel Crook's saloon, located on Chatham and Baxter. In the eyes of the mob, Crook had sinned by employing black waiters in his establishment. Incensed at the sight of African-Americans occupying what could have been Irish jobs, the mob stormed the saloon and began to administer vicious beatings to their economic competitors. This time, however, the massing downtown police force was able to quickly respond, and drove Five Point rioters from the scene.<sup>110</sup>

The first downtown riot violence to not take place in Five Points occurred in the neighboring Fourth Ward. There, the downtown trend of ranking racially-motivated targets above other priorities continued. At four o'clock – the same time that the first uptown racial violence occurred with the burning of the Colored Orphans' Asylum – a mob beat an African-American sailor so severely that the sailor temporarily lost his memory.<sup>111</sup> Conversely, the first major non-racial violence in the downtown occurred forty-five minutes later, when a police force intercepted a large mob marching on the police headquarters, leading to a melee. The massed police force easily forced the column of rioters to beat a retreat. It should be noted however that while this fighting occurred downtown, the mob who participated had formed in the uptown, and had marched down Broadway with the express purpose of targeting the center of police

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<sup>110</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 168.

<sup>111</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 79.

operations.<sup>112</sup> They do not appear to have realized that the urban geography of the downtown discouraged such combat. Acton's decision to consolidate in the downtown meant that he would have enough able-bodied policemen to handily win such pitched-confrontation in the lower wards.

Actual downtown residents, meanwhile, knew better. They were aware of the geographic realities of their portion of the city, and continued their campaign of racial terror. By quickly hitting soft, unarmed targets, they knew they would have a greater chance of success. They would soon learn, however, that better chances do not always equate to the optimum results. Back in the Five Points, policemen successfully charged rioters attacking African-American residences along Baxter Street at six o'clock.<sup>113</sup> In the Ninth Ward, a mob had more success, lynching an African-American, and subsequently burning his corpse before the police could arrive.<sup>114</sup> In the Sixth Ward, rioters attempted to destroy an African-American boarding house, but were again beaten back by a rapid police response.<sup>115</sup> To the rioter's chagrin, even quick attacks were beginning to prove no match for the consolidated downtown police system. Recovering from the chaos of the day, government forces then successfully defended the *Tribune* office from downtown rioters at 7:30 that evening, and a victorious police counter-attack at Roosevelt and Batavia managed to briefly clear the Fourth Ward.<sup>116</sup> Despite downtown rioting on Monday being overwhelmingly defined by racial attacks, the final action of the day was the impotent torching of an empty Draft office in the Thirteenth Ward.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 171.

<sup>113</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 316.

<sup>114</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 82.

<sup>115</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 316.

<sup>116</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 81.

<sup>117</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 87.

This independent examination of the downtown riot shows the prominence of the Sixth Ward in the first day of unrest, painting a picture of violence neither “mild,” nor “relatively quiet.” Far more first day acts of downtown violence occurred in the Sixth Ward than any other downtown ward, even when one accounts for the uptown rioters who pushed in to the lower sectors of the city. Such descriptions would be more accurate over the course of the following days, as the first day of violence would mark the peak of riot action in the Five Points. This may be, in part, because government forces found far more success in the downtown than they did in the uptown. This was undoubtedly a consequence of the urban geography of New York City’s police precinct system, as well as Acton’s decision to consolidate his men in the Sixth. Out of all the attacks in Five Points, for example, only one act of violence can be chalked up as a “success” for rioters, and that was the beating of the child. Elsewhere, swift government responses frustrated attempts by rioters to fully achieve their objectives. However short Sixth Ward domination over downtown rioting lasted, it must not be discarded or ignored. Five Pointers not only started the rioting in the downtown in spite of a large police presence in their own backyard, they started the campaign of racial terror that would shape that portion of the city throughout the riots. This must be remembered.

By now downtown rioters had realized that they were no match for the police in the Sixth Ward, and took their hit-and-run tactics to the surrounding wards. In the early hours of Tuesday morning, rioters attacked an African-American man in the Ninth Ward.<sup>118</sup> At around ten o’clock, in the Thirteenth Ward, federal troops fired on a large downtown mob waving anti-draft signs.<sup>119</sup> At noon, downtown rioters successfully looted a gun store on Grand Street, and, being now

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<sup>118</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 98.

<sup>119</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 102.

armed, ambitious plans were made to seize the North River Ferries.<sup>120</sup> When this failed, downtown rioters returned to attacking easier targets, sacking businesses along Grant Street and burning African American homes in the Fourth Ward. At the same time, rioters along the waterfront attacked the area's red-light district, beginning a campaign of sexual policing that would remain mostly unique to downtown violence.<sup>121</sup>

This campaign continued at around eight o'clock that night, when a local Democratic politician, William Cruise, led a gang in an attack on at least two residences where white women had engaged in sexual relations with black men. One woman was a prostitute, while the other had married an African-American man. Cruise's gang made no distinction, and while the prostitute, Mary Burke, managed to escape as the mob burned her house to the ground, the gang administered a vicious beating to the other woman, Ann Derrickson, as she attempted to shield her son. She would die some agonizing weeks later from the wounds she had received. Derrickson's husband, an African-American man, had known Cruise for some years, and had even supplied him with meat.<sup>122</sup> According to Cook, this was the first time during the Draft Riots that rioters killed a woman.<sup>123</sup> For Cruise and his thugs, to see a black man have a white wife and the ability to provision others with meat even in the lean years of the Civil War – things that the Irish thought they themselves were solely entitled to – must have provoked a murderous amount of jealousy, which may help explain why Ann Derrickson lost her life and others did not. In the sad case of the Derrickson family, racial and caloric anxieties combined with sexual policing to create a type of violence that was, with a sole exception, unique to the downtown.

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<sup>120</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 103, 133.

<sup>121</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 132.

<sup>122</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 135.

<sup>123</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 135.

Around half an hour later, downtown rioters plundered the famous Brooks Brothers clothing retailer in the Seventh Ward. Many rioters absconded with fine garments before government forces quickly restored order on the scene.<sup>124</sup> Sartorial distractions did not hold the attention of the downtown rioters for long, however, and by ten o'clock that night racial animosities again directed the furies of the mob. The Fifth Precinct police station, located on Leonard Street, was harboring around four-hundred black residents of the downtown. Up to this point, downtown rioters had avoided attacking defensible targets, and had retreated when confronted by government forces. However, the Fifth's police station was at the time defended by only two policemen, and the mob undoubtedly saw a golden opportunity to strike a deadly blow against their African-American rivals by destroying the station. The Fifth's policemen, seeing the danger, armed the African-Americans sheltering there in anticipation of the Irish threat. Luckily, in a testament to the efficacy of the downtown police system, Inspector Carpenter and a large contingent of policemen quickly arrived. The rioters, knowing their geographical disadvantages and that more police could quickly arrive on the scene if they chose to give pitched battle, sulked back into the shadows of the night.<sup>125</sup>

By the third day of rioting, the rapid and successful responses of government forces had ensured that the number of insurrectionary activities in the downtown were dwindling. However, Wednesday would still see several acts of violence. Early in the morning, William Rigby led a gang of rioters in an attempt to torch "the Arch," a group of mainly black tenement buildings in the heart of Greenwich Village. Rigby and his friends managed to start a fire, but the arrival of a fire company frustrated their efforts.<sup>126</sup> Rioters then torched government stores in Greenwich

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<sup>124</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 131.

