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State of the Union

NEW YORK AND THE CIVIL WAR

Edited with an Introduction by

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Foreword by

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First Edition

The Volcano Under the City: The Significance of Draft Rioting in New York City and State, July 1863

Iver Bernstein

IN JULY 1863, at a crucial turning point in the Civil War, armed mobs halted the effort of the Lincoln administration to conduct the first federal draft and virtually took over New York City in what was to become the bloodiest urban riot in American history. When the last crowds were scattered after four days of violence, at least 105 people were dead and possibly many more. Along with the death toll, the citywide scale of the violence and the range of targets went well beyond what antebellum urban mobs had contemplated. Rioters attacked not only draft offices and officials but also an array of individuals and installations associated with the Republican Party and Lincoln's national government, as well as abolitionist leaders, Protestant reform agencies, and now, six months after the Emancipation Proclamation, the city's relatively defenseless African-American community. At times the riots almost seemed to be a distinct battle in the war—mobs raided armories for weapons and destroyed telegraph lines, railroads, ferries and bridges. The uprising ended in a series of titanic armed confrontations on the city's industrial Upper East Side in which Union troops, battle-weary from Gettysburg, retook poor Irish Catholic districts in the manner of war zones.

Irish Americans dominated the crowds, but many Irish New Yorkers stayed aloof from or fought against the mobs, and not all rioters were Irish. What was notable about the Irish mobs by the end of the first day and through the end of the insurrection was their extremism

in racial and political terms. In some cases, their racist efforts to drive African-American men from the city's black enclaves culminated in grotesque lynch murders and the sexual mutilations and burnings of victims' bodies. The rioters' political gestures included cheers for Confederate President Jefferson Davis and efforts not only to barricade specific neighborhoods against advancing federal troops but to sever neighborhoods and even the city itself symbolically from the entire Northern war effort. In these doings, rioters were both acting out the suggestions of "Peace" or "Copperhead" Democratic leaders and going way beyond what even the most vitriolic party orator could have imagined.

What interested me, in preparing my 1990 book on the riots, is where this "volcano under the city," as one contemporary observer aptly described it, came from.¹ How do we account for its enormities of bloodshed, its geographic scale and ideological scope, its extremities of racial hatred and political ambition, all new in the context of mid-nineteenth-century urban social and political relations? What relation did events in New York City have to draft resistance elsewhere—for instance, the outbreak in Troy, New York, on July 15, two days after the eruption in New York City? If, as I contend, New York City's insurrection exposed and embodied a deeper set of ruptures in urban social and political life, to what extent and how were these profound problems of rule and relations resolved? The riots present an unusual opportunity to probe the ideological connections between a dramatic event and much longer-term and often quieter social processes—riot week issues of loyalty and treason made the episode a highly self-conscious one, forcing even the most neutral of observers to choose sides. The insurrection elicited lengthy commentaries on local and national racial, ethnic and class relations, party policies, neighborhood dynamics, national politics and the progress of the war, in diaries and private correspondence as well as public sources such as newspapers and court records.

¹I thank Harold Holzer and the participants in the June 1999 symposium, "The Union Preserved: New York and the Civil War," for their commentary.

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); William Osborn Stoddard, *The Volcano Under the City. By a Volunteer Special* (New York, 1887). The description and analysis of the Draft Riots in the discussion that follows derive, in large part, from my Oxford University Press book, *The New York City Draft Riots*, cited above.

What made such questions about the origins, dynamics, and implications of the Draft Riots particularly urgent and arresting was my realization that the episode represented a kind of lost history of the Civil War. Here was an event that was deeply embarrassing to all involved, particularly as the Union war effort took on the momentum and inevitability of a winning cause in the months following. The memory of the insurrection would surface in subsequent moments of labor strife, social crisis, or race panic—1872, 1877, 1886—but by the turn of the century, it had drifted out of the consciousness of most New Yorkers and Americans (with the exception of the New York City police, whose bravery and successful rallying during the riots became a long-lasting source of institutional pride). Certainly the disloyalty and racism of the draft rioters hung like an ominous and acrid cloud over the North's efforts to do justice to the African American former slaves during Reconstruction. What kind of commitment to racial justice in the South was a North that could produce such grotesque riots capable of?² To take the Draft Riots seriously, then, may require some qualification of the triumphal narrative of a unified North marching to freedom in the Civil War—a triumphal narrative that may well be inescapable and at some level we may all share.

