

MANHATTAN  
FOR RENT,  
1785-1850

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of households that shared their neighborhoods—"everyone who lives on the street"—they created a community of those entitled to visit one another's houses—"all the people of a certain sort." Thus the gradual melding of social and spatial neighborhoods in the republican city laid the ground for new modes of class interaction.

As Manhattan's land-tenure and labor relations changed dramatically in the fifty years following the American Revolution, the institutions of domestic property—"modern dwellings" and tenant houses—opened new fields of real estate investment that contributed to the closing down of earlier institutions of proprietary independence. The process of neighborhood formation added a new spatial dimension to the marketing of land, housing, and domestic services for profit. The housing market rested not simply on the demand for shelter but on demand for particular kinds of shelter in particular locations. The definitions of these needs in turn rested on cultural perceptions of the meaning of new domestic property and labor relations. Having looked at how the housing market first formed, we now turn to the question of how it was interpreted, and particularly at how the republican rhetorical tradition of proprietary independence was transformed into a new vocabulary of domestic respectability.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Social Meanings of Housing, 1800-1840

AS THE SOCIAL relations and spatial organization of New York City housing changed in the first third of the nineteenth century, so did its cultural meanings—the values, beliefs, customs, and rules that housing arrangements represented to a larger community. Control over a dwelling—a realm *rhetorically* set apart from the site and activity of work—emerged as a new measure of personal independence and respectability. In 1816 the New York insurance clerk John Pintard, who had once been a wealthy merchant, invoked the language of republican simplicity to express this new sensibility. "I hope you will be able to get up the Frame of your new tenement," Pintard wrote his daughter Eliza Davidson in New Orleans upon hearing of her family's plans to build a dwelling. "A Log House is very comfortable and doubly so when it is one's own. Better a hut to ones self than to dwell in a palace of another. Sweet Independence what a blessing in the cup of Existence."<sup>1</sup>

Pintard's yearning for the "sweet independence" of a private dwelling stemmed from the frustrations of his own situation in New York City. Pintard had endorsed the notes of the financier William Duer, and he lost his mercantile fortune and spent time in debtors' prison when Duer went bankrupt. Pintard later recovered his social status and held positions as city clerk and as secretary to various insurance companies and benevolent organizations. But unlike many of the prominent citizens with whom he did business, Pintard could not afford "a hut to ones self." The trustees of the Mutual Insurance Company had repeatedly rejected their sixty-year-old secretary's request that he, his wife, and their younger daughter, Louisa, be allowed to move from their "found" quarters above the Wall Street office to a separate dwelling.<sup>2</sup>

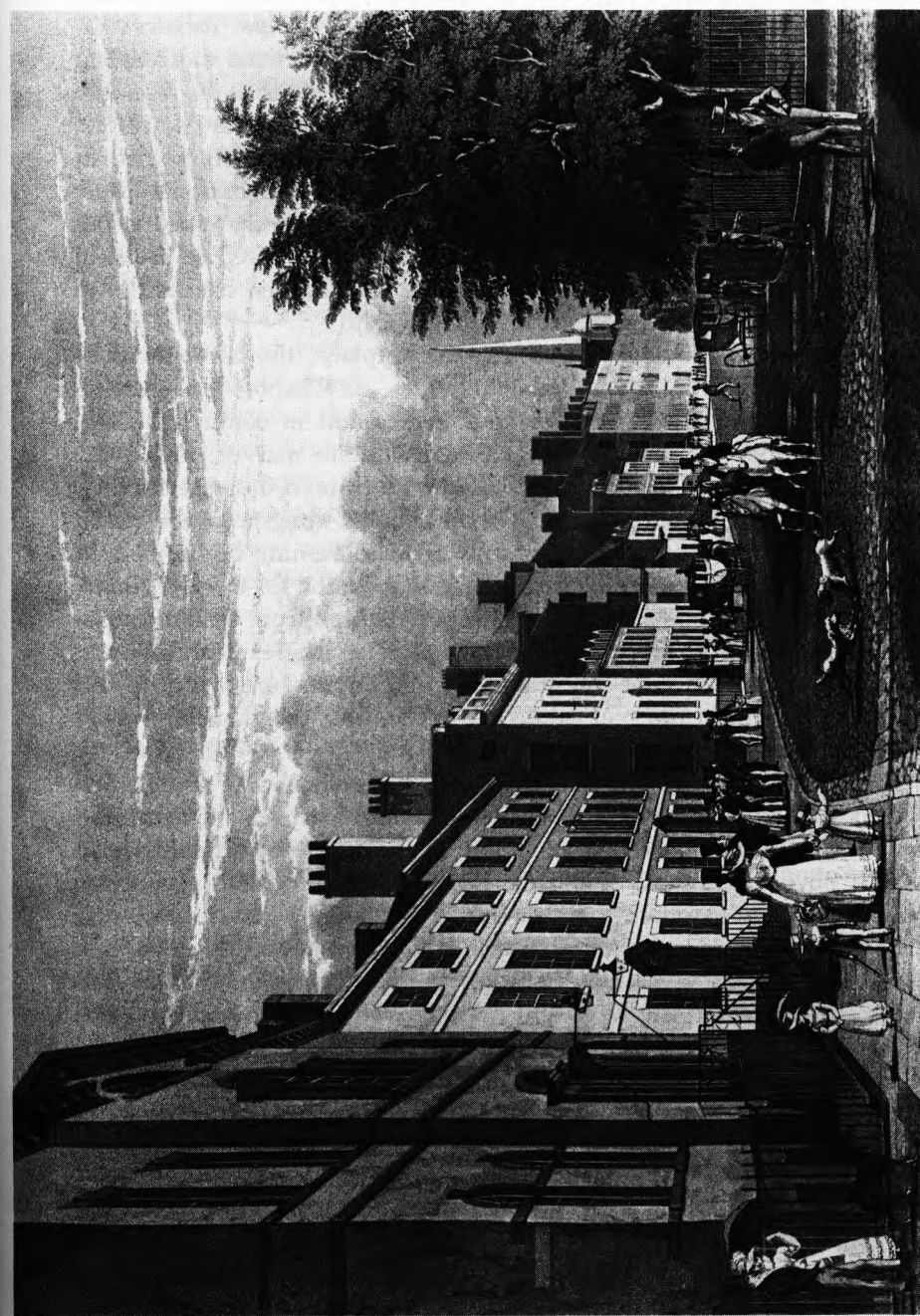
Pintard  
petard

Even if he could secure permission, "the excessive high price of houses in any favorable street," Pintard reported to Eliza in 1818, "almost makes me despair of being able to purchase one to our liking and we must have patience I fear another year." By the following year, Pintard's plaint had grown more poignant: "I had hoped this year to have provided a tenement, if not to live, to die in. But buildings are so high that nothing like a house in a decent street can be obtained under \$10,000, a sum almost insuperable for me." Concluding that he would again seek to negotiate "with my Directors to allow me a compensation for the house I live in, which I fear will be attended with difficulty," Pintard persisted in his "hope of better accommodations for Mama and Sister, who are nearly prisoners during the hours of business in Wall street."<sup>3</sup>

Why did Pintard attach such value to a separate residence in a "decent street"? What was the relation between his perception of the dwelling as an emblem of personal independence and earlier concepts of proprietary independence attached to an integrated house and shop, house and office, or house and adjacent store? How had an earlier generation's ideas about the convenience of a Wall Street location given way to Pintard's feelings of imprisonment? Thinking about the changing cultural meanings and uses of housing requires us to look at the historical values associated with an institution—the home—that many contemporary Americans take for granted.

Historians have often described the "separation" of workplace and home as an automatic part of the process of industrialization in the first half of the nineteenth century. According to the conventional interpretation, as men found employment in expanding workshops, factories, stores, and offices, housing lost its economic function and became a "sphere" set apart from productive relations. All too often historians' representation of "the home"—and particularly of women's activities within it—have assumed a universality of experience and meaning that offers no way to think concretely about how housing relations changed, how new housing needs or desires were socially defined, and how "the home's" new economic and cultural meanings were themselves historically constructed.<sup>4</sup>

"Modern dwellings" and tenant houses were still *new* institutions in the early nineteenth century, and New Yorkers situated, valued, and interpreted them with reference to other social institutions, ranging from the labor and marriage markets to religion and politics. How did different ways of organizing housing to serve different material needs shape New Yorkers' understandings of shared or divided social goals? What place did housing occupy in explanations of city residents'



Broadway from the Bowling Green. Aquatint by W. J. Bennett, c. 1826. Eno Collection; Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs; The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

powers, interests, and obligations in relation to one another? Why did "the home" come to figure so prominently in some New Yorkers' discussions of personal aspirations and social order, and what did housing mean to those New Yorkers who left no record of their home lives?

Before we explore these questions, it is perhaps necessary to reiterate the ways in which housing and home life remained immersed in economic relations. For not the least problem with conventional interpretations of the "industrialization" of nineteenth-century cities is the tendency to treat housing as a derivative cultural "sphere" or arena of "consumption" that merely reflected rather than helped construct the new material social relations of capitalist society.

Far from being "removed" from the marketplace, the home stood at the heart of new property and labor relations. As Chapter 3 suggested, propertied New Yorkers' simultaneous investment in commercial and domestic property structured the city's real estate market, raised the price of independent proprietorship, and undermined the economic viability of the traditional house and shop with its integrated household labor force. High rents kept thousands of wage-earning households in permanent tenancy and generated investment capital for the city's merchants and entrepreneurs. As rent revenues flowed from tenant households into landlords' more comfortable budgets, the resulting housing relations established new conditions of competition, opportunity, and vulnerability within the real estate market and altered domestic working conditions for both groups.