<sup>125</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 131.

<sup>126</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 134.



Village, as a panicked telegraph operator reported on the situation to the police headquarters.<sup>127</sup> Around five o'clock that evening, rioters killed yet another African-American man at Pier 4.<sup>128</sup> From this point on, rioting would, for the most part, cease in the downtown. Government forces were beginning to retake control of the city, and, unlike their uptown cousins, the downtown rioters had no intention of doing combat with increasingly organized policemen and soldiers in the compact lower wards. Besides, their quick hit-and-run tactics had already allowed them to accomplish some limited success in their objectives. The torched homes and beaten bodies of the area's many African-Americans could testify to that.

Racial antagonism was a critical part of the Draft Riots, and deserves to be remembered as such. Rioters, crazed by fears over competition and calories, were not content to simply beat their economic rivals. Instead they oftentimes attempted to erase them entirely from the geography of the city. Understanding the geographic as well as the economic context to this violence helps explain why certain patterns would emerge over the course of the riots, such as was in the case of the downtown attacks.

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<sup>127</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 235.

<sup>128</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 237.

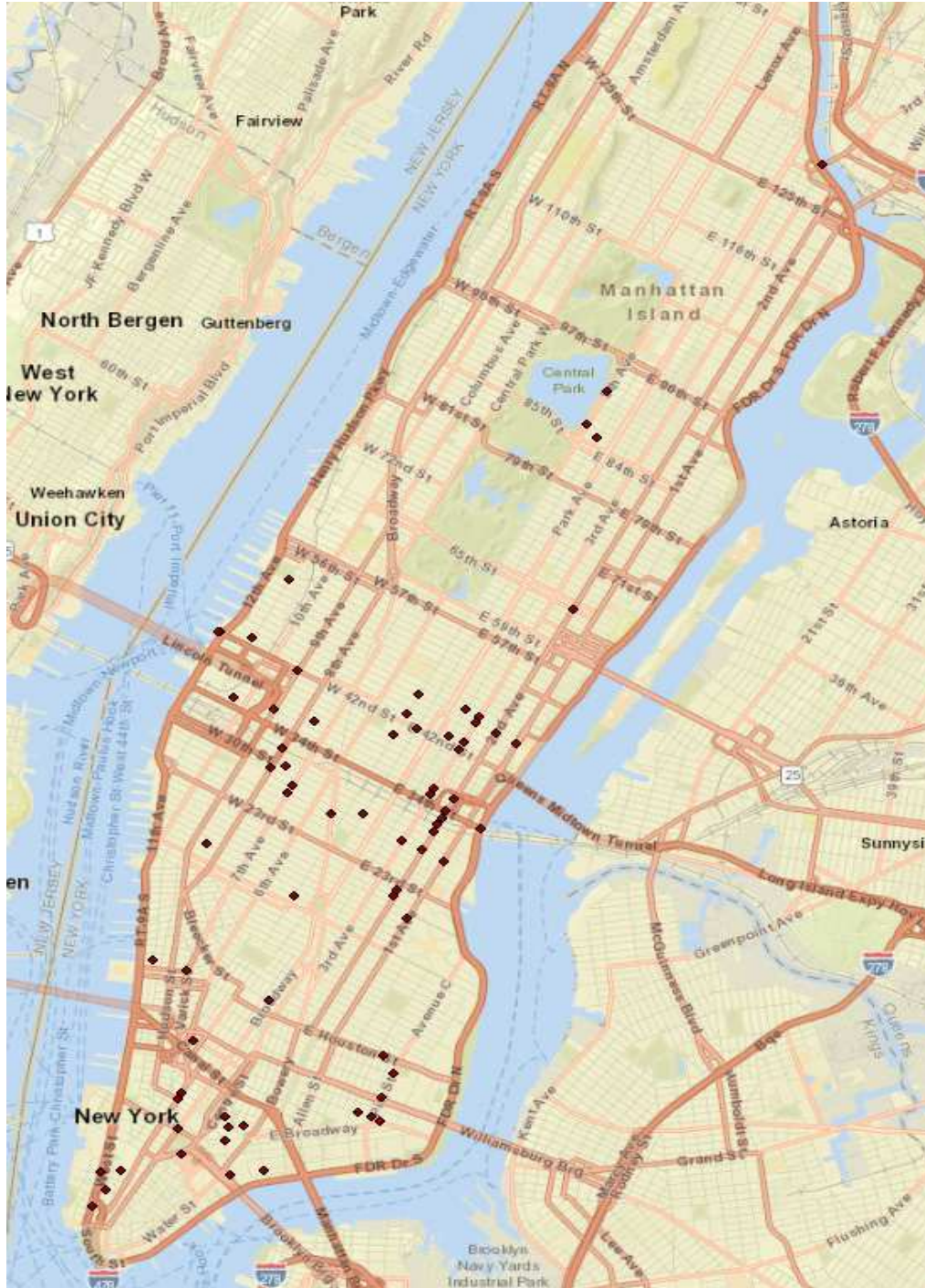


Figure 2 – all attacks



Figure 3 – all clashes with government forces



Figure 4 – hard (dark green) versus soft (light green) targets

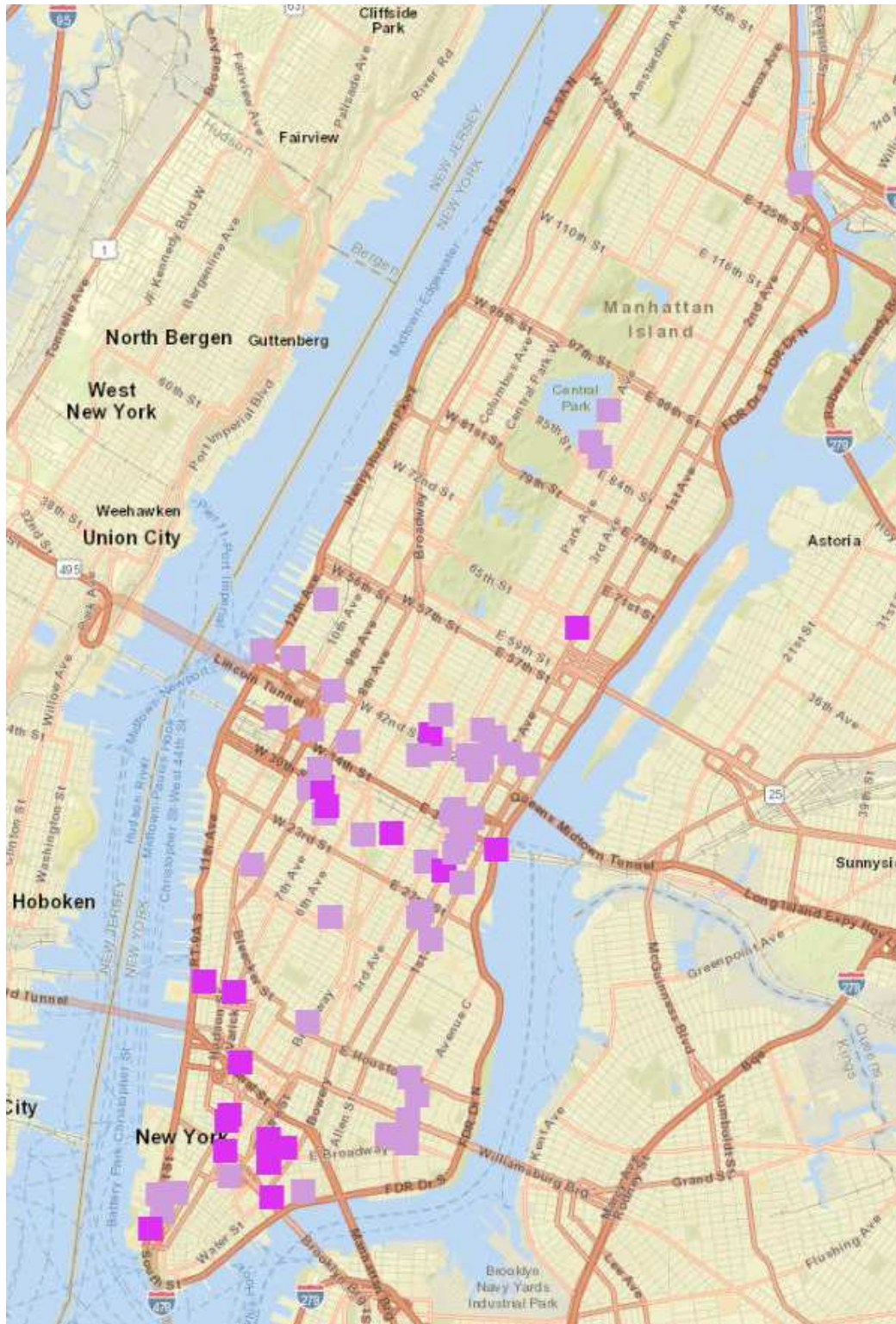


Figure 5— racial (dark purple) versus non-racial (light purple) attacks



Figure 6 – racial attacks, day one



Figure 7 – racial attacks, day two



Figure 8 – racial attacks, day three





Figure 9 – racial attacks, day four

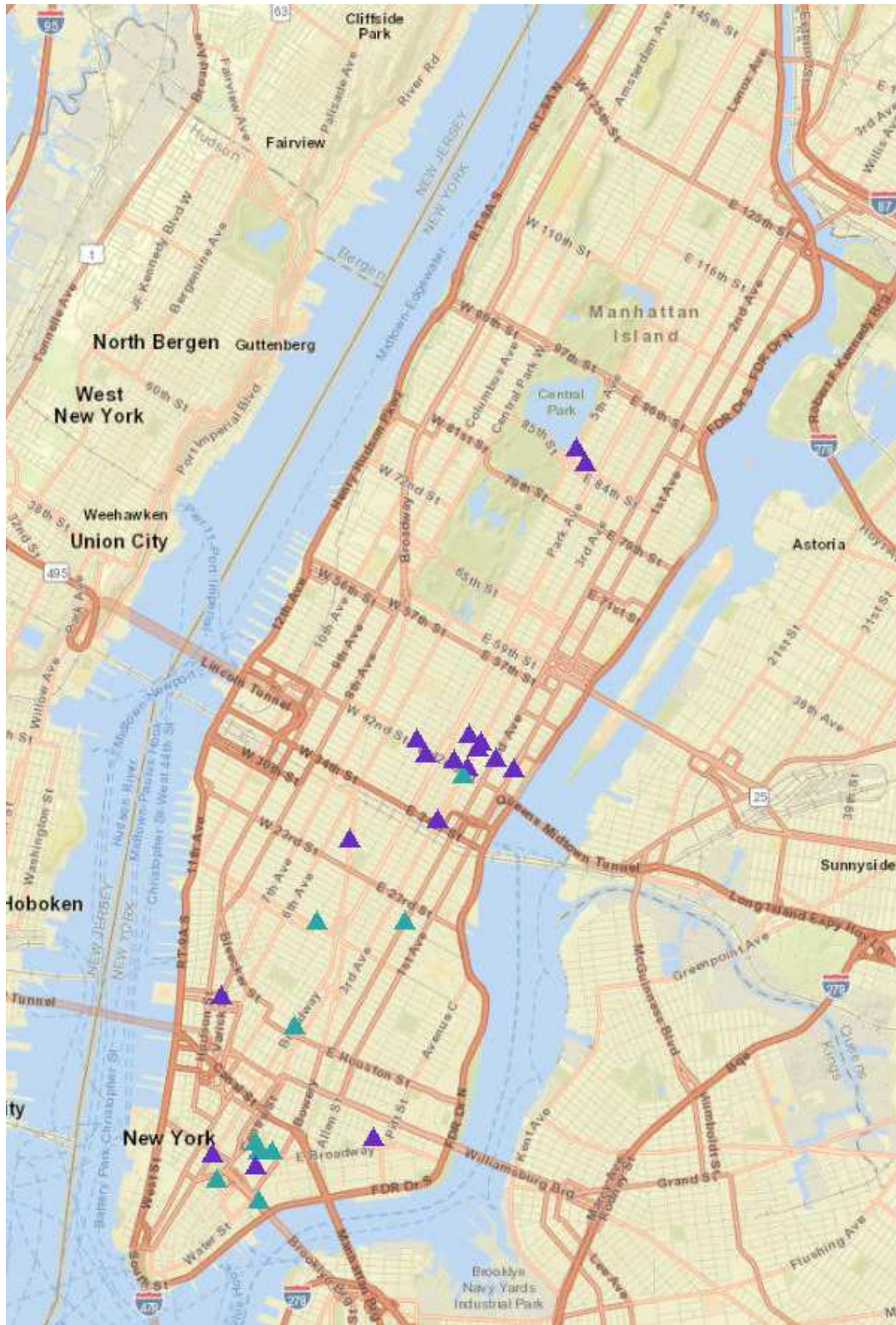


Figure 10 – first day mob success (dark blue) versus failure (light blue)

## Pestilence: The Riot in the Uptown

For Anna O'Brien, time and space could have made all the difference in the world. If only her husband had died two-hundred miles to the west, the home that they shared may not have been ransacked. If only he had died eleven days earlier, his body may not have ended up in an unmarked grave. Most importantly, if Colonel Henry O'Brien had died at Gettysburg, eleven days earlier and two-hundred miles away, he would not have been forgotten.