At the heart of the Draft Riots were two related identity crises—New York City's problematic relation to the United States (itself undergoing a profound crisis of identity during the era of the Civil War), and New York's own intramural problem of identity, coherence, and community. Before the Civil War, New York was the Northern capital of proslavery and pro-Southern sentiment, in some ways, a kind of Northern outpost of the slave empire. Slavery had flourished in New York through the eighteenth century, and while it was not a colony made for slavery, like South Carolina, it had a higher proportion of black residents than any colony north of Delaware. Slavery ended legally in New York State with the general emancipation of 1827, but the city's merchants continued to finance the southern slave owners' flourishing cotton trade. Some of those merchants were even involved in the illegal Atlantic slave market, which most mid-nineteenth-century Americans regarded as the most extreme form of

² See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), ch. 1.

barbarism. As late as 1860, the illegal ships, or “Blackbirders,” arrived in New York port and continued to receive the surprisingly open sanction of New York’s customhouse officials, federal judges, and juries.³

The continuing power of slavery in the city was well known by local black leader William Powell. He had led a mass meeting of black New Yorkers against the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 in which he advocated physical resistance if black homes were invaded in the enforcement of the law. Powell’s Globe Hotel was invaded in July 1863, not by proslavery kidnappers but by Irish rioters in search of black targets. (Powell’s preparedness from the heyday of the Fugitive Slave Law served him well: in 1863 he rigged a bo’sun’s chair that carried him and his household a hundred feet across the tenement rooftops to a place where they could flee the crowds and board a boat to the safe haven of New Bedford, Massachusetts.)⁴

In the secession winter of 1860–61, the mayor of New York City, Fernando Wood, suggested to the municipal government (with the support of some leading citizens) that the city secede from the Union at the same moment that South Carolina and other Lower South states were withdrawing, and set itself up as a free commercial republic so as to keep its trade with the slave South and England undiminished. The plan was defeated, and New York City would remain loyal to the Union during the Civil War, but shrewdly, the Lincoln administration never took its loyalty for granted.

If New York was, from one angle of vision, a “Southern” city, then, from another, related perspective, it was a “white” city, the Northern

³ On New York City’s relationship to slavery, both as a site for Northern slavery before 1827 and as an outpost of a Southern slave empire, see Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998); Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards The Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Phillip Foner, *Business & Slavery: New York Merchants and the Irrepressible Conflict* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1941); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770–1810* (Athens, GA: University Press of Georgia, 1991); Ernest A. McKay, *The Civil War and New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990); see also Joanne Pope Melish, *Discovering Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁴ For a discussion of Powell, see George E. Walker, *The Afro-American in New York City, 1827–1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 24–25, 56, 71–72, 125, 173–74; Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1974), 80.

nerve center of a newly formalized and so-called scientific “white” ideology. No one spoke more vociferously for this emergent outlook than John H. Van Evrie, physician, journalist, and sometime political correspondent of Jefferson Davis, through his white supremacist newspaper, the New York *Weekly Caucasian* and proslavery screeds such as *Negroes and Negro “Slavery”: The First an Inferior Race—The Latter its Normal Condition*, first published in 1853, revised and expanded during the first year of the war. Van Evrie wrote for an Irish Catholic audience devastated by poverty. With the move of Archbishop John Hughes from Philadelphia to New York by the 1840s, it could be argued that New York had replaced its neighbor to the south as the American capital of the Catholic Church and its broad and growing constituency of famine Irish immigrants. The position of these poor Irish women and men was deeply ambiguous.

In many ways the 1850s and 60s was the moment when the Irish first gained significant political power in New York through their presence in the Democratic Party and the labor movement. Their political aspirations were stunningly articulated by Archbishop Hughes in lectures such as the widely reprinted *The Decline Of Protestantism, And Its Cause*, first delivered at St. Patrick’s in 1850. “Every body should know that we have for our mission to convert the world,—including the inhabitants of the United States,—the people of the cities . . . the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all,” Hughes announced.⁵ But this expansive theological and political confidence was hard to sustain. New York’s Irish Catholics retained their commitment to the tight-knit *clachan* or traditional Irish village, whose crowding was, Peter Quinn observes, retained in New York City not just out of necessity but also out of choice. Here the emphasis was not on expansive engagement with the encountered culture but secession into what Quinn aptly calls the “sodalities” of church and saloon life.⁶ And even on the theological front, Irish Catholics’ confidence ebbed: many felt that the best response to what they perceived as the corrosive subjectivity of Protestants’ “private interpretation” of the Bible was separation and withdrawal, not engagement. The dominant American culture repudiated Irish Catholic

⁵ John Hughes, *The Decline Of Protestantism, And Its Cause* (New York: Edward Duncan & Bro., 1850), 26.