The home—whether within a dwelling or a tenant house—remained a workplace; housework was still an essential part of securing and maintaining a livelihood. At one end of the economy, the historian Jeanne Boydston argues, employers implicitly calculated the economic value of housework when they set the "living wage": cash income and the value of women's unpaid domestic labor determined the level of a household's subsistence. Deteriorating working conditions within tenant houses devalued the wage and devalued women's unpaid contribution by increasing their work load. At the other end of the social scale, within a housing market organized to accommodate and display new concepts of respectability, property values rested in part on the labor of maintaining or embellishing dwellings. If her merchant husband succeeded in his "just and natural" desire to purchase a dwelling, Pintard informed his daughter, "then indeed it will look like indep[en]dence & you will not bestow your care & labor on other people's property."<sup>5</sup>

Beyond determining the conditions of labor necessary to maintain both family and property, the houses of both rich and poor New Yorkers continued to shelter *paid* labor. The creation and maintenance of

dwellings expanded domestic service as a major field of waged employment and established a new arena of labor conflict. The prevalence of boarding preserved the cash nexus within thousands of homes. And through the outwork system, shoemakers and needleworkers paid employers' overhead costs in their own housing rents. Like the conditions of unpaid family work, these "productive" labor relations within and between New York's houses molded new understandings of the power and value of domestic property as a labor institution.

In some respects, it is not surprising that social historians so seldom analyze these economic relations of housing and home life, for despite lively discussions of high rents, greedy landlords, spendthrift wives, idle servants, starving needleworkers, immoral boardinghouses, and diseased neighborhoods, antebellum New Yorkers themselves seldom directly confronted the question of what these housing issues had to do with the larger structures of social power. Rather, in newspapers, letters, novels, diaries, advice manuals, and city ordinances, New Yorkers presented housing conditions as manifestations of individual or collective morality and maturity.

The nineteenth-century language of housing came to rest on polarized categories—home and workplace, private and public, respectable and immoral, necessity and luxury—that sought to define and fix the cultural value of one of the city's most unstable and tension-worn social institutions. By defining what home life should and should not be, these categories offered a way of classifying and judging people, behavior, and spaces without reference to either social practice or the conditions of social power. All New York houses sheltered work; most were no less public than other institutions—churches, saloons—that accommodated a constant (if sometimes selective) social traffic; and the costs of maintaining a respectable home life encouraged entrepreneurial strategies that surely seemed immoral to their victims. Other concepts incorporated in the cultural definition of a proper "home life"—including a "mature" male provider and a "virtuous" female caretaker—were themselves the products of historical debates. Yet, (precisely because rhetorical oppositions deny qualifications and contradictions, they offer a powerful means of affirming shared cultural values in the face of uncertainties and repeated challenges.) Indeed, so effective was the language of housing in classifying and prescribing social attributes while denying social conflicts that by the mid-nineteenth century its vocabulary had become a mainstay of the bourgeois language of both class and gender.<sup>6</sup>

In order to understand how these categories assumed their social meanings and cultural authority we must think about the historical

On the inevitability of progressive market forces and intrinsic free markets

process and occasion of their construction. Some concepts of what housing represented (for example, Pintard's invocation of "sweet independence") drew on and recast earlier housing values and practices; others (Pintard's concern with a "favorable street") emerged in relation to New York's new and multiple housing forms and uses. Unfortunately, a twentieth-century social historian writing about the cultural meanings of housing inherits the social distances of the past in the kinds of sources that survive. Thus, whereas the city's most prominent citizens left records that tell us something about how they valued their own home lives and judged those of others, evidence of how the city's middling ranks and especially its laboring people interpreted housing is more fragmentary. It is perhaps a measure of the cultural power of the propertied classes that their definitions of housing's cultural meaning dominated nineteenth-century language and texts; on the other hand, it may have been the tenacity of wage-earning tenants' alternative practices and values that pushed respectable New Yorkers to expend so much energy in asserting the universal moral validity and social utility of their own experience and aspirations.

### *The Value of Independent Housekeeping*

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, New York's most successful merchants, entrepreneurs, lawyers, and doctors allocated a significant portion of their prosperity to the acquisition of housing amenities. Self-defined "respectable" New Yorkers had created a new market for "modern dwellings" in new locations. Controlling neighborhood land use through restrictive covenants, siting, and architecture, the wealthiest developers and homeowners sought to ensure dwellings against the social encroachments that they had encountered in lower Manhattan. Economic and cultural motives went hand in hand: that the project of reorganizing the city's social geography to accommodate new domestic values should also enhance land values seemed proof of the soundness of both.

The process of constructing new standards of domestic respectability, however, involved more than new real estate investment opportunities. The formation of a market for dwellings required widespread recognition and acceptance of the cultural value—indeed, the necessity—of new arrangements for specifically domestic convenience or comfort. What exactly did domestic respectability represent and entail? As new standards of "independent housekeeping" emerged, what happened to housing's earlier cultural identity as a workplace?

Prosperous New Yorkers' increasing capital investment in domestic construction, and particularly in utilities and equipment, dramatically improved the physical conditions of housework. Private cisterns and pumps guaranteed clean water and eased the work of water hauling; the development of first wood-burning and then coal-burning stoves and furnaces made household heating more efficient and cooking less dangerous. Set-back dwellings screened the dust of the streets, and more important, the ventilation, sanitation, and light of substantial town houses contributed to their healthiness and reduced the intense labor of nursing the sick. In the 1830s and 1840s, gas lighting, early plumbing, and central heating further distinguished new dwellings from the town houses of an earlier generation.<sup>7</sup>

Women, who assumed primary responsibility for the production of household services, were the immediate beneficiaries of these improvements. Indeed, the rising investment in domestic establishments marked new terms of negotiation between husbands and wives over the allocation of family financial resources. Wealthy wives contributed directly to those resources through dowries and legacies, which included household equipment and furnishings as well as cash and, less commonly, land. Propertied wives also brought to their marriages social and family connections that opened channels of credit and business cooperation. Such contributions had long established husbands' obligations of reciprocity, but the balance of marital exchange appears to have shifted in favor of propertied wives in the early nineteenth century. New York women who transferred Knickerbocker wealth and local contacts through marriage to migrating Yankee merchants provided the starting-up capital for many a successful port enterprise. Although they were clearly not the only beneficiaries of housing amenities, these prosperous wives claimed new cultural authority in collecting their return in the improved working conditions of dwellings.<sup>8</sup>

For John Pintard, a city-born descendant of French Huguenots who married into the well-to-do Brasher family, the obligation of being a provider was weighted with the guilt of becoming in effect a family debtor. In losing his own and his wife's fortune and making Elizabeth Brasher Pintard a "prisoner" of their Wall Street quarters, Pintard felt he had failed as a husband as well as a banker. And when he failed in negotiations with his employers, Elizabeth Pintard herself ("with her usual masculine resolution") intervened to confront the insurance company's directors and demand that they give her husband an increase in pay (in place of "found" housing) and permit the family to move. In all likelihood Elizabeth represented herself to the directors more as a Brasher than as a Pintard.<sup>9</sup>

Family name, property, and social connections were not the only bargaining chips that wives could use to define and claim new standards of "independent housekeeping." Negotiations over family investment in dwellings as domestic work sites went hand in hand with the restructuring of household labor relations. The abolition of slavery and the demise of found labor transformed the cultural meaning of housing's "private economical relations" and required families to reposition themselves in relation to the free labor market. Even such families as the Pintards, who could not afford improved dwellings, could claim the essential housing credentials of family respectability and independence by hiring servants.

The eighteenth-century definition of a family's (and a wife's) independent social position had rested on the hierarchical organization and integration of trade and domestic labor. In the most successful colonial merchant and artisan households, wives had supervised slaves, who undertook the heavy labor that made houses habitable. Even before the passage of New York's gradual manumission law in 1799, as the price of slaves increased and antislavery sentiment grew, prominent families had begun to hire free servants (as well as slaves) to perform domestic work. Within middling artisan households, daughters had worked alongside young white women servants, who frequently came from neighboring or rural households of comparable social status. For daughters and servants who expected to become artisans' wives (and indeed were regarded as "apprentices"), such employment marked a life-cycle rather than a class position. But as both the fixed status of slavery and the interchangeability of hired "help" and family labor gave way to a free labor market, social hierarchies based on sex, age, and race incorporated new distinctions of wage status.<sup>10</sup>

With the rise of a specifically female labor market, some New Yorkers began to redefine the status of wives' dependency with reference to the emerging conditions of wage dependency. Identifying women's moral character with their social and economic position, republican rhetoric celebrated the virtues of the skillful and dutiful wife as a manager of domestic economy and even invoked marital unity as a model of civic cooperation. By contrast, the waged domestic worker was scorned as an abjectly dependent figure who lacked the capacity for virtue. Thus, when Tom Paine sought to insult his landlord, the blacksmith William Carver, he charged that Mrs. Carver's character "was no better than that of a servant"; and in 1801, journeymen shoemakers complained that master tanners who required that a journeyman get "a regular discharge in writing from the Bause he had worked for last"

placed him "on the same footing with a hired negro wench, that must get a recommendation before she can get a place."<sup>11</sup>

European travelers invariably commented on the contempt with which Americans viewed domestic service, which was popularly associated with slavery on the one hand and with the privileges of an unnatural aristocracy on the other. Fueled by misogynist as well as racist attitudes, daily gestures of contempt enacted ideological aversions to the conditions of waged dependency which domestic service embodied. Women engaged in the coarse work of hauling water and firewood, throwing out waste and garbage, and washing clothes over open fires were exposed to abusive insults in a culture of republican simplicity which imagined female virtue to consist of modest, clean, and "naturally" deferential decorum and attire.<sup>12</sup>

For an independent citizen to require a mother, wife, daughter, or sister to do heavy and exposed domestic labor associated with slavery or "hiring" was to place her outside his own class, implicitly contradicting his own claims to independence as measured by his obligations as a provider. Hiring domestic labor, on the other hand, placed women in a social position comparable to that of the entrepreneurial fathers and husbands who were assuming new social authority as members of an employing class. The realization of women's familial identity as republican wives and mothers further depended on securing their household positions as employers: how could a woman whose own laboring condition contradicted the virtuous qualities of personal independence retain the respect of her husband and children? The presence of servants, then, was essential to maintaining the new values of domestic respectability, which were defined in opposition to the "promiscuous" and dependent conditions of female wage labor. And whereas waged servants performed "work," the wives and daughters who supervised or worked alongside them performed "duties."<sup>13</sup>

In the period 1800-1850, as a new residential geography emerged in New York, domestic labor remained the city's single largest field of employment. As such, it helped shape propertied New Yorkers' cultural perceptions and interpretations of the necessary ingredients of respectability and their relation to a new class of wage workers.