Instead, Anna O'Brien's husband died at home, in New York City. Colonel O'Brien, while examining damage done to his home, was attacked and tortured for six long hours. The mauling he received was so severe that by the time a priest had arrived to administer the Extreme Unction, his face had been reduced "to pulp."<sup>129</sup> Anna O'Brien's husband was a casualty in one of the two critical Northern soil victories over insurrectionary forces during July, 1863. Unfortunately, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Colonel O'Brien did not die at Gettysburg, but during the course of the New York City Draft Riots. In January of 1864, several months after the death of her husband, Anna O'Brien wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Herald*. "I feel emboldened to request your generous influence in my behalf," wrote O'Brien, "in the hope that an appeal through the columns of your valuable paper will have the effect of bringing of city authorities to a sense of what I cannot but deem their bounden duty."<sup>130</sup> The widow went on to detail the death of her husband, his unceremonious burial, and her own subsequent fall into poverty. She concluded the letter with a plea that her husband be given a proper burial, alongside the couples' deceased children, and that

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<sup>129</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 36.

<sup>130</sup> Anna O'Brien, "The Late Colonel O'Brien." *The New York Herald* (New York, NY), January, 1864.

she herself receive the pension, as the widow of a colonel killed in action, to which she was entitled.

Anna O'Brien's letter to the *Herald* was a last-ditch effort to attract the attention of the city's authorities. Unfortunately for the widow, New Yorkers had already by 1864 begun the process of erasing the Draft Riots from their collective memory. "When in late 1863 Northern military victory began to appear imminent," writes Iver Bernstein, "an anachronistic reading back of national unity in a grand cause encouraged many Northerners to repress further the recollection and meaning of draft resistance in New York."<sup>131</sup> While exact motives varied, rich and poor alike soon distanced themselves from the embarrassing memory of the rioting. Unfortunately for Anna, the role of women in the rioting was quickly forgotten by the public and historians alike. While analyses of the unrest have played close attention to issues of race and class, a study of gender in the Draft Riots has been neglected.

Regardless of this lack of historiographical attention, women played a distinct and important role in the New York City Draft Riots, both as participants in and victims of the violence. While this chapter will not be so arrogant as to claim to be a definitive study of gender in the Draft Riots, the role of women is especially important to understanding the development of violence in the uptown portion of the city. Like the riot in the downtown, the riot in the uptown was shaped by geographical realities as well as economic and occupational needs. The situation would become so dire in those upper wards that Acton referred to at least one uptown ward which had been overrun by rioters as a "plague spot," that needed to be "wiped out."<sup>132</sup> Understanding the role of women in the upper wards rioting is revealing to both the specific

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<sup>131</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 4.

<sup>132</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 162.

needs and objectives of uptown rioters, and further underlines the differences between uptown and downtown violence.

One of the most famous images of the Draft Riots, a print by *The Illustrated London News*, depicts uptown workers standing fast against an approaching column of Federal soldiers.<sup>133</sup> In the distance, a cannon thunders in the direction of the rebel barricade, while in the foreground rioters and dogs are shown dying alongside each other on the cobblestone. The rioters, tattered but seemingly defiant, return fire on the approaching mass of soldiers, taking what meager cover they could behind the crumbling barricade or from the windows of the surrounding tenements. In all of this action, only one woman can be seen, rushing arms-out to embrace a dying fighter. In some ways, the depiction was accurate. Uptown workers did fight largescale pitched battles with federal troops and erect large barricades in their neighborhood – two things their downtown cousins did not. When confronted, even by a force as awesome as the one depicted in *The Illustrated London News*, uptown rioters often stood and fought, again differentiating themselves from the rioters downtown. In one way, however, the print is dead wrong in its depiction. The presence of only one woman in the print, portrayed as a non-combatant simply trying to reach a fallen loved-one, is an inaccurate depiction of the role women actively played in uptown combat. Before the development of the riot in the uptown can be understood, gender must be explored.

An analysis of gender was not an easy one. In accounts of the unrest, rioters are typically lumped together into terms like “rioters,” or “the mob,” with no attention paid to the make-up of particular crowds. There may have been women present in these groups, but accounts seem to

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<sup>133</sup> “The Riots in New York: Conflict Between the Military and Rioters in First-Avenue.” *The Illustrated London News* (London, GB), August 8, 1863.

imply in most situations that the rioters were generally male. This may be on account of contemporary views in regards to a woman's capacity for violence, but, because of this ambiguity, I chose to only map incidents of violence where women were listed explicitly – either as participants or as victims. First, I created a mapping category for riot violence explicitly inspired by women having sexual relations with African-American men (fig. 11). This group, symbolized by green crosses, would include violence against women who found occupation as prostitutes, or women who chose to marry or engage in sexual relations with African-American men. Second, I created a category (fig. 12) to track every incident of women being specifically noted as participants in the rioting itself. These instances are marked on the map by black crosses. Finally, both sets were plotted simultaneously (fig. 13) in order to see what patterns, if any, could be found in women's participation in the Draft Riots.

The first set, tracking attacks on women for sexual relations with African-American men, records two instances of such violence in the downtown, and one instance in the upper wards (fig. 1). While this may seem at first glance insignificant, the one incident in uptown was against a sole individual, who was not even an African-American, but was mistaken as such because of his tanned complexion.<sup>134</sup> In the downtown, however, sexually motivated violence took a much more serious edge. The first of the downtown crosses, located at the tip of Manhattan in the First Ward, represents the mob's assault on multiple waterfront brothels located there. Because of the limits in the sources as to the actual addresses of all the brothels, they all have to be recorded as a single incident. However, rioters furiously attacked several establishments at this location, smashing the interiors of the brothels in an attempt to drive their proprietors out of business. The second downtown cross, located in the Fifth, represents the violent Cruise gang attacks that left

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<sup>134</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 134.

Ann Derrickson dead. Although still maybe little more than a footnote in the grander narrative of the Draft Riots, sexual violence in the downtown took a form which nothing in the uptown would resemble. Compared to the sole uptown attack – targeted against a single individual – downtown sexual violence was larger in its murderous scope and ambition.

The mapping of women specifically noted as rioting is much more conclusive. With only one exception, every single specific mention of women rioting occurred in the uptown. The one downtown event was the sacking of Brooks Brothers, and with a whopping 48% of women in downtown wards like the Sixth employed in the “needle trades,”<sup>135</sup> downtown women leapt at the chance to pilfer some very fine cloth. Downtown women are not otherwise listed specifically in accounts of the violence there, unless, as previously noted, as victims. In the uptown, conversely, women took an active and violent role in multiple instances of rioting. Writing on the uptown women who mutilated the body of Colonel O’Brien, Bernstein writes that “the participation of working-class wives suggests these events were not merely the outgrowth of the male workplace experience and may have relied as well on the neighborhood networks of poor Irish women.”<sup>136</sup> I will go one step further than Bernstein: uptown rioting did rely on those networks of poor Irish women, and understanding their participation is central to understanding the Draft Riots.

As was the case in the downtown, the distinct characteristics of uptown urban geography helped form the riot violence that took in the upper wards of the city. These geographic realities in uptown allowed for unrest that looked, in many ways, more like a rebellion than a riot. Deficiencies in the spatial arrangement of the New York City’s network of station-houses, decisions made by the acting police commissioner, and bold tactical moves made by the Irish

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<sup>135</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 112.

<sup>136</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 37.

rioters all combined to create a situation drastically different than the one in downtown. The initial police withdrawal from the uptown, following a string of rioter successes, created a vacuum of power in which the space of the city itself could be contested. An evolving fight over space necessitated the participation of whole Irish neighborhoods, including male industrial workers and those networks of working-class Irish women. The sort of neighborhood-level insurrection enabled by this vacuum is the reason why women rioted in the uptown in a way that they did not in the lower portion of the city.