⁶ Peter Quinn, “Farmers No More: From Rural Ireland to the Teeming City,” in Michael Coffey, ed., *The Irish in America* (New York: Hyperion 1997), 41–42.

efforts to advance, through the harsh nativism of the Know Nothing movement and the hate-filled cartoons and slurs that portrayed Irish Americans and African Americans as sub-human and animalistic. Both groups were described as “lazy,” “bestial,” “low-browed,” and “simian.” Even an educated observer such as lawyer George Templeton Strong was not above making such racial comparisons, referring to what he dubbed the “prehensile paws” of Irish workmen and denouncing the “Celtic beast” while proclaiming that “Southern Coffee seems of a higher social grade than Northern paddy.”⁷ There was a deep anxiety, not surprisingly, in the experience of the newly arrived Irish that explains the readiness with which many of them defined themselves as members of a “white” master race and entertained Van Evrie and other Democratic propagandists’ pseudo-scientific assertions about America as a “white man’s country” that had no place for blacks, considered biologically separate and hence a “permanently inferior” species.⁸ If the Irish were only tenuously American, they felt that at least they were somehow “above” their black neighbors by virtue of skin color.

Of course, such efforts to imagine or invent a “white city” ignored rich ironies and powerful realities. Many African-American New Yorkers could trace their local lineage well back before the American Revolution, if not earlier. Especially after Emancipation, Democratic orators fanned anxieties among Irish audiences that newly freed and “low wage” blacks would flood north to steal Irish jobs, but such fears were never realized. Indeed, Irish Americans had crowded out African-American workers from their foothold in the unskilled sector of the New York economy in the 1840s and 50s. And for all the efforts of the Irish Longshoreman’s Union and the Democratic Party to advocate separation of “superior” “white” Irish from “low-wage” and “inferior” blacks, Irish and black men and women and families mixed, were often intimate, and sometimes married. Such mixing was especially common along the waterfront.

If New York was from one vantage an outpost of the slave empire and a “white” city, it could also make claim to being a capital of the Northern antislavery and benevolent empire, a center of what the

⁷ Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas, eds., *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, 3 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 3: 342, 245.

⁸ [John]. H. Van Evrie, M.D., *Negroes and Negro “Slavery,” The First, An Inferior Race—The Latter, Its Normal Condition* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1853).

draft rioters and their sympathizers would call “Black Republicanism.” Horace Greeley’s abolitionist newspaper, the *Daily Tribune*, dubbed the “political bible of the North,” made its home there, as did the philanthropic dynamos, the Tappan brothers, and the brilliant black abolitionist Henry Highland Garnet; meanwhile, over in Brooklyn, that oracle of moral enterprise, Henry Ward Beecher, was holding forth. In New York City, too, could be found the agencies of the United States Sanitary Commission and a host of other benevolent secular or Protestant enterprises.

The Draft Riots in New York, then, were the outgrowth of these identity crises—a divided New York’s relationship with a divided America and especially the deeply uneasy relation of New York’s parts to each other. The Civil War and particularly the situation in early summer 1863 brought these issues of identity and community into focus with an unbearable intensity. The small Republican elite in the city saw the war as an extraordinary opportunity for consolidating its power and expanding its influence. The war provided momentum to the project of immediate emancipation of four million enslaved African Americans and to the related project of political centralization, expanding the activities of the federal government in the name of moral reform. The Republicans’ reform ventures could now be advanced simultaneously on the local and the new national stages. For the city’s opposing Democratic majority—its until-recently-Southern-leaning merchants, its newly Americanizing immigrant population (over half of the city’s total population was foreign-born by 1855) and its powerful Catholic clergy and politicians—the war required a far more complex and perilous negotiation with the newly ascendant forces of antislavery and wartime nationalism. Archbishop Hughes was a committed Unionist; early in the war, he even served as Lincoln’s delegate to Europe to plead the Northern cause. But Hughes and the city’s Catholic clergy were vehement opponents of abolitionism, which they saw as the American manifestation of Europe’s “lawless” revolutionary liberalism and theological heresy—the abolitionists were “Deists, Atheists, Pantheists, anything but Christian,” as one Catholic orator put it. Many of New York’s poorer Catholics perceived the post-emancipation war as a violation of the terms of an implicit agreement with the national government set out at the beginning of the fighting in 1861 and of their understanding of what it meant to be an American: they would fight to restore the