The harsh conditions of waged domestic work, as well as the volatile and often antagonistic relations of domestic employers and employees, contradict images of the home as a tranquil realm set apart from the labor market. Servants were on call twenty-four hours a day; they did the dirtiest and heaviest tasks of housework; their wages were among the lowest in the city; they could not freely socialize outside their

employer's house. But as waged workers, servants also asserted their own interests. At one extreme, employers confronted outright rebellion, as when Elizabeth Bleecker's "negro girl" deliberately set fire to their attic. At the other, householders faced the chronic "servant problem" of labor turnover.<sup>14</sup>

In 1818 and 1819, John Pintard expressed one employer's anger at workers who took full advantage of their "freedom" within the labor market. Acknowledging "how much ones existence depends on domestics," Pintard wrote his daughter Eliza that he was "distressed beyond description by unfaithful, ungrateful" servants. It was "vexatious in the extreme" when Sophia left "without notice or reason . . . just when she had become acquainted with our habits," leaving only the "tolerably handy but heedless" fourteen-year-old Susan, who had been brought from New Jersey at \$2 a month and found. In the absence of servants, Pintard's wife and younger daughter, Louisa, had "performed every drudgery above stairs," while he himself "had to make office, kitchen and parlor fires, hang on the tea kettles, bring up all the wood and coals, sweep the entries etc." Four months later he complained of Sophia's successors that "life has been embittered and I have felt more like a boarder than a member of a family, afraid to give exception [or] even ordinary commands, not knowing but that at midnight we might have been robbed and deserted by the worthless trollopes."<sup>15</sup>

In Pintard's view, given labor market competition and aggressive employment agencies that "decoyed" away good servants, his problem was one of market position: "Our abode is not very favorable to make domestics contented, being attended with many inconveniences in consequence of the office, wh[ic]h supports me." Although it would require exaggeration to argue that New Yorkers invested in new dwellings in order to keep domestics "contented," servants were essential to a respectable household's operation; and Pintard, for one, believed that servants carefully calculated their own interests in securing the best working conditions available. The prominence of "servants' rooms" in advertisements for new dwellings suggests more than the clear demarcation of status within households. Such separate quarters offered both employers and workers the option of spatial retreat within the battleground of the home.<sup>16</sup>

✓ [The historical use of slave and indentured labor for household maintenance, the interchangeability of domestic work with free female "family labor," and reliance on youth established the field's low wage scales. Excluded from skilled crafts, Afro-Americans (including men who worked as house porters, cooks, waiters, and butlers) constituted one core of the early-nineteenth-century waged domestic labor force.

The city's prominent families pointed to the history of slavery to assert that Afro-Americans' dependent and servile "nature" made them especially "good servants"; in light of this logic, New Yorkers were all the more mistrustful and contemptuous of white women who crossed the color line of republican independence to work as servants. Although black domestic workers were paid less than whites, they sometimes could turn such prejudices to their own advantage in order to secure work in dwellings that contained new utilities and wealthy employers' ample "leavings" of food and clothing. Indeed, one ongoing source of tension between the city's white and black laborers was the white workers' perceptions of the "patronage" that blacks received from elite (generally Federalist and/or former slaveholding) families.<sup>17</sup>

Knowing their own "value," some black domestic workers (who were more likely to be married or have children than white servants) further negotiated employers' control over their time and personal lives. Pintard's servant Hannah, for example, clearly mastered her employer's prejudices and won the concession of keeping her infant children with her until she decided to leave his household to join her recently emancipated husband. "Destitute of servants and dreading the constant change of unprincipled, unqualified and thieving white women," Pintard sought out another Afro-American servant, Tamar, who had left the family after eight years of employment. Tamar "at length" agreed to return on the condition that the Pinards also hire her daughter Nancy. Even then, Pintard felt he had lost the battle to discipline wage labor within the family circle. Nothing but Tamar's "integrity and care of the House in case of our absence," he had reported after her first departure, "c[oul]d have suffered me to endure and put up with her violent temper."<sup>18</sup>

Pintard was perhaps exceptionally vicious in his constant representation of servants as "worthless trollopes," unprincipled thieves, and "insect vexations." In other households, older customs of paternalism and deference may have absorbed some of the tensions between employers and servants. Yet such characterizations carried larger social implications. Prompted no doubt in part by rage at women who could not be disciplined, employers also impugned the morality of men who "permitted" their daughters or sisters to enter domestic service. That New Yorkers had to rely heavily on the countryside as well as on the city's Afro-American and immigrant (especially Irish) population for its domestic labor pool suggests that both women and men of native-born white mechanic families viewed the domestic employment of daughters as demeaning to themselves. Such a judgment in turn reinforced cultural cleavages within the city's working classes.<sup>19</sup>

Domestic labor relations had other implications for New Yorkers' perceptions and interpretations of social relations in a free market economy. By erasing housing's cultural identity as a workplace and replacing it with the "home," respectable New Yorkers could preserve wives' and daughters' independent status and at the same time reassert women's ongoing obligations to perform domestic work as "family duties." Housing's definition as a cultural rather than an economic institution in turn shaped explanations of the antagonisms between employers and workers. Rather than address issues of the value of domestic labor—including pay and hours—employers framed the "servant problem" as one of morality and discipline. Thus, for example, Pintard joined a "society for improving the character and usefulness of domestic servants," which in 1826 offered a prize for the best tract on servants' "moral and religious duty."<sup>20</sup>

Domestic employers' angry preoccupation with "the moral condition of a class found in the bosom of every family; of fellow creatures heretofore totally neglected and with whom . . . daily and hourly comforts are identified," revealed both their essential dependence on waged workers to preserve the conditions of their own self-respect and a new psychology of class relations. Like all strategies of blaming the victim, attacks on servants as trollopes, thieves, and idlers established employers' distance and directed attention away from their own moral accountability for exploitive labor conditions within "the bosom of every family."<sup>21</sup>

The "moral condition of a class" (primarily of women) became a familiar refrain in antebellum discussions of social relations, and although this class language also drew on evangelical discourse, its terms were rehearsed daily in respectable New Yorkers' homes. Republican rhetoric in the early nineteenth century paid tribute to the "manliness" of virtuous mechanics' industry and skills. Despite common law sanctions against trade unions, journeymen could draw on this regard for craft (and white male) independence to assert the legitimacy of their claims against employers. In contrast, repeated characterization of servants as immoral and ungrateful distinguished them as a wage-earning class both from their employers and from the industrious "productive classes." The same accusatory language with which Pintard labeled and confronted his servants reappeared in the 1820s and 1830s in discussions of poverty as the consequence of personal failings of character. Indeed, reformers' roster of the "undeserving poor"—blacks, prostitutes, and idle vagrants—mirrored employers' descriptions of the domestic labor pool. Although white journeymen showed little interest in aligning themselves with black or female wage workers, by the 1850s

they too found themselves subject to moral classifications that discounted their economic needs and interests.<sup>22</sup>

The cultural codes of independent housekeeping classified householders as well as workers, but the terms were far less stable. The respectability of the wealthiest New Yorkers, as of the independent artisans of the eighteenth century, rested on the bedrock of property and a dependent labor force—a dwelling and servants. But secure control over these resources was as exceptional in early-nineteenth-century New York as housing arrangements were diverse. Many New Yorkers could readily produce other evidence of their claim to social respect—family or firm name, craft skill, religious affiliation, proper dress and manners. But few could afford a private house; and many could not afford to hire servants. Thus New Yorkers either selectively conformed to cultural prescriptions (often explaining their position with reference to age or life-cycle conditions) or drew on earlier cultural understandings of the meaning and value of independent housekeeping to assert alternative standards of judgment.

The employment of servants was by no means limited to New York's elite households. By 1855, in a city of nearly 43,000 "houses," 32,000 women worked as domestics.<sup>23</sup> Among modestly "independent" artisan or professional households that shared a house with one or two other families, the ability to hire (or share) a servant could signal recognition of the new code of domestic respectability. And possibly the need to spare wives certain kinds of "humiliating labor" entered into understandings of "comfortable subsistence," the artisan term that came to replace proprietary "independence" (which implied a master's control over an integrated house and shop). But many nonelite households that hired servants also took in boarders, and boarding captured the ambiguities of New Yorkers' cultural definition of housing as workplace and home.