To understand how this vacuum formed, and how uptown rioting subsequently developed, it is again useful to review the violence as it evolved. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the uptown police situation was far removed from the situation in the downtown – with the headquarters and a majority of station-houses located there. So, instead of focusing solely on the occupational divisions between uptown and downtown fighters, special attention again will be paid to the ways that the local built environment helped shape uptown rioting. We will start in the Nineteenth Ward, where historians typically begin their account of the Draft Riots – and by extension their account of uptown violence – with the attack on the Ninth District provost marshal’s office.

The sound of a stone crashing through glass signaled the charge. A mass of men, spearheaded by the boys of the “Black Joke” Fire Engine Company No. 33, rammed themselves against the door of the Ninth District provost marshal’s office, where the draft had been taking place. Some of the company’s men had been listed for drafting, and the firemen had elected to demonstrate to the drafting officers just how well they could fight. The door’s hinges quickly buckled, and, as drafting officers scurried out of a back door, the Black Joke stormed into the



building. The men proceeded to smash furniture, destroy documents, and, shouting “How are you, Old Abe?” set the entire office ablaze.<sup>137</sup>

The destruction of the Ninth District provost marshal’s office has traditionally been afforded a significant amount of discussion by historians of the riots. Every serious monograph concerning the Draft Riots includes in its analysis of the initial violence a lengthy description of the action at the Ninth District Office, and this is by no means wrong. The burning of the office, as one of the first moments of destructive confrontation during the unrest, was certainly a critical moment in the development of the rioting. However, what is problematic is the propensity of the incident to overshadow critical strategic targeting that was occurring nearby. Before the men of the Black Joke threw the first stone through the window of the provost marshal’s office, rioters (including a contingent of specifically-mentioned women) destroyed telegraph lines, stopped horse-cars, and began tearing up railroad tracks.<sup>138</sup> Storming the office could, without that information, be shrugged off as simply anxiety and resentment towards the draft. However, when the attack on the provost marshal’s office is placed within the context of rioters first eliminating lines of communication and transport, it becomes apparent that rioters were already preparing for a larger-scale conflict. The rioters were obviously cognizant of the realities of the police’s ability to project power in the upper wards, and before they even began their assault on the Ninth District provost marshal’s office, rioters orchestrated strategic strikes – isolating uptown authorities by limiting their access to communication and transportation. As Bernstein notes, “the assaults on telegraph lines, ferry slips, railroad tracks, and gas factories went beyond mere machine breaking to disclose a greater anticipation of – or even plan for – protracted

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<sup>137</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 57.

<sup>138</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 153 and Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 56.

confrontation with the authorities.”<sup>139</sup> Surrounding strategic context is necessary to understand not only mob actions, but also government responses.

The tendency to privilege violent and exciting clashes over small strategic actions is not limited to just the incidents surrounding the Ninth District office. Certainly, it is easier and more exciting to illustrate a pitched battle between rioters and soldiers than it is to provide excruciating detail of a group of men quietly cutting down a telegraph pole. However, it must again be stressed that the uptown police presence was relegated to a relatively small number of station-houses which were expected to project power over a large geographic area. To accomplish this and artificially shrink their relative geographic isolation, the uptown Metropolitan Police needed to rely on an increasingly efficient transportation and communication system. The contemporary Joel Headley underscored the importance of the telegraph network to the ability of the police to maintain control of the upper wards, writing that “no other system could give as much power to the police – the power of instant information and concentration at any point.”<sup>140</sup> Exploring the initial success of rioters in dismantling this system is vital to understanding the riot in the uptown.

As noted earlier, the strategic attacks throughout the city were severe enough to convince many New Yorkers that the mob actions were being secretly orchestrated by Confederate agents. As Florence E. Gibson writes in *The Attitudes of the New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848 – 1892*, “Some people believed that the riot was part of a conspiracy planned to help the South. The contention was that it was timed to coincide with Lee’s invasion of the North, but the victory at Gettysburg had defeated that plan.”<sup>141</sup> Much of this undoubtedly stems

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<sup>139</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 4.

<sup>140</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 158.

<sup>141</sup> Florence E. Gibson, *The Attitudes of the New York Irish toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892* (New York: AMS Press, 1968) 157.

from a racial prejudice that the savage and backward Irish could not, on their own, cripple New York so effectively, but is telling to how disturbed New Yorkers were by the mob's seemingly deliberate actions. A United States Marshal, having arrested a Virginian by the name of Andrews, triumphantly telegraphed the Secretary of War, E. M. Stanton, "I have arrested the principle orator of the mob."<sup>142</sup>

While fears concerning a Confederate conspiracy were unsubstantiated, the strategic targeting of communication and transportation lines had very real consequences for government forces attempting to quell the uptown rioting. In the aftermath of Monday's attack on the Provost Marshal's office, New York's uptown police force was in a state of total disarray. Police superintendent John Kennedy had been compromised in a brutal mob beating, and rioters had helped facilitate a communication and transportation breakdown through their targeting. Rioters had, in a resounding blitz, smashed the copper Goliath's head, ears, and eyes. Already, the participation of entire neighborhoods – not just male workers – became apparent. Writing about the Monday riots, Dr. John Torrey wrote "I found the whole road way and sidewalk filled with rough fellows (and some equally rough women) who were tearing up rails, cutting down telegraph poles, and setting fire to buildings."<sup>143</sup> As a reading of all of Monday's attacks demonstrates, most of the strategic attacks were clustered around the destroyed provost marshal's office (fig. 14). This meant that authorities attempting to respond to the attack had to deal not only with the lack of leadership following the assault on Kennedy, but also with a myriad of transportation and communication difficulties. Whereas in the downtown wards smaller distances meant that police could often quickly get where they needed on foot, the

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<sup>142</sup> Robert Scott and United States War Department, eds. *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records*, Vol. 27 (Washington, D.C.: 1864) 927.

<sup>143</sup> Hunter A. Dupree, and Leslie H. Fishel. "An Eyewitness Account of the New York Draft Riots, July, 1863." (*The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47, no. 3, 1960) 474.

uptown wards were far enough away that the police risked losing the elements of surprise and speed. The policemen and soldiers who marched into the Nineteenth Ward that morning were poised to learn a quick and bloody lesson on the realities of uptown rioting.

What followed was a disaster for authorities. The Invalid Corps, a reserve unit of older and partially disabled soldiers which had been dispatched to the scene of trouble, was quickly routed, leaving Third Avenue cluttered with the bodies of several soldiers. Following that, several police squads hastened to the scene, but, due to the confusion wrecked by strategic targeting and geographic limitations, arrived at different times and at different places. Each squad was quickly overwhelmed by rioters and forced to withdraw.<sup>144</sup> The first pitched battles of the Draft Riots had been fought, and they had been won by the mob.