Union but not to end slavery and, by extension, to raise the status of African Americans.

The Lincoln administration's Conscription Act of March 1863 heightened such Irish Catholic perceptions that the purposes of the war had been perverted. The Act was passed at a bleak moment in the fortunes of the Union Army, after its debacle at Fredericksburg. (Indeed, the whole direction of the war in spring and early summer 1863 was exceedingly unclear and open-ended—both on the battlefield and with regards to enforcement of the draft. General George Meade was perhaps not exaggerating when he declared in a letter on July 16 that he “always had expected the crisis of this revolution to turn on the attempt to execute the conscription act,” and three weeks later, “if the draft is not heartily responded to, the Government had better make up its mind to letting the South go.”)⁹ The March Act subjected all men between 20 and 35 and all unmarried men between 35 and 45 to military duty. Names were procured through a laborious house-to-house enrollment conducted by government agents. Then a lottery in each congressional district determined who would go to war. The most controversial provision allowed drafted men to provide substitutes or buy their way out of service for \$300. Though intended to put a ceiling on the price of a substitute, the \$300 clause was perceived by many poor New York Democrats as an effort to transfer the burden of the war to straitened immigrant laborers. The discriminatory draft law—passed at a moment of high uncertainty in the direction of the war, giving the Lincoln government new powers of summary arrest through its Provost Marshal Bureau, its quotas of drafted men rumored to be disproportionately high for New York State and City, and scheduled to be enforced after a long spring of inflation and labor agitation—had the effect of triggering a social panic among the city's immigrant and Catholic poor. As the law pertained to “citizens” of the United States, theoretically only whites were subject to the draft. Did the law thus conceal a Republican conspiracy to sweep Catholic Democratic workers (and voters) into the carnage at the front and fill their jobs with the cheap labor of newly emancipated slaves? Democratic orators fanned such fears, moving from Hughes's anti-abolitionism to an extreme proslavery po-

⁹ Meade quoted in Jack Franklin Leach, *Conscription in the United States: Historical Background* (Rutland, VT: C. E. Tuttle, 1952), 347.

sition that translated Van Evrie's pseudo-scientific racism into the language of the gutter. Wartime nationalism had polarized and clarified the differences between Republican and Democratic elites and between Republican and Democratic followers. Now the draft, biased against the poor, magnifying white racial fears, involving the federal government as never before in local affairs, made preexisting conflicts seem even more real and hysterically urgent. Governor Seymour's July Fourth speech helped create the mood of an imminent release of tensions: if the needs of justice could not be carried out through constitutional means, he remarked, by repealing or amending the discriminatory draft act, the same purposes could and would be accomplished by a mob.

The first draft lottery in New York City was carried out peacefully on Saturday, July 11. That hot weekend, the names of the first drafted men replaced the long lists of city residents who had died at Gettysburg as front-page news, and New Yorkers pondered the fact that Seymour and other Democratic leaders had not been able to block the draft. Whatever limited planning the coming violence had seems to have taken place in saloons, kitchens, and street corners on Sunday the twelfth; rumor and circumstance and not orchestration and premeditation would dominate the events to come.