For most boarders, boarding represented a temporary "home," that is, a place culturally defined in opposition to a place of paid work as well as to "independent housekeeping." Although the vast majority of boarders were male wage earners who had no other means of securing domestic services, European visitors expressed surprise that many newly married "respectable" New York couples also chose to board rather than to set up housekeeping. When hiring domestics could add from \$50 to \$100 annually to already high rents, boarding offered a practical economy to couples whose incomes did not match their cultural expectations for maintaining a wife's social position. Elite New Yorkers regarded such a strategy as appropriate only for young couples; the Pintards, for example, consciously rejected boarding as a means of



escaping their Wall Street "prison." But the life-cycle strategy of couples who boarded also contrasted with that of young married mechanics such as the nailmaker Grant Thornburn, who pursued the republican virtue of personal independence by renting domestic quarters and substituting a wife's labor for that of a landlady.<sup>24</sup>

By the 1840s, the physician-reformer John Griscom urged the construction industry to introduce new housing utilities in order to spare such modest households what he regarded as the necessity of hiring domestic labor. "Many highly respectable, but poor persons, now feel obliged to spend a considerable portion of their small incomes in paying the wages, board, and for lodging rooms, of servants," he reported, "but if houses had water-pipes and drain pipes so that there should be no need of going into the streets to perform the mortifying duty of carrying water and emptying refuse, these persons would prefer to do their domestic work themselves." Griscom suggested that hiring servants came at the expense of "wholesome food, better rooms, better education for their children, and other things needful for their happiness"; and he lamented the fate of women of poorer families who "are compelled to appear in the streets under these mortifying circumstances, and in consequence, however wrong it may be, sometimes lose acquaintances whom they value, and sometimes even their own self-respect and courage."<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to know whether these women themselves found such heavy domestic labor "mortifying" or simply exhausting. There remained alternative understandings of housing's cultural value as a workplace *and* home. For many mechanic families (including those headed by women), the conditions of housekeeping represented less an issue of maintaining valuable acquaintances than of securing the economic value of household labor. Whether or not the family hired servants, New York's wives, daughters, and widows expected to contribute to their households by domestic work that included a range of cash-generating and cash-saving activities. Only "with care and frugality" within a well-managed domestic economy could a young mechanic get ahead, the traveler Isaac Holmes reported in 1823. Skilled journeymen might "save a considerable part of their earnings," he noted, and "do well, particularly if he have a wife and children who are capable of contributing, not merely to the consuming but to the earning also of the common stock." Mechanics' wives who were spared heavy domestic labor by the hiring of servants could more readily contribute other skills to the household economy. The more boarders a household accommodated, for example, the more likely women were to have the assistance of hired servants, particularly young girls.<sup>26</sup>

The wage-earning family's goal of maintaining the wife's position as a helpmate contrasted with propertied New Yorkers' concern to establish the wife as a member of an "independent" employing class and with "highly respectable but poor" New Yorkers' need to preserve the acquaintances they valued. And the bargaining power that women derived from the labor of keeping boarders differed significantly from that of women who brought property or social connections to a marriage. A mechanic's wife's contribution to family resources might increase savings, provide security against a slow season or unemployment, and even offer the means to acquire household furnishings and equipment. But such labor could establish few claims on the deployment of capital—investment in new housing utilities—to improve domestic working conditions and "save labor."

To a large extent wage-earning tenant households from 1800 to 1840 did not share in the material improvements that distinguished the "new modern dwelling" as a domestic workplace. Tenant quarters subdivided out of an earlier generation's artisan houses seemed interchangeable in their lack of space (although their occupants no doubt valued specific qualities and details of construction, siting, and level of repair, which varied with the quality and age of the building). Rear houses and courts further eliminated the yard as an extension of household work space, and close quarters did not offer the healthful amenities of light and air. Female working-class tenants (including boardinghouse servants) generally performed household labor without a pump, facilities for the storage of food and fuel, or improved kitchen equipment, and later without plumbing, a central heating system, or gas lighting. The most important change in tenant house utilities came in the 1830s, when coal burners replaced hearths and wood-burning stoves; this change, necessitated by the spiraling price of firewood, also increased fumes and dust.<sup>27</sup>

Despite mechanics' recognition of housekeeping's value to the family's comfortable subsistence, by the third decade of the nineteenth century, housing conditions for wage-earning families in and of themselves devalued unpaid domestic labor. That is to say, women in tenant houses were able to realize less for their labor in household savings, family health, and domestic comfort than propertied women in dwellings or artisans' wives in shared houses.<sup>28</sup>

Few sources survive to tell us how wage-earning New Yorkers regarded the changing conditions of housekeeping. New York's early labor movement focused on changing craft working conditions—on training, hours, work rules, and wages. Although early labor newspapers readily affirmed the value and virtue of home life, they seldom

directly discussed the physical conditions or relations of unpaid housework. Occasionally New York's striking journeymen presented household budgets to demonstrate to the public the justice of their wage demands. Or, as in the 1830s, they suggested their domestic vulnerability and denounced employers who cut wages "in the middle of an inclement and unusually tedious winter, when provisions, fuel, and every domestic requisite, rose to an unprecedented price hitherto unknown in the city of New York, and rents not only already high, but rising the coming year to an average of 20 percent!"<sup>29</sup>

It was in the context of addressing the dangers of competition from women operatives and outworkers in the needle and shoe trades as well as in cloth manufacturing—"the system of Female Labor"—that workingmen most strongly expressed concerns about changing domestic relations. In the face of "ruinous competition" from female operatives, "the parent or the husband, or the brother is deprived of a sufficient subsistence to support himself and family . . . in decency and [keep] his wife or relative at home to perform the duties of the household." In a sense, unionists charged "speculators and monopolists" with appropriating not only the value of their own labor but also their proprietary interest in their wives' and daughters' domestic labor. Indirectly criticizing employers' wives by addressing the concern that women kept "at home" would be "idle," the journeymen invoked housing's traditional cultural identity as an integrated workplace. In "the early ages," they reported, "women were usefully, healthily, and industriously employed, although differently engaged from their present occupations."<sup>30</sup>

Rather than embrace new concepts of domesticity attached to the dwelling, journeymen sought to preserve traditional values of artisan housekeeping. But the conditions of tenant housing undermined wives' and daughters' ability "to contribute to the earning of the common stock" through customary forms of "female industry," including assistance to male family members in their own trade work. As declining wages and rising rents reduced affordable space, there was less opportunity to take in boarders. Women who faced an increasing burden of domestic maintenance under deteriorating physical conditions could not fulfill the chief "duty of the household" by providing for their families' health. For laboring families, the alternative that loomed largest was not housing's new cultural identity as a "home" but rather its new economic identity as a sweatshop.

The outwork system in shoemaking and the needle trades built on shoemakers' and tailors' traditional claims to their wives' and children's labor. Like domestic service, such work was valued in accordance with

a baseline of "family labor" that cost nothing. This measure, as well as the ideology of female dependency, kept outwork wages desperately low. The "system" of sweated female labor within the home was also a travesty of earlier housing relations of integrated domestic and trade work. Male household heads had retained obligations for their family members' subsistence. Employers paid starvation wages and further required workers to pay shop overhead in domestic rents. From the perspective of New York's laboring classes, the conditions of sweated labor provided the strongest message of what happened when a "home" became a "workplace."<sup>31</sup>

The conditions of male independence became increasingly uncertain in antebellum New York; succession within crafts was losing its security, skills did not necessarily secure wages that permitted savings, the costs of setting up a shop or business increased, the expansion of credit created more risks. Men who controlled real property gained power to command the labor of those who had none, and control of labor represented both security and the means to accumulate more property. Whether owned or rented, domestic quarters, no less than the integrated house and shop of an earlier generation, established conditions for controlling female labor. When women's dependency was posited through the legal doctrine of marital unity, a wife's condition represented that of her husband. In sparing a wife heavy labor or "protecting" her from the vulnerabilities and predations of the specifically female labor market, a husband preserved his self-respect as provider and his claims on a wife for other forms of family and household labor. And when journeymen's and laborers' wages reduced their control over housing, they lost control over the value of unpaid female labor and became increasingly vulnerable as a class.

Given the conditions of female economic dependency, women held their own distinctive interest in the emerging system of cultural meaning that situated "home life" within the larger frame of capitalist property and labor relations. Antebellum women as a class had limited rights in property and limited means to acquire it, and without property they could make few claims on labor. The female labor market—most immediately visible in the conditions of domestic service and outwork—determined that women's "property" in their own labor would produce more value than it could ever earn. Paid female labor did not represent a viable means of independence. The majority of women, then, had few options but to place claims on fathers and husbands for the best working conditions possible, that is, to assert the value of their labor through familial obligations of the "home" rather than the market relations of the "workplace."

The cultural construction of housing as a home separated from a workplace did not emerge simply with reference to men's departure to workshops, offices, and stores. Female family members who performed household "duties" were culturally defined against the figures of both "immoral and ungrateful" servants who grudgingly performed "work" and female outworkers who "took work away from men." Although the points of reference were vastly different for propertied and working-class New Yorkers, the language with which they interpreted housing relations was often the same. Unable to eliminate the tensions of waged employment, keeping boarders, or sweated labor within their domestic quarters, New Yorkers insisted on housing's identity as a home, defined family work as a labor of love, and spoke of domestic relations as they "ought" to be.