The strategic targeting employed by the rioters soon prompted the police to change their own tactics. Communications breakdowns had led to the routs near the provost marshal's office, and "the inadequacies of the police telegraph system meant that the precincts could not communicate with each other, only with the Central Office."<sup>145</sup> Thomas Acton had replaced the incapacitated Kennedy as the head of the police force, and was forced to order all police in the city to pull back and concentrate at the downtown Central Office. Authorities had, for a time, abandoned the uptown, leaving behind the vacuum of power that allowed the rioting there to take on a scope and magnitude not seen elsewhere in the city.

As the above instances demonstrate, strategic targeting was a critical piece in the development of the Draft Riots. However, as with racial attacks, strategic targeting too followed a basic pattern. Just as the racial attacks were more a predominant feature in downtown rioting, so were strategic attacks more prominent in the uptown rioting. Mapping out every instance of

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<sup>144</sup> Cook, *The Armies of the Streets*, 64.

<sup>145</sup> *ibid*

strategic attacks reveals several attacks in the downtown, but a significantly larger cluster in the uptown (fig. 15). Overlaying this map with every instance of clashes between government forces and the mob, it becomes clear that rioters were more willing to stand and fight near instances of strategic targeting (fig. 16).

This is important, because it seems to give further credence to the significance of urban geography in shaping the different “fronts” of the riot. It becomes apparent, when comparing the map of strategic attacks (fig. 15) with the map of racial attacks (fig. 6) that the uptown and downtown rioters had different strategies if not wholly different aims. As explained in the previous section, the downtown rioters were engaged in an economically motivated racial purge that was shaped in many ways by the urban geography of the downtown. The uptown rioters, on the other hand, found themselves in a position to attempt something much more radical. These rioters destroyed telegraph lines, ripped up railroad tracks, and fought with government forces. These rioters, later in the week, would erect massive barricades around their neighborhoods and attempt to burn the Harlem bridge. These rioters, after attempting to sever the city’s access to gas and water, prompted Joel Headley to admit almost accomplished “master-strokes.”<sup>146</sup>

Uptown rioters were fundamentally different than those in the downtown. Granted, the uptown rioters were hardly abolitionists, but these particular sons of St. Patrick were more concerned with snaking telegraph lines than they were with racial and sexual purification. Uptown racial attacks did occur, with the burning of the Colored Orphans Asylum being one notable example, but they accounted for a much lower percentage of overall attacks than they did in the downtown.

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<sup>146</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 237.

Most importantly, the uptown disturbances differed from the downtown insofar as they began to resemble less of a race riot and more of a distinctly Irish and Catholic uprising. Entire neighborhoods, incorporating both men and women, attempted to physically separate themselves from a governing body that they believed had become deleterious to their interests. Ethnic and religious identity, not just occupation, is what allowed both men and women to fight for the same objectives. “Irish Catholicism was an important part of the identity of many East Side rioters,” Bernstein writes, referencing the uptown area in which rioters erected barricades, “and by excluding Republicans, they may have believed that their territory of justice would be free from...nativistic and homogenizing Protestant rule.”<sup>147</sup> Irish Catholic identity would prove to be such an important rallying point and unifier for the men and women of the uptown rioting that New York Governor Horatio Seymour would eventually be compelled to enlist the aid of Catholic Archbishop John Hughes in ending the unrest.<sup>148</sup> Of course, as the murder of Colonel O’Brien and the beating of Superintendent Kennedy demonstrate, Irish Catholicism alone was not enough to save individuals who chose to side with the government.

The uptown rioters repeatedly displayed a tenacious determination to engage in prolonged and violent conflict with authorities. This may partially be because these particular rioters were choosing to fight in their own neighborhoods alongside their friends, spouses, and neighbors. Again, the presence of women as rioters is important to note in order to understand how uptown violence took its unique shape. Geographic conditions had allowed for entire neighborhoods, women included, to revolt as units, and the presence of those women near or at the front lines in turn inspired uptown rioters to stand their ground in the face of the later attempts by soldiers and policemen to penetrate fortified Irish neighborhoods. These people had

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<sup>147</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 39.

<sup>148</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 257.

lived in squalid conditions and had seen their friends and loved ones sacrificed in the name of a war that they believed no longer served Irish interests. They were poor, hungry, and afraid of a second great starvation. They wanted out of the system, and were willing to die to do it. As entire neighborhoods fought and bled over the rough barricades, the voices of uptown Irish women could be heard, encouraging their men with the laconic admonition to “die at home.”<sup>149</sup>

Comparing the uptown rioters to the more mobile bands of downtown rioters, Bernstein writes, “industrial workers and their families now became intensely local in their thinking. They hoped to establish zones of the city free from a Republican presence.”<sup>150</sup> This was true, but was only possible because of the unique geographical uptown situation which had created the vacuum of power that Irish rioters subsequently exploited. The massive barricades that these rioters would erect symbolized a physical attempt to quarantine themselves from an increasingly centralized Protestant, Republican authority, but could not have been erected if the city’s police had been able to maintain the ability to project power and disrupt riot action in the uptown.

If barricades symbolized rioter efforts to preserve their own spaces and neighborhoods against a deleterious outside influence, the destruction of property showed that rioters also desired to “cleanse” the uptown of spaces perceived as instruments of Protestant, Republican hegemony. Chapter Two explored the growth of Irish resentment towards imposing Protestant spaces, and the uptown rioting represents the violent expression of that resentment. Uptown rioters attacked Protestant missions such as the Magdalen Asylum and the Good Shepherd home for no other reason than to remove the physical manifestation of Protestant influence in their neighborhoods. Such sentiments may have played a part in the burning of the Colored Orphans

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<sup>149</sup> Ellen Leonard, *Three Days Reign of Terror* (New York: 1867) 7.

<sup>150</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 38.

Asylum, founded in 1836 by Quakers sympathetic to the abolitionist cause.<sup>151</sup> Rioters did not actually attempt to stop any of the 237 children who resided there from escaping, but racial epithets hurled at the burning structure leave no doubt that the burning of the Asylum was a racially motivated attack, even if it did possibly contain a sectarian element.<sup>152</sup> Rioters also targeted the fine uptown residences of Republican abolitionists for torching, gleeful at the chance to strike at their wealthy political opponents free from police interference.

At first glance, one of the most mystifying targets of the rioters was the Croton Aqueduct. Following a particularly deadly cholera outbreak in 1832, the government of New York City had taken it upon themselves to take control over the city's supply of water.<sup>153</sup> The Croton supplied many residents with fresh, clean water and helped limit the spread of diseases such as cholera, which were particularly deadly in low-income Irish neighborhoods. One would assume that the uptown's Irish would celebrate the existence of the Croton. Despite this, on the third day of rioting, uptown rioters threatened to destroy the aqueduct, marching on the Croton with pickaxes and crowbars.<sup>154</sup> Partially, this may have been for strategic reasons. Maybe the mob hoped that by attacking the water supply, the rest of New York City's structural ability to fight the rioters would crumble. However, given the amount of good the Croton would have done for poor Irish communities, it seems unlikely that only strategic needs were considered before rioters agreed to march on the aqueduct. The Croton – despite all the benefits it had provided for the people of New York City – represented the growing power and reach of New York City's Republican government. If uptown rioters were truly intent on divorcing their neighborhoods from greater

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<sup>151</sup> Catherine Reef, *Alone in the World: Orphans and Orphanages in America* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 2005) 13.