The riots began Monday morning the thirteenth, not at the hour of the resumption of the draft lottery (scheduled for 10:30 A.M.), but at the hour of work. Between 6 and 7 A.M., employees of the city's railroads, machine shops, and shipyards, iron foundry workers, "hundreds of others employed in buildings and street improvements" failed to appear at their jobs; they streamed up the city's uptown avenues, closing shops, factories, and construction sites, urging workmen along the way to join the procession. This was the usual style for a strike action in the mid-nineteenth century, the way strikers informed others (who often did not speak their language) of a work stoppage. After a brief meeting at Central Park, the crowd, women and men both represented, broke into two columns, and with "No Draft" placards held aloft, marched downtown to the draft office at Third Avenue and 47th Street, at the edges of the immigrant tenement district, scene of the scheduled lottery. In some Monday morning episodes, self-deputized "committees" of workers visited employers and peaceably advised them to close down for the day; in others, rioters began to hack down telegraph poles—one reporter

overheard such a crowd discussing the need to prevent authorities from summoning troops from Albany. Irish women used crowbars to pull up the tracks of northbound railroads; still another mob of Irish men and women attacked Superintendent of Police John A. Kennedy, spotted out of uniform. Kennedy was chased, caught, dragged through the mud and beaten on the head until almost "unrecognizable."

At 10:30, draft selection began inside the Provost Marshal's office while a crowd waited on the street. After some names had been drawn, the firemen of the appropriately named Black Joke Engine Company pulled up to the office in full fire regalia. One of the Black Joke men had been drafted in Saturday's lottery, and the volunteer fire companies believed their traditional exemption from militia service should extend to the draft. Led by the firemen, the throng outside burst in, smashed the lottery wheel, and set the building on fire. By 11:30 that first morning, orders were given to suspend the draft in the affected districts.

After Monday noon, concourses of hundreds of men, women, and children milled about the uptown avenues enjoying the holiday from business, debating the draft and discussing the disturbance and its direction. One cohort paid a friendly visit to Democratic General George B. McClellan's house. Shortly after noon, rioters appeared at Printing House Square, the journalistic thoroughfare, huzzahed McClellan and the offices of Democratic newspapers, and groaned at those of the Republican papers, especially Horace Greeley's *Tribune*. There were murderous threats against the abolitionist Greeley himself, some in the crowd searching for the editor's cherubic face and telltale white overcoat, but the crowd resisted the urgings to violence and dispersed when Greeley failed to appear.

Meanwhile the pattern of violence increasingly reflected the more violent of Monday morning's activities. The deserted 8th District draft office was burned at 5:00 P.M. Monday by an Irish cellar digger and an estimated 300 men and boys. Elsewhere policemen caught by the rioters were stripped of their clothing and literally defaced. Now these attacks were joined by others against expensive Republican homes in which picture frames, furniture, pianos, and bed clothes were destroyed; well-dressed gentlemen were accosted on the street and robbed (sometimes \$300 was referred to). By suppertime, one mob had set fire to the splendid Colored Orphan Asylum on Fifth Avenue and another began attacking and in one instance lynching

black men and boys in the tenements along the downtown waterfront. Crowds returned to Greeley's *Tribune* in the early evening, stormed through the offices and tried to burn them down. Monday evening we find the earliest evidence of rioters who had clearly participated in the early protest against the draft now abandoning the crowds and joining the patrols and fire companies to guard property.

Tuesday morning, the rioters who returned to the streets and resumed the battle against the police—these rioters were more predictably Irish and Catholic, young and male, and employed in the foundries, railroad shops, and construction and dock gangs that clustered in the waterfront and in the uptown industrial wards. (In this and other regards, there was some parallel to the riot on Wednesday the fifteenth that overtook Troy, New York, and halted the draft, destroyed a Republican newspaper office, stripped German brothels, partially ruined a black church, and sent African-American families fleeing into the hills; the Irish molders and nail factory workers in the Troy uprising resembled in ethnic and occupational profile these New York City rioters.)¹⁰ The native and German workers and skilled artisans who were also on the streets of New York City Monday morning largely disappear from riot accounts and arrest records by Tuesday. The violence on Tuesday and Wednesday was characterized by attacks on other draft offices (indeed, concern with the specter of the draft remained ever present) and titanic struggles between huge, heavily Irish crowds and the police and military. Indeed, by Wednesday, troops began to arrive in the city from Gettysburg.