Labor relations were not the only field of housing's cultural redefinition. The home as a social institution also ordered new understandings of obligations within the community. As with the rhetorical opposition of home and work, the categories of private and public did not describe social reality. Rather these categories helped to establish new measures of personal morality and social maturity, the qualities necessary for social respect.

### *The "Public" Home*

No institution in nineteenth-century America received more literary attention than the home. So many sermons, speeches, toasts, songs, novels, and articles extolled its virtues and satisfactions that the cultural value of home life seems self-evident. The home was the site of a loving family circle, of simple pleasures and intimacies, of cooperation and mutual trust. As in literary constructions of other ideal places—the wilderness, the country—the concrete referent, a physical site, its people, labors, and conflicts, often disappeared into abstract qualities. Housing's literary and ideological removal from the market and the "public sphere" underscored male privilege and denied class privilege by naturalizing gender prescriptions into a psychological landscape: men who braved the wilds of the marketplace could return to the safety and comforts of a hearth tended by women, be it in a hut, a log cabin, or a palace. For rich and poor, women and men, the home that sheltered the heart represented the possibility of human relations unqualified by a price.<sup>32</sup>

We in the twentieth century have inherited this elusive concept of the home as an emotional refuge that transcends specific conditions

and relations of housing. And because the home is a place that exists primarily in imagination or in memory, because it represents such a depth of emotional attachment or longing, we tend to accept its inherently personal or private nature. But real homes have always had to exist in physical spaces, those spaces have been socially constructed, and they have changed their forms, uses, and meanings over time. Whatever the depth of psychological needs individuals brought to the construction of home life in antebellum New York City, they organized their housing to serve a wide range of social activities that differed from those of earlier generations and varied according to material means. In order to consider how particular cultural values and expectations shaped housing as a new social institution, we must move beyond its characterization as a "private sphere" and explore the publicity of new housing practices.

Dwellings and tenant houses evolved out of an earlier housing institution that, though private property, had not assumed the ideological attributes of a separate private sphere. Eighteenth-century integrated houses did not operate on a principle of exclusivity; sheltering trades or business alongside housework, they accommodated the traffic of customers and business associates as well as neighbors and kin. New Yorkers had ritually affirmed their "open houses" through the custom of New Year's visits. On January first, men and younger family members visited the houses of relatives and neighbors to wish the residents a prosperous new year; women stayed home to serve buffets of traditional liquors and sweets to members of the "community" who called to pay their respects. Nor were "private economical relations" opposed to public obligations: household heads' accountability for their dependents and the duties of public service attached housing to the civic order. And though family—and specifically conjugal—relations suggest personal privacy within houses, even domestic intimacy was not entirely free from exposure or publicity in a culture that sought to enforce a particular code of sexual morality and proscribed, for example, miscegenation and "unnatural" sexual acts as transgressions of social order.<sup>33</sup>

The only thing clearly private about eighteenth-century housing was proprietors' exclusive rights to the value of household resources and dependents' labor. The Bill of Rights, by protecting citizens' houses along with their persons, papers, and effects from unreasonable searches and seizures and by proscribing the quartering of soldiers, linked these property rights with political rights. But boundaries drawn between public and private with respect to state power and personal political rights did not construct spatial boundaries of social use or

obligation. Rather, new boundaries were culturally constructed through custom, ritual, and prescription.

Even with the demise of trade uses, housing remained an intensely social, highly visible institution. Their rhetorical opposition notwithstanding, public and private "spheres" did not operate as either spatial or social polarities. In the eyes of propertied New Yorkers, respectable public and private spaces constructed one another through *continuities* of social traffic, activity, and conduct which established and maintained circles of obligation and trust beyond the family. The cultural definition of respectable housing opposed itself less to a "public sphere" than to perceptions of disreputable public and private continuities within tenant housing and neighborhoods.

Through its use for entertainment, meetings, religious life, and the marriage market, the dwelling stood at the center of circles of selective socializing that shaped public and private associational life into a class culture. A respectable home life suggested a person's capacity to enter into and to meet obligations within the community. In an era when New Yorkers were only beginning to establish financial institutions, they used kin networks, business associates, and acquaintances to certify reputation, and through reputation to gain access to property and credit. Propertied New Yorkers established their social standing and claims through rituals that affirmed their reciprocal obligations. Unlike the fixed contractual relations of a cash bargain or a dated loan, the reciprocity enacted through home hospitality laid the ground for ongoing social exchanges and cooperation. In this respect, bourgeois New Yorkers did seek to distinguish the social world that moved through their homes from the anonymous "public" market and to store up social credit that could withstand sudden turns of fortune.

The dwelling's value as a social institution that organized acquaintanceship and certified public character emerged in contradistinction to the perceived limitations and dangers of alternative housing forms. In contrast to the carefully regulated social traffic of home hospitality, boarding and tenant houses appeared socially promiscuous, nonselective, and immediately vulnerable to market determinations of personal worth. Such housing was commercial; it operated through the conversion of wages into rents and suggested money's power to resolve all social relations into cash bargains and to dissolve future obligations. A world in which all domestic services—shelter, maintenance, meals, entertainment, and even sex—were available for a price rendered domestic manifestations of character irrelevant. Through home hospitality, respectable New Yorkers could enforce codes of reputable conduct by withholding invitations. Tenant housing relations, in contrast, they perceived as imposing no social accountability for moral transgressions.

In the eyes of genteel New Yorkers, the "liberty" of boarding especially represented a condition of social immaturity that rejected the principles of family duty and selective obligation. The cultural characteristics attributed to unmarried boarders—youth, transience, freedom from family ties and long-term commitments—became all the more problematic in multifamily tenant housing. Viewed from a distance, the sharing of domestic space seemed to break down any one household's powers to define and order its relations with other households. What respectable New Yorkers overlooked, of course, were wage-earning tenants' own rituals and networks of obligation and sociability, often established through the very neighborhood institutions that most threatened the emerging bourgeois cultural definition of "proper" home life.

The elaboration of New York houses as centers of selective socializing had begun in the eighteenth century. Downtown merchant houses with offices and adjacent stores had operated as practical centers of intersecting business and kinship obligations; and informal hospitality provided occasions for negotiations, the exchange of information, and affirmation of shared interests. Still, only the houses of the city's colonial officials and most prominent merchants contained space for formal entertaining—dining rooms, drawing rooms, and less commonly, ballrooms. The owners of these exceptional houses extended patronage to elicit deference rather than to establish reciprocal obligations; few guests could afford to match their style of entertainment. Those merchants who could afford to entertain associates at dinner generally did so at taverns. Inns or pleasure gardens accommodated such heterosocial amusements as dances and receptions. It was only after the Revolution that new city dwellings systematically expanded the space given over to receiving visitors and established the value of home hospitality in defining the circles of obligation and regulating social interaction.<sup>34</sup>

In embracing "modern style" dwellings that differentiated formal "front" and family "back" parlors and featured dining rooms, prosperous New Yorkers expressed their perceptions of the necessity of public entertainment as much as a new impulse toward family privacy. If the level of investment in furniture and decoration is any indication of cultural priorities, a family's comfort in the "private" space of its back parlor mattered less than the accommodation of visitors. The city's social elite established the importance of dwellings as social institutions most clearly through the exchange of dinners, teas, receptions, and formal visits that rendered the new domestic standards of an emergent bourgeois class visible to itself. "In fashionable, as in mercantile life," the editor Samuel Woodworth observed in 1824, "there is a regular debit and credit. A paying and receiving of visits, a giving and a going to

parties, and the former are as tenacious and strict in the rules of fashion as the latter are in the transactions of commerce." Furthermore, the observance of codes of conduct that certified good character in domestic society were essential to the transactions of commerce as a collective project.<sup>35</sup>

With the expansion of domestic space and furnishings for entertainment, modern dwellings gained importance in the organization of propertied men's associational activities. Even as the practice of holding private dinners for thirty or more men at taverns or hotels persisted, entertaining associates at home afforded gentlemen new distinction. In his retrospective novel of manners, *Home as Found*, James Fenimore Cooper sketched a typical dinner party: "Two rows of men clad in dark dresses, a solitary female at the head of the table, or if fortunate, with a supporter of the same sex near her, invariably composed the *convives*." When the gentlemen were seated, "the conversation turned on the prices of lots, speculations in towns, or the currency." Women, aside from the hostess, were not commonly included in such dinner parties in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Their absence suggests both the persistence of older customs of male sociability and men's recognition of the particular value of the home to their own business affairs.<sup>36</sup>

In more subtle ways, propertied men used home hospitality to affirm among themselves the continuities of public and private responsibilities, values, and manners. Members of benevolent and political organizations generally assembled at such public sites as Tammany Hall, the New York Institution (the converted almshouse on Chambers Street), hotels, and taverns, but the formal and informal committees that managed these associations were as likely to meet in one another's parlors. Thus in 1818 John Pintard, De Witt Clinton, and Dr. Alexander Hoesack organized a club of "6 to 9 who are to mee[t] every Sat[urda]y ev[ening] probably at each others houses, a *converzazione*, to promote useful objects . . . In these associations the various hints and projects for the benefit of Society can be discussed improved and converted to the best interest of the community." Always sensitive to the power of money alone to define social standing or to inflate the requirements of reciprocal hospitality, Pintard informed his daughter that "to prevent a competition of luxury," the gentlemen had agreed to limit refreshments to "Coffee, sliced Tongue, Saucisson, a pickled Oyster, Wine and porter, with Segars."<sup>37</sup>

If socializing within dwellings permitted propertied men to affirm a sense of mutual obligation and display qualities of magnanimity and character that redounded to their business and civic credit, women had

a greater stake in constructing interlocking codes of public and private respectability. Only as the modern dwelling was understood to be a cultural necessity could women secure their claims on men for the improvement of housing as their workplace. As men used dwellings to form and confirm their business and civic networks, women defined the value of home life in relation to another social institution, the church.