<sup>152</sup> Cook, *Armies of the Streets*, 79.

<sup>153</sup> Baics, *Feeding Gotham*, 47.

<sup>154</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 237.



New York City, they would not be fully independent until all agents of the New York City's government were removed. New York water still flowed beneath Irish barricades. Luckily for the city, soldiers arrived just in time to save the aqueduct, and clean water would continue to tether the blood-soaked upper wards to the rest of Gotham.<sup>155</sup>

When the downtown rioters contented themselves with killing their African-American competitors, they signaled a willingness to abide by their position in the New York social hierarchy, albeit without the economic and sexual competition of black workingmen. The uptown rioters, however, seemed less willing to negotiate. As Bernstein notes, "Industrial workers wished less to coax upper-class loyalty and good will than to separate their world from that of the Republican elite and its authority."<sup>156</sup> While the downtown rioting was a bloody renegotiation of dockyard social and economic politics, the uptown rioters seemed more intent on political rebellion. Maybe downtown workers would have done the same, had they had the chance, but it was the geographic conditions of the uptown provided rioters there with the brief opportunity to land a decisive blow against the city's authorities.

Uptown rioter success was not to last. Acton's decision to consolidate his forces in the downtown, where he had the geographic advantage, meant that the toughest downtown resistance had been effectively quelled within two days. Massed units of police, reinforced by troops from Gettysburg, began to march into the uptown, where their numbers could outweigh their disadvantages in communication and transportation. What is more, disguised telegraph officers bravely operated behind rioter lines, working to restore lines of communication with the Central Office.<sup>157</sup> Authorities gradually began the process of restoring order, storming the barricades and

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<sup>155</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 237.

<sup>156</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 35.

<sup>157</sup> Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, 158.

forcibly pacifying rebellious neighborhoods. When soldiers finally pushed in to the Upper East Side on the last day of unrest, rioters fought from house to house and from room to room. When they were at last cornered on the tenements roofs, many chose the last remaining path to freedom available to them, and hurled themselves to death on the streets below.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> *ibid*

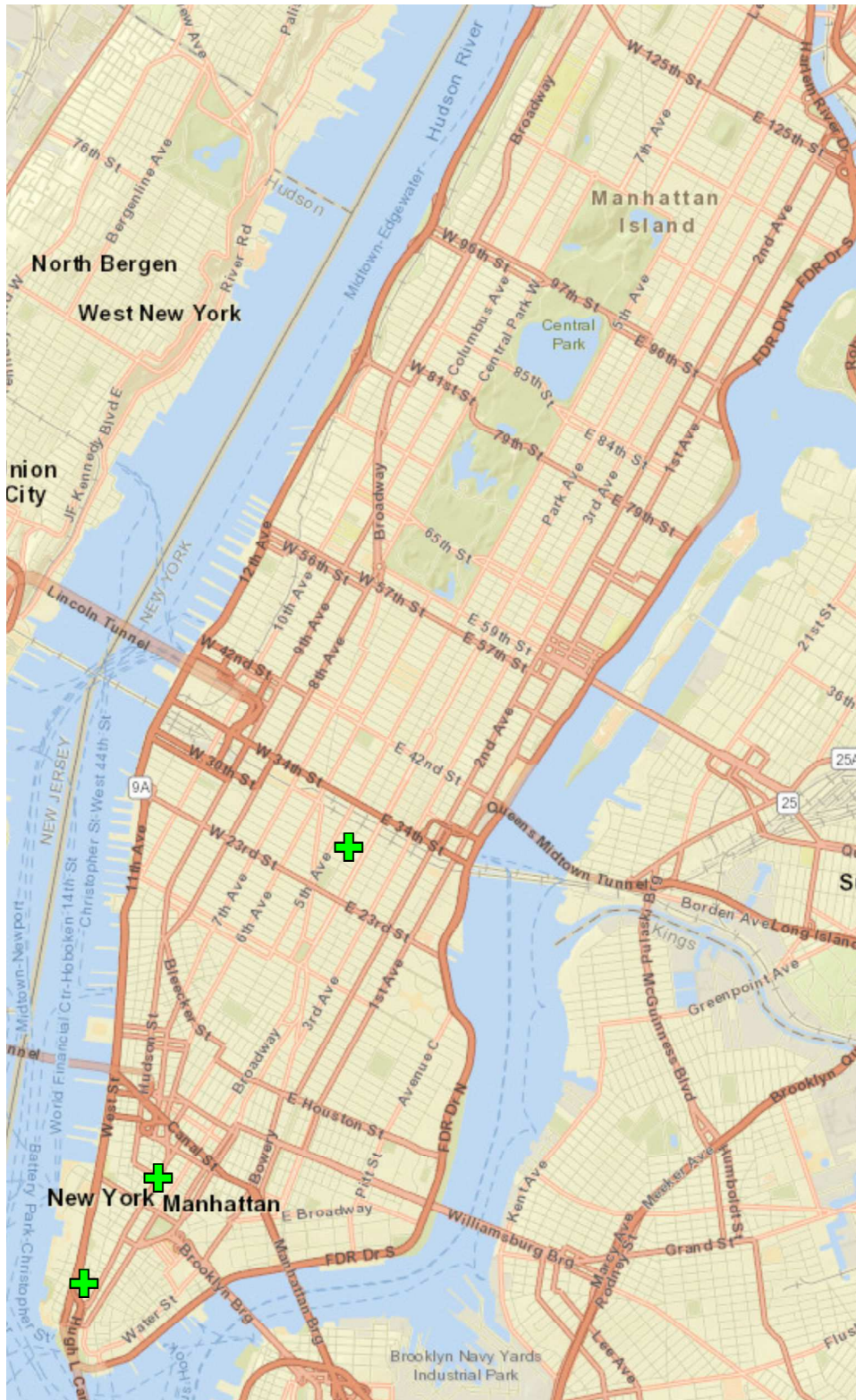


Figure 11 – victims targeted because of sexual relations with African-American men