Wednesday also witnessed the grisly onslaught of young Irish men against black families and black homes, and especially black men, in the city's scattered African-American enclaves. In one of eleven recorded lynch killings from July 13 to 15, Abraham Franklin, a crippled black coachman, was pulled from his house by an Irish-led mob and hanged from a lamppost. The approach of troops scattered the rioters and the soldiers cut Franklin down. As soon as the military left, the murderous crew reappeared, hanged Franklin's body from the lamppost again, with cheers for "Jeff Davis." Later the body was taken down again, and Patrick Butler, a sixteen-year-old Irish

¹⁰ For an account of the Troy riot, see E. H. G. Clark, *The Trojan Mob: A Plain Statement* (Troy, NY, np, 1863; copy in Troy Public Library); Leach, *Conscription in the United States*, 319–20.

butcher, grabbed Franklin's body by the genitals and pulled it through the streets as bystanders yelled approval. Here the relation between Irish Americans and African Americans was played out in all its tragic complexity, hatred being the dominant message but sexual lure serving as a kind of leitmotif. White abolitionist Mattie Griffith described the acts of unimaginable cruelty committed upon the city's black population during the midweek violence: "A child of 3 years of age was thrown from a 4th story window and instantly killed. A woman one hour after her confinement was set upon and beaten with her tender babe in her arms. Children were torn from their mother's embrace and their brains blown out in the very face of the afflicted mother. Men were burnt by slow fires."¹¹

The city's black community was in some instances able to defend itself from this pogrom: there is one known instance of armed black people defending themselves from a rooftop, and others of horrified and sympathetic whites interceding to help black victims. William Powell's ingenious escape, already noted, was accomplished with the help of a neighboring Jewish family. Many other black families fled Manhattan to the surrounding countryside.

The riot ended late on Thursday as federal troops deployed howitzers to sweep aside the barricades the rioters had constructed in the uptown neighborhoods. As the violence reached a desperate intensity on some barricaded Upper East Side blocks, mobs searched tenements for wounded "enemy" soldiers, while soldiers combed buildings for rioters, who, when found, were driven off the rooftops. In the red heat of Wednesday's and Thursday's violence, there were scattered assaults against Chinese peddlers; attacks against the white wives of men of color; a sacking of Brooks Brothers' clothing store; and the smashing of brothels, in the tradition of European revolutionary mobs. The final act in the drama was Archbishop John Hughes's speech to the crowd from the steps of his home on Friday, July 17. There was no need for a revolution on the streets, Hughes was reported to have said—in America we have a revolution at the ballot box every four years. The Catholic leader, who could still command a reverent hearing among the Irish laity, hoped to convey his

¹¹ Mattie Griffith to Mary Estlin, N.Y., July 27, 1863, Estlin Papers, Dr. Williams's Library, London, England. I thank Eric Foner for bringing this letter to my attention.

empathy for the widespread anti-draft sentiment while urging upon his listeners this ringing endorsement of the legal forms of American democracy. When the Archbishop finished, his audience dispersed without help from the troops posted nearby.

The riot-week crisis of authority was exacerbated by the deep disagreement among city leaders over whether to declare federal martial law and establish a Republican standing army in New York. As the riot expanded on Tuesday and Wednesday, it became obvious that there was no agreed strategy to restore order. To some extent, military rule was a party issue: the Republican-led Union League Club, the ultra-nationalist businessmen's club, was in favor of martial law, and Democratic financiers and politicians such as August Belmont, General McClellan, Samuel Barlow, and others were opposed.

But the debate over martial law also reflected profound differences in outlook, especially as the insurrection evolved into a gruesome race riot. The Union Leaguers and Republicans excoriated the Irish rioters (George Templeton Strong wrote, "For myself, personally, I would like to see war made on the Irish scum as in 1688.") Conversely, these Union League Republicans focused philanthropic attentions on black victims and vowed to enforce the draft at all costs. E. H. G. Clark, a Troy abolitionist who wrote about his city's "Trojan Mob" of that week, captured the essence of this Republican position: "The spirit of the mob in Troy was of course the same that impelled the bludgeon and lit the firebrand in New York, and ground into blood and dust, the most helpless and unoffending of the American people in that almost foreign city. It was simply the indirect offspring of slavery and rebellion."¹² From this viewpoint, New York City (and Troy) had been turned into wholly "foreign" cities by the Irish draft rioters and their Southern-sympathizing political allies; their treason could be contrasted with the true Americanism of the riot's African-American victims.