Insofar as New York's oldest established churches oriented themselves primarily to propertied congregations, church and home developed a symbiotic relationship. Elite families that attended Episcopal, Dutch Reformed, and Presbyterian churches purchased church pews as a form of "domestic property" and regarded home prayers as an essential religious observance. Indeed, one might argue that churches helped establish the legitimacy of dwellings that could easily be regarded—in the era of republican simplicity—as undemocratic luxuries. The location of new churches north of the wharf district (starting with St. John's in Hudson Square) readily identified the "moral character" of the new residential districts that sprang up around them. Conversely, New Yorkers viewed the scarcity of churches in the tenant neighborhoods of the Lower East Side as symptomatic of the dangers of working-class immorality.<sup>38</sup>

Though revivals sporadically rechurched men, by the 1820s women dominated New York's congregations, and in their church activities women asserted a public presence that is sometimes lost in historians' projections of social isolation onto the "private sphere." Women organized their own associational life through parlor prayer, Bible reading, and charity meetings, which reinforced the ties between the social duties of home life and religious practice. Confronting an ideological tradition that asserted their natural inferiority, women drew on the cultural authority of religion to articulate new standards by which to measure men's reciprocal obligations to wives and daughters. No less than employers whose evangelicalism promoted disciplined work habits among employees, women sought to link the virtues of male self-discipline and temperance to the benefits of a comfortable home life. And by making home life part of the evidence of disciplined moral character, women elaborated the cultural and material requirements of male maturity.<sup>39</sup>

In the early decades of the nineteenth century the ritual Sunday promenade from church to tea at home symbolized continuities between public and private spaces and values which extended well beyond elite circles. Among the evangelical women and men of more modest merchant, shopkeeping, and artisan families, domestic quarters

accommodated a close congregational life that supported both religious observance and selective social networks. The architect Joseph Probyn, who maintained a ground-floor office in his house, regularly entertained both visiting Baptist ministers and fellow vestrymen in his "upstairs parlor," where they discussed and plotted church affairs. In the 1830s, Michael Floy, a perhaps exceptionally pious young man who in his early thirties became a partner in his father's nursery establishment, attended two Methodist services on Sunday as well as weekly Bible classes; and he taught Sunday school both at his own Bowery Village Church and at African Methodist churches. After services Floy regularly repaired to the parlors of other church members for tea. He and other young adult church members met for prayer meetings and held choir practice and singing parties at their parents' houses. Indeed, the parlors of Methodist church members served as the centers of Michael Floy's flirtatious bachelor social life.<sup>40</sup>

Through such visiting among middling households as well as those of elite families, domestic quarters were "on view" to a larger community. In an earlier generation, many rules of proper conduct—cleanliness and grooming, sobriety, refraining from profanity and spitting, a quiet demeanor—had been reserved for church attendance and observance of the Sabbath, or they had been associated with genteel rank. Such manners took on an everyday life and new codes of behavior were introduced, rehearsed, and disseminated through domestic socializing. "Among the hospitable circles which reciprocate good and cheerful entertainments a man would be marked who should retire intoxicated, indeed, except among the young and jovial, convivial parties are all decent & sober," John Pintard reported to his daughter of one change in manners. Pintard attributed the new restraint to the presence of women and credited this style of domestic entertainment in turn to the French, "who never expell Ladies from the dinner table." But New York women surely asserted their own authority in "importing" such manners to establish and enforce new temperance standards.<sup>41</sup>

In the early decades of the nineteenth-century, New Yorkers (like other Americans) were intensely self-conscious and often critical of domestic rituals or personal manners that smacked of European tastes. Beyond elite circles, much of the home's emerging cultural authority derived from perceptions that new codes of respectability revived, enacted, and recast precepts of family duty, Protestant piety, and republican virtue. But as they had done when the home was defined in opposition to a workplace, New Yorkers of different classes negotiated the meanings of "private" home life in relation to different arenas and forms of public interaction.

The conditions of housekeeping, for example, structured different kinds of public and private continuities for bourgeois and working-class women's activities. On the city's wealthiest clearly bounded residential blocks, town houses pulled back from the street and servants frequently acted as household agents to mediate relations with the neighborhood by performing errands and screening people who came to the door. The conceptual categories that defined the home as a private sphere (while incorporating church, charity, visiting, shopping, entertainment, *and* supervision of waged labor) drew a veil around bourgeois women's housework. The ability to assume that veil "in public" through particular styles of street dress and manners implicitly testified to "private" conditions of home life.

For most New Yorkers in tenant neighborhoods, there was a growing disjuncture between such codes and the conditions of housing, the physical environment in which wives, mothers, landladies, and servants secured household maintenance. The grounds of domestic work space in trade and tenant neighborhoods extended from the house and yard to the street and markets. Tenant women's domestic skills at bargaining for both goods and credit required personal familiarity with the neighborhood's social and economic resources and the "character" of particular shopkeepers and peddlers. Tenant women's housekeeping and socializing activities were thus more readily interchangeable.<sup>42</sup>

Disregard for new rules of feminine propriety worried such observers as the nursery journeyman Michael Floy, who lived in the mixed-trade neighborhood of Bowery Village. Floy used his diary to rehearse social comments that situated his own feelings of respectability by distancing him from neighbors and cohorts. "Every morning we see Mrs. Mountain, bare-headed, dishevelled hair, carrying a great boy in her arms, coming to visit our woman [servant]," he complained. Certain that there was nothing "more odious than to behold an idle gadabout woman visiting the neighbors, carrying about a squalling creature wherever she goes," Floy was especially offended that Mrs. Mountain brought her child with her when she came visiting. "She would be bad enough without the baby, but when we see her wherever she goes lugging about a child in her arms when she ought to be at home, the sight is intolerable; it sickens me completely. Then it is that characters suffer; scandal is dealt out by the mouthful, and the baby in her arms makes her look ten times more hateful."<sup>43</sup>

Household servants who could assist with child care and run errands, of course, permitted a respectable woman to leave her children behind when she went out visiting. And except on Sundays, housewives such as the bareheaded Mrs. Mountain did not observe the

proprieties of dressing "to go out." Such women doubtless observed their own rules and routines as they dropped in at one another's kitchens to exchange gossip and information. But these codes were not organized to be legible to any observer as evidence of a woman's social position—or of the quality of her home life.

In other contexts, the cultural concept of the private home assumed a different meaning. In the city's mixed-trade neighborhoods, the households of small masters and shopkeepers and wage-earning boarders and tenants (situated amid taverns, workshops, and groceries) maintained a sometimes uneasy coexistence as they negotiated the continuities and boundaries of private and public conduct. The "comfortable subsistence" that was replacing trade proprietorship as a marker of male maturity introduced new points of reference in establishing social accountability. The home's "private," "moral" character contrasted with more "public" housing arrangements, particularly boardinghouses, which in their alliance with commercial institutions threatened the traditional authority of household (and trade) hierarchies in maintaining social order.

Although households that took boarders were arrayed along the city's economic ladder, boardinghouses had customarily been identified with transience and youth. Already suffering censure from their association with sailors and wharf-district epidemics, boardinghouses became a dominant housing form within the city's mechanic neighborhoods in the early decades of the nineteenth century. Boarding solved the problems of domestic maintenance for many young single men (and, to a far lesser extent, women) by liberating them from its labor. Boardinghouses frequently accommodated workers of the same trade or nationality, and meals served as an occasion for socializing; but the boardinghouse was less a center of social obligation to many residents than the place for meals and sleep within a daily circuit that included workshop and corner tavern. "The room in which we sleep," the journeyman printer Thomas Chamberlain noted in his diary, "is the back room of the first floor, it contains 2 double beds and 2 single beds, we have a double bed and there is at present three young men besides in the room. The ground floor of the house is a grocery store." Given such quarters, boarders readily turned to neighborhood resources.<sup>44</sup>

Boarding subsumed certain categories of living expenses—housekeeping and furnishings as well as food—into a fixed price. That part of a worker's wage not surrendered for rent formed "disposable income" (ranging from perhaps 50 cents to the traveler Isaac Holmes's generous estimate of \$5 a week for skilled journeymen),<sup>45</sup> which could be saved, spent on clothing and entertainment, gambled, contributed

to the church or other voluntary associations, or shared with family members in the city, in the countryside, or abroad. One category of spending did not of course exclude the others. But boarders used disposable cash to support a system of housing services and recreational pursuits that citizens within their own neighborhoods charged were destroying the republican city's virtue.