Figure 12 – instances where women were named as rioters

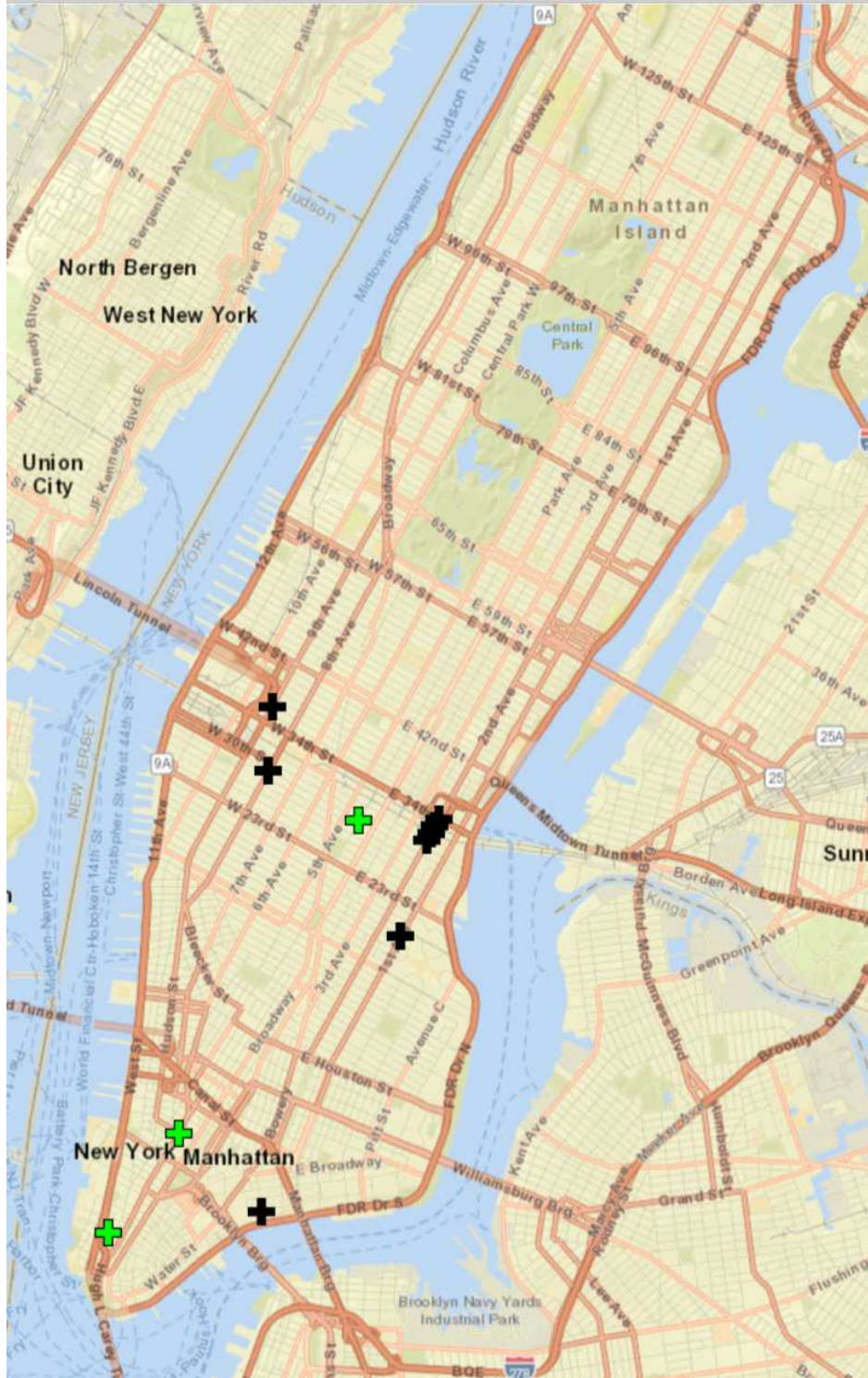


Figure 13 – women as rioters (black crosses) and victims chosen because of sexual relations with African-American men (green crosses)



Figure 14 – strategic attacks, day one



Figure 15 – all strategic attacks



Figure 16 – strategic attacks (bolts) and clashes with government forces (pentagons)



## Conclusion

On July seventeenth the Draft Riots ended, but life somehow continued. General Meagher of the 69<sup>th</sup> Irish Brigade left New York, becoming, before disappearing under mysterious circumstances, the governor of Montana. Hugh Boyle of Five Points outlived the war, deserting with his pistol and holster as his unit prepared to leave for occupied Texas.<sup>159</sup> Abraham Franklin's mother, who herself survived the rioting, provided her testimony to the Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People, a group which helped raise much-needed money for the city's shaken African-American community.<sup>160</sup> The toughs of the Black Joke kept on fighting fires until 1865, and their leader, Peter Masterson, would go on to serve on the Legislature and Board of Aldermen.<sup>161</sup>

Ostensibly, the Draft Riots failed. The war would continue, the draft would still be held in New York, and Republicanism would continue its ascendancy. Rioting neither brought back the dead New York Irish men who had died at Antietam or Shiloh, nor did it improve conditions in impoverished Irish neighborhoods like the Five Points. It would appear safe to assume that the moment federal troops arrived to quash the insurrection, all rioters had lost across the board. In reality, as is the case with many of the aspects of the Draft Riots, the truth is far more complicated.

Patterns in violence help to illustrate the goals and targets of rioters, and so they also help illustrate successes and failures. One unlikely winner of the New York Draft riots appears to be the downtown rioters. As was demonstrated by the maps and analysis, the downtown laborers

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<sup>159</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 318.

<sup>160</sup> *Report of the Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People*, 14.

<sup>161</sup> Augustine Costello, *Our Firemen: A History of the New York Fire Departments, Volunteer and Paid* (New York: A. E. Costello, 1887) 612.

had embarked on a primarily racial campaign fueled by economic and social tensions and constrained by geographical realities. These rioters avoided direct confrontation with government forces, and instead opted for quick strikes on “soft” targets. The terror that these rioters inflicted on New York’s African American community appears to have been enough to permanently drive black New Yorkers from their neighborhoods. Tyler Anbinder notes that in Five Points alone, where around 500 African Americans lived at the start of the Civil War, the black population had by 1870 dwindled to 132.<sup>162</sup> Throughout the city, the black population had by 1865 fallen from 12, 472 to 9,943.<sup>163</sup> While the African American presence was not completely erased from the city, the Irish laborers of the downtown had certainly weakened their economic competitors.

An apparent loser of the rioting, however, would be the uptown rioters. These men and women had attempted to exploit the brief inability of New York City’s authorities to maintain control of the uptown. Uptown rioters had attempted, ambitiously, to physically separate their world from the hegemony of Protestant Republicanism. Entire neighborhoods could participate in this effort through the erection of barricades and direct conflict with government forces. While their strategic targeting had some initial success in frustrating government attempts to reestablish control over the uptown, the rioters were too poorly equipped and disorganized to hold out forever. The barricades were stormed, the telegraph lines were repaired, and order was eventually restored in the area.

For Anna O’Brien, memory mattered. The riots have may ended, the Civil War may have been won, but her husband’s body still lay in an unmarked grave. There it lies still today, in

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<sup>162</sup> Anbinder, *Five Points*, 317.

<sup>163</sup> Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 267.

Section One West, Avenue E, Plot Ten of Calvary Cemetery in Long Island.<sup>164</sup> There are no memorials of the New York City Draft Riots. There are no monuments to the victims, no statues of the city's defenders, no landmarks to remind Americans why so many died in those bloody July days. All that remain are the bones. Colonel O'Brien's bones serve a silent reminder that it is still important to remember the Draft Riots. It is important to remember why and how they happened, who they were fought by, and who the victims were. It is too late to help Anna O'Brien, but it will never be too late to remember her or the thousands of others whose lives were changed that July. This GIS mapping of the Draft Riots is just a small contribution to the historiography of the event, but hopefully it helps audiences to remember the violence as it was – structured, complex, and rarely without reason.

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<sup>164</sup> Damien Shiels, *Irish in the American Civil War* (Dublin: History Press Ireland, 2013)

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