By contrast, Democrats such as August Belmont and his circle negotiated with the white rioters, ignored black victims, and sought to have the draft overturned in the courts. While the pro-martial law wing condemned the Irish Catholic draft rioters as an "unworthy poor," undeserving of charity and best persuaded by force, they were opposed by anti-martial law Democrats who thought that same white immigrant

¹² Clark, *Trojan Mob*, 1.

poor eminently worthy of charity—*they* were the victims. The Tammany Democracy thus proposed to neutralize the draft by a massive public appropriation to pay the commutation fees of poor men. The riots thus highlighted the relative absence of consensus among the “better classes” over basic questions of social and political rule.

Immigrant New York’s problematic relation to America and the national government, and the problem of political and social community within the city, had suddenly become fused in a profound crisis of authority. Would New York City be confirmed as a Northern City? A Southern City? Or, indeed, a “white” city where African Americans had no public rights or role? Or, perhaps, a “Black Republican” city where African Americans could confidently claim freedom of travel and other civil rights as well as political voice? In this way, the issue of July 1863 was the wartime reconstruction of New York City.

Lincoln did not declare martial law, despite frantic letters from New York Republicans urging him to place the city under the dictatorial General Benjamin Butler (whom Southerners had nicknamed “the Beast”). Instead, he appointed General John Adams Dix—an old Jacksonian Democrat and financier who had the confidence of both ultra-nationalist Union Leaguers and the Democratic capitalists of the Belmont stripe—as military commander of the Department of the East. Dix would succeed, one month later, in carrying off the draft lotteries without martial law. But the most important event to insure the return of peace to New York City was the confirmation of Boss William M. Tweed’s Tammany Hall as the city’s premier Democratic organization. Tammany’s pre-riot record as patriotic defender of the war made it the direct beneficiary of post-riot indignation against treasonous rioters and politicians. Tammany officials stood watch at the peaceful August draft lotteries. Tammany’s ultimate trump was a “County Loan” ordinance, administered by Tweed and a bipartisan committee, which paid the \$300 draft waiver for poor conscripts who could not find an acceptable substitute. The Committee encouraged drafted men to visit the many agents who supplied substitutes for a fee, if indeed the Tammany Supervisors did not hire the services of brokers directly. Tammany’s County Loan ordinance virtually guaranteed that poor conscripts who did not care to serve would not be compelled to do so, and also that the army would get its men, or at least its quota, from New York City.

The problem of building community out of this disorder, even of

determining winners and losers, was a daunting one, and was hardly resolved by the military victory of the Union Army on the Upper East Side or the successful August draft lottery. The Republicans and President Lincoln got some of what they wanted: the riot did not spread, the draft continued, the North went on to win the war—and the Republicans got the credit. But on closer examination, the Republican “victory” over the rioters also had elements of concession and defeat. The failure to declare martial law in the city suggested that the most radical Republicans would have their hands tied when they finally came to national power after the war. The Radical Republicans’ brief tenure in Washington from 1866 to 1868 would allow them license to proceed with military reconstruction only in the South, not in New York City. A more clear-cut case can be made for the victory of Democratic business leaders, who at least would be allowed to run local affairs without Republican interference. But the riots and their aftermath demonstrated that fashionable millionaires such as Belmont and Barlow would retain power in the city only if they acknowledged the claims of Boss Tweed’s “Ring” of Tammany politicians who sat on the Board of Supervisors and presided over the draft exemption fund. If the Draft Riots represented a triumph for the Democratic elite, it was one riddled with major concessions to Tweed and Tammany.

Boss Tweed and Tammany’s successful post-riot political arrangement demands closer attention—certainly Tweed emerged from the riots in a position of power. Loyal nationalism was the *sine qua non* of Tweed’s formula. No one, not even the super patriots of the Union League Club, could match the histrionic flag-waving and hoarse cheering of a Tammany Hall Fourth of July celebration in the mid-1860s. After the riots, Tammany’s patriotic commitment to the Union war effort served as evidence of the loyalty of a broad segment of immigrant voters in Democratic New York City. Even the ultra-elitist George Templeton Strong reluctantly supported Tammany after the Draft Riots as the middle ground between a controversial and impotent local Republican Party and what he perceived as the treasonous and riotous *canaille* who supported the Southern-sympathizing Fernando Wood.