A household head of an earlier generation could discipline employees as well as family members. Master artisans as a class set the "moral tone" of trade neighborhoods. When new issues concerning the regulation of public behavior emerged early in the nineteenth century, city officials had initially looked to household heads to preserve order (holding masters responsible, for example, for journeymen's kite flying and shooting of guns). But rapidly expanding numbers of young boarding wage earners were not accountable to employers or parents—or to their boardinghouse landlords—for their public conduct. Their popular amusements—gambling, drinking, cockfights, boxing, bear baiting, fire fighting, and the boisterousness that accompanied these activities—were not new. What was distinctively new was the concentration of young men between the ages of fourteen and twenty-five who had the personal "liberty" to engage in these recreational pursuits.<sup>46</sup>

Through the early decades of the century evangelical artisan householders in the city's mechanic wards (Wards 5, 6, 7, 10, and 14) joined more influential citizens in repeatedly appealing to the Common Council to control young men's rowdiness and disrespect, particularly on Sundays, when churchgoing, the promenade, and labor's day of rest brought New Yorkers together onto the streets. In one typical petition, "proprietors and residents" in the Fourteenth Ward complained of the neighborhood "boys [who] assemble at and about . . . [the fire] Engine House, but more especially . . . of great noise on the Sabbath day, insulting females, and sometimes fighting and using most indecent and profane language."<sup>47</sup>

Artisan householders who may not have identified with bourgeois codes of respectability nonetheless sought to preserve their own moral standards (and particularly their religious values) within their neighborhoods. In 1812, for example, an aldermanic "Committee for Suppressing Immorality," composed of a lawyer, a sailmaker, and a tanner from the predominantly artisan Wards 6, 8, and 10, responded to this constituency as much as to the city's merchants when they investigated a "long and offensive catalogue of abounding immoralities" that included Blue Law violations by grocers and tavernkeepers, Sunday skating, ball playing, and horse racing, and "the Drovers of Youth who on that day resort to the outskirts of the City, and commit depredations on

the property and too frequently insult the persons of the Inhabitants." Though the aldermen acknowledged that one reason for Sunday commercial activity was that "laboring men . . . cannot get pay for their Weeks work until late on Saturday night," the aldermen were as much concerned with the "manifest injustice" to those grocers who did close on Sundays, "inasmuch as they soon lose their most profitable customers." The state legislature responded to the aldermen's request for more stringent laws regulating morality, but even the aldermen had confessed that they were "not so enthusiastic as to believe it within the reach of this Board, or any other Human power to eradicate the vices which usually prevail in populous and commercial Cities."<sup>48</sup>

The tensions between those shopkeepers and artisans who upheld the new codes of public propriety and those who ignored them reveal competing economic interests as well as moral values. Proprietors who sold "home" services as well as shelter to thousands of boarders and tenants depended on young wage earners' spending for their own livelihoods. By 1827, for example, more than three thousand licensed grocers and tavernkeepers provided the city's journeymen and laborers not merely with drink and food but also with heat and amusements lacking in their domestic accommodations. By 1836 the temperance movement had reduced the number of liquor licenses (most precipitously in Wards 6, 8, and 10), but aldermen still charged that there was one licensed tavern for every fifty inhabitants over the age of fifteen. "It is in these places," the aldermen asserted in the common formulation of the era, "that many of the youth of this city are first led from paths of virtue and prepared for a course that must lead to ruin."<sup>49</sup>

In reformers' imagination, virtue's ruin came from mechanics' waste of earnings, abandonment of ambition, and denial of moral obligation. The institutions of journeymen's sociability, the saloons that could be found on virtually every block, operated as wage earners' parlors; and drinking, treating, and games may have fulfilled their own need for rituals of mutuality. But such cultural practices—and indeed whole neighborhoods—that revolved around cash transactions and short-term debts suggested the rejection of long-term goals and commitments. The pursuit of temporary pleasures seemed to undermine a social order constructed on reciprocal duties, an order so readily identified with and orchestrated through the private home.<sup>50</sup>

The tensions raised by young male boarders' "ruin" proved all the more problematic with respect to young single women. The majority of female wage earners worked as domestics and lived under the watchful eyes of their employers. Furthermore, given their wages, other women probably spent in labor, and particularly in sewing late into the night,

the hours that male wage earners spent in entertainment and informal socializing. Rougher neighborhood amusements were restricted to men, but young wage-earning women participated in heterosocial institutions—taverns, dance halls, and Bowery promenades—that served a distinctive working-class sexual economy. The "liberty" of female boardinghouses was readily (and often accurately) associated with prostitution. Within the city's proliferating "parlor house" brothels, even the most sacred of home intimacies was available for a price. Only a proper home life could insulate women and men from the vices of casual exchange and regulate their intimacy.<sup>51</sup>

In the early decades of the century, the sociability of a male boarding youth culture (and such mixed civic and recreational institutions as fire and militia companies) had cut across class lines. By the 1830s, more and more independent artisans (contractors and employers) were locating their homes (often in shared houses) on blocks of like-minded households, particularly on the West Side. This spatial separation further framed the perceptions of the private home as a distinct arena apart from "public" workshops, boardinghouses, and institutions of workers' leisure, including the basement groceries that anchored so many tenant houses.<sup>52</sup>

Older styles of interclass fraternization, particularly when it was thought to be promoted by housing arrangements, also worried wealthier New Yorkers, who feared for the corruption of their sons. Young "gentlemen" who boarded in effect lost their domestic certification of character. "Boarding houses are not *home*. The circle is too large and miscellaneous to be sacred and affectionate." Thus a "bachelor" described to *Mirror* readers the strains of living in a boardinghouse, "always superintended by women whom in most instances poverty and misfortune have driven to this precarious and unhappy occupation." Feeling "ready to resort to any artifice to escape from solitude and self-examination," the boarding bachelor would turn to "theaters, gambling houses, saloons, clubs, a thousand dazzling attractions."<sup>53</sup>

In the 1830s, hotels such as the one built by Seth Greer on Broadway and occupied "by gentlemen exclusively" emerged as an alternative housing institution for single men who valued their reputations. Respectable young couples also turned from boardinghouses to hotels: suites with private parlors permitted exclusive entertaining of visitors while still sparing housekeeping expenses. Hotels regulated their clientele with their prices, and they supported their claims to respectability by offering the latest in domestic conveniences and comforts, ranging from new plumbing to elegant furnishings. On the surface, at least, the trappings signaled their residents' observation of the minimal codes of



propriety. Although most independent households regarded hotels with ambivalence, few doubted the superiority of hotel life to that of boarding.<sup>54</sup>

Far from being a spatially or socially circumscribed "private sphere," the social institution of the home assumed a new public presence in the first half of the nineteenth century. As housing lost its association with a proprietor's rank or trade, New Yorkers turned to new points of reference and situated "the home" between church and saloon, between civic order and public rowdiness. These cultural associations took the home's "private" character as a statement of commitment to public responsibility and morality. The definition and display of respectable home life, by placing individualism within the frame of family duty, offered moral sanction to acquisitive and competitive impulses. Yet this definition of respectability also carried a price. As an earlier generation's housing "luxuries" became "necessities," negotiations over their price and cultural value ranged from the personal contract of marriage to the social contract of community obligation.

### "The Progress of Luxury"

In the nineteenth century, domestic and social duties, Thornstein Veblen observed in his study of conspicuous consumption, became "a species of service performed not so much for the individual behoof of the head of household as for the reputability of the household taken as a corporate unit—a group of which the housewife is a member on a footing of ostensible equality." As managers of a "corporate" household, bourgeois women assumed duties ranging from the nurturing and training of children in what Veblen called the "mandatory codes of decency" to representing family interests and obligations within a larger community. Neither the definition of domestic responsibilities nor the legitimacy of women's claims to an "ostensible equality" in their management of household resources, however, had been obvious in the early nineteenth century. Against the backdrop of new mansions and tenant houses, New York women and men engaged in intense debate over the definition of household "necessities" that established the "reputability" of a corporate unit and the cultural requirements of a new "standard of living."<sup>55</sup>

Often we think about domesticity—the activity within domestic quarters—primarily with reference to a particular stage of the family life cycle, the relation of parents—and especially mothers—to young children. Early-nineteenth-century writers stressed this dimension of

home life in order to revise an earlier generation's view of childhood as a condition to be suppressed. With the demise of apprenticeships and the prolongation of childhood within propertied families, children did assume a new centrality within the corporate unit. But nurturing and training young children constituted only one phase of a household's life cycle, and only one aspect of domesticity. If the creation of nurseries within dwellings suggests the central place of children in antebellum family life, it also points to the practical containment of children's needs and activities within the "new modern" house.<sup>56</sup>

The characterization of the home as a sacred family center emerged in the context of a lively public discussion of the reach, purpose, and effects of new levels of personal investment in domestic property, housekeeping, and entertainment. The very means by which respectable New Yorkers affirmed their shared valuation of independent housekeeping as evidence of social maturity—visiting and hospitality—opened the door to charges that "fashion" was corrupting republican virtue.<sup>57</sup>

Many New Yorkers who had been raised to identify "republican simplicity" as a distinctive American value viewed the increasingly visible private wealth of housing with ambivalence. Welcoming material prosperity, they nonetheless saw a new danger in the importation of "aristocratic" tastes and manners that imparted false measures of self-importance, increased pressures of competition, and drew wealth away from the obligations of civic benevolence. As genteel New Yorkers adopted the use of visiting cards as part of their rituals of social exchange in the 1820s, for example, a correspondent to the *Mirror* complained that "empty ceremony and heartless formality have usurped the place of friendly attention and social intercourse." Answering a gentleman who proposed that the use of visiting cards "answers every purpose of a visit and is far less trouble," the critic thought the custom convenient when confined "to its legitimate use, to obviate the carelessness or forgetfulness of servants, but when made the instrument of idle ceremony and deceitful professions, it's certainly reprehensible and may be classed with the follies and crimes of the age."<sup>58</sup>

Changes in older customs of New Year's visiting in the late 1820s and early 1830s further pointed up internal tensions within the ranks of propertied New Yorkers who were redefining the obligations of social patronage and exchange. Members of old New York families complained that a new generation of "would-be nobility" and "people who have no ancestry themselves" were abandoning open houses and community-wide visiting on January 1. The editor George Morris, a self-appointed arbiter of taste in the 1830s, cited the concern of those

who felt "the custom must be general, or it will be entirely broken up. We must know that wherever we go we shall be welcomed, or else we shall pause before each dwelling with a doubtful and misgiving heart and look in every face for a sign of displeasure." Urging his readers not to "be too indiscriminate in censuring those tastes and wishes not similar to our own," he nonetheless concluded, "if it is the pride of wealth and aristocracy which would destroy this pleasant holiday, then let him who advances against it be known as the enemy of innocent enjoyment."<sup>59</sup>

On January 2, 1837, Philip Hone noted a different problem: "Mr. Lawrence, the Mayor, kept open house yesterday, according to the custom from time immemorable, but the manners as well as the times have sadly changed." In contrast to a time when "one out of twenty perhaps [took] a single glass of wine or cherry bounce," the New Year's visitors "used his house as a Five Points tavern," and the ensuing brawl prompted the mayor to call the police and close his house.<sup>60</sup>

Against such anxieties over fashionable circles' "pride of wealth" on the one hand and the "common man's" disrespect on the other, the image of the intimate family hearth imparted a transcendent social value to dwellings, one that existed independently of a stratified society shaped by market forces. Then, too, such a focus on the familial virtues of dwellings drew attention away from the problematic presence, importance, and strains of unrelated household members (whether servants or boarders) within most houses.