Tammany-style loyal nationalism, more important still, was appealing to the many Irish-American men and women who hoped to offer some confirmation of their loyalty after the Draft Riots. For an Irish

lower middle class striving to lose the taint of proletarian treason, the stylish Tammany Mayor A. Oakey Hall became the emblem of a domain of bourgeois fashion and sensibility open for the first time to the Irish community. Hall believed himself a great literateur; one sympathetic listener imagined that "his first message as Mayor, in point of perspicuity and attractiveness, might have been written by Thackeray." To polish this image of cultivation and elegance, Oakey even submitted his own custom jewelry designs at Tiffany's. He nonetheless still fancied himself as a man of the people—in one of his early acts as mayor he abolished the traditional salutation, "Your Honor." The Harvard-educated Hall was not Irish (though he played up a story that a maternal ancestor was one of the regicides of Charles I—the Irish community looked with favor on a man descended from the killer of an English king). But Hall, one of the prosecutors of the draft rioters in New York City, did everything otherwise possible to clothe himself in sentiments of loyal Irish Americanism. He was fond of joking with Irish audiences that his initials A.O.H. stood for the "Ancient Order of Hibernians." One Irish observer remembered the Saint Patrick's Day Parade of 1870 as a high moment of Oakey's career. As Tammany Irish dignitaries Sweeny, Connolly, Richard O'Gorman and the city's Irish societies passed Hall's reviewing stand, the mayor saluted "in the supposed regalia of an Irish Prince. It was not enough for him to put a shamrock on the lapel of his coat . . . to adequately typify his consuming love for the 'Exiles of Erin,' he wore a coat of green material and a flourishing cravat of the same inspiring color." When he attended the lavish 1870 Annual Ball of Tweed's Americus Club in green fly-tail coat, green kids, green shirt embroidered with shamrocks and emeralds, and eye-glasses "with rims of Irish bog-oak and attached to a green silk cord," Hall's unmistakable message was that "Irishness" was now acceptable in New York society. For those Irish men and women seeking inclusion in the world of elite nationalism after the Civil War, Hall's antic display provided a sense of legitimacy, of the Americanization of the Irish.

Perhaps the most crucial element of Tammany's post-war appeal was its emphasis on white supremacy. Even though the Union League Club succeeded in integrating the city's streetcars and marched the newly-created African-American 20th Regiment down Broadway after the riots, the size of the city's black population, declining since the 1830s, would drop by nearly a third over the course

of the war. No doubt the riots had much to do with that shift. A post-riot climate of intimidation and fear made the public life of the city a more noticeably white domain. In this process Tammany cooperated. It drew its ideological line at acceptance of the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, and vehemently opposed the two subsequent amendments to establish constitutional rights to black citizenship and suffrage. In the context of the debate over Irish and black status that the Draft Riots put in sudden focus, the message of Mayor Hall and Tammany was confirmation of the whiteness and loyalty of the Irish and the clear demarcation of the riots' black victims as an inferior and degraded race—by implication, un-American—who were not worthy of organized philanthropy.

The tragedy of the Draft Riot and its denouement under Tammany was that they suggest how essential such brutal schemes of racial inclusion and exclusion would continue to be to the governing of New York and to the resolving of the city's problematic relationship to America. By 1870, black chattel slavery in the United States was dead and New York's labor movement had begrudgingly endorsed the principles of black citizenship and suffrage (though this is hardly to say that anti-black racism was ebbing). Revealingly, it was at just this juncture that A. Oakey Hall and Tammany allied with Irish and German labor leaders to stage a Workingmen's Anti-Chinese rally. The centerpiece of the event was Hall's reading of a letter from labor leader John Swinton, describing the Chinese as an "inferior type" of humanity, bringing paganism, incest, sodomy, and the threat of miscegenation to American shores. This distorted echo of the Draft Riots lacked sufficient impact to influence long-term political loyalties and the fear of an invasion of Chinese laborers quickly subsided. However, the workingmen's anti-Chinese movement in New York made clear, further and in another form, the resilience of racial hierarchy, prejudice, and exclusion in Northern urban life, after slavery and its particular requirements of racial caste had been abolished. Even after slavery it was extraordinarily and tragically difficult to create or even imagine a political order in the urban North that could consolidate and manage rapid change and growth, reconcile the city's foreign-ness and its American-ness (and incorporate an immigrant working class increasingly conscious of its power), and do so without a ruthless scheme of racial exclusion. New York, it could be said, had been confirmed as a Northern city, but indeed, as such, it was a precursor of the still not fully reconstructed North we know today.