Yet another specifically familial concern and ambition—the desire to "place" young adult children in society—motivated and structured many of the rituals of home hospitality and entertainment. In a city where leading merchants had for over a century defined their collective interests and loyalties through kinship ties, the tensions that accompanied the definition of new standards of respectable housekeeping became most apparent in the negotiations to establish new homes, particularly in the marriage market. Few women or men in the volatile economy of the early nineteenth century could afford to embrace the romantic ideal of marriage for love and companionship irrespective of material considerations. Ambitious young men saw in "successful" marriage an avenue for social mobility. Since marriage determined the future conditions of their labor, young women sought to preserve or improve upon the domestic gains of their mothers, and to protect their reputation and any property they brought with them. Parents, having long since lost the power to select their children's partners, nonetheless took responsibility for arranging "opportunities" for suitable introductions and acquaintances.<sup>61</sup>

For many evangelical New Yorkers, the link between church and home provided the best prospects for identifying suitable mates. Michael Floy's diary regularly referred to courting activity at parlor prayer meetings and singing parties. Intensely self-conscious about his own prospects, Floy took to heart his father's admonition that it "was the business of women to study men's character." When he met his own future wife at church, Floy conducted the courtship by escorting her home to tea after services. Yet Floy also had to overcome obstacles: her parents slept in the front "parlor" room, so that it was necessary to continue the courtship in the evenings outside the front door.<sup>62</sup>

Earlier, as he shopped around for a wife, Floy's doubts about one woman's domestic virtues had led him to break an engagement. Other negotiations over the formation of new homes landed in the courts, where juries weighed and evaluated the "affections engaged, expectations excited, and future prospects blasted" upon the breaking of engagements. In one particularly prominent case, the mantua maker Jane Mount sued James Bogert for \$10,000 in damages for failure to fulfill his promise of marriage. From 1807 to 1816, Bogert, the middle-aged son of a wealthy merchant, had conducted his courtship by visiting Mount in the parlors of houses in which she boarded and by escorting her home from church services. But Bogert's family and friends worried that he was being duped. When his father died and left him a fortune, they urged him to break off his "engagement." Jane Mount's lawyers brought a series of witnesses who testified to Bogert's unflinching devotion to the mantua maker as she moved from house to house, and the judge noted in his instructions that "heavy and exemplary damages ought to be awarded" when the breach of a civil contract "could be inferred from the circumstances." But the case had extenuating circumstances. The defendant's witnesses testified that Mount had repeatedly "ridiculed and reviled" her suitor, thereby calling into doubt the validity of a contract that required parties to "mutually agree" to its terms. Deciding that Bogert's attentions had indeed established Mount's expectations but that her conduct could not be regarded as that "of a woman towards a man who had engaged to make her his wife," the jury awarded her only \$400 in damages.<sup>63</sup>

The marriage market of the city's wealthy, self-conscious "society" revolved around a winter season, "with Balls Theatres Concerts and private parties," which, John Pintard complained during the panic of 1819, abounded "in proportion to the pecuniary embarrassments of the country." Pintard worried about his younger daughter's position and prospects within this world, "for such is the state of Society here, that a young lady, without money, has a hopeless prospect of a settlement,

no personal merits can compensate for this difficulty." Pintard was relieved that family connections could serve his daughter. Reporting that a Brasher cousin "who has grown up a very genteel youth and very correct" had escorted Mrs. Pintard and Louisa to the theater, he expressed hope that "next season he will be able to act a brothers part and attend Sister to such parties and places as may introduce her a little into Society." Nonetheless, Pintard saw "but little benefit, in the way of matches, resulting from all these public fairs where young ladies are exhibited for market." Of the 1819 winter of "extravagant entertainments," he bitterly concluded, "The Beauty of it is, that not a single marriage, of all the young ladies exposed for sale, at these entertainments has taken place this season." The men were "too profligate," and "the young ladies too extravagant to admit of matches," Pintard observed, and recalling the conditions of his own courtship, he looked "with astonishment on the changes of habits, the progress of luxury and conception of morals that have taken place in my day."<sup>64</sup>

Pintard need not have worried. Louisa married a cotton merchant, Thomas Servoss, whom she met while visiting her sister in New Orleans. Furthermore, in his mid-sixties Pintard finally achieved the long-sought "sweet independence" of a private house: in 1828 he and his wife moved with Louisa and Thomas Servoss to a \$13,000 three-story dwelling at the corner of Broome and Crosby streets. Thus he escaped the "prison" of Wall Street, which he had declared was "no longer a residence for females." For Elizabeth Brasher Pintard, however, "the change from a housekeeper to an inmate" did not represent the same achievement. "For myself I feel quite easy and comfortable under [Mr. Servoss's] roof," Pintard told Eliza, "and regret most poignantly that poor dear Mothers pride of Independence does not permit her to do the same." As tensions mounted with her son-in-law, Elizabeth Pintard "persist[ed] to go to housekeeping again," and two years later Pintard reluctantly announced that he "would make every effort to gratify her," though he himself wished that "instead of housekeeping, plague of servants & all the worrying incident thereto, . . . she wd consent to go to lodging in some neat family, where our comfort wd be greater, & our expenses defined."<sup>65</sup>

For all the particular anxieties of his personal situation, Pintard was not alone in his anger at the "progress of luxury" or in his frustrations at marital tensions that arose over the meaning of domestic independence. From the early decades of the century, rising housekeeping expenses and the inherent antagonism between "extravagant women" and "profligate men" recurred as themes in an expanding literature of domesticity. Newspaper articles and stories opposed the new

requirements of maintaining a respectable dwelling to the traditional male prerogative of controlling family property. "The really prudent and somewhat homebred man," the editor Samuel Woodworth warned in 1824, "feels obliged to relinquish the idea of marriage altogether or defer it to a later period because it is justly considered a hazard to many on the score of supporting the expenses of modern living."<sup>66</sup> Though committed to and profiting from the cultural construction of the home, men seem also to have resented the ascendancy of dwellings as social institutions that claimed a substantial share of household income and a public status equal to that of business, religion, or government.

More often than not, women were blamed for the new expenses of housekeeping; "many a female, because she has been educated at boarding-school[,] returns, not to assist her mother but to support her pretensions to gentility." Though few commentators doubted the necessity of servants to do heavy household labor, "gentility" connoted social ambitions that pushed households into social obligations they could not readily afford, at the expense of more practical contributions to home comfort, even to subsistence. An educated daughter, having tasted the pleasures of an expanded cultural life, would not willingly retreat back into the position of dutiful housewife: "She conceives herself to be degraded by domestic occupation and expects to lose her credit if she is known to be industrious." Such a daughter's ambition was, the *Mirror* noted, "an evil which pervades all classes in some degree, but which is peculiarly injurious to those of the middle ranks."<sup>67</sup>

Men of the middle ranks denounced what they regarded as women's susceptibility to the seductions of new household luxuries. In 1811 a "tradesman" wrote to the *Independent Mechanic* to share his story of domestic woes. During his courtship he had announced his prospects and "entreated" his fiancée "to maturely consider whether she would be content to live in the manner that she might expect." But after three months of marriage, when visiting took her into houses that displayed Turkish carpets instead of rag rugs, muslin rather than calico curtains, china in place of pottery, and painted rush-bottom chairs, his wife had announced that she was "quite ashamed to ask a few ladies to tea" and that "every article in the house [was] . . . a disgrace to a decent family." When the tradesman decided "to lock up money, and forbid her to run me in to debt," his wife had in effect gone on strike. "She discharged our servant girl, declaring that if she could not appear like a Christian (as she termed it) she would not be seen out of the house, and would be completely the mope I wanted her." Insisting that his wife's desires for domestic amenities and fashionable clothing were

"unbecoming a tradesman's wife," the husband nonetheless found that he was now "ashamed that any one should see her." Her revenge expressed her "total disregard" both for his happiness and for "the opinion of the world at large."<sup>68</sup>

Female authors frequently drew on the language of republican virtue and domestic economy "to vindicate [women's] character from illiberal aspersions." In their eyes, women's claims to a comfortable home life opposed rather than promoted the temptations of new wealth on the one hand and of moral dissipation on the other. They charged that untrustworthy men looked only to marry women with property and then squandered the family's resources in gambling, drinking, and speculation. Thus in advising one another on "how to choose a husband," they denounced the seductions of male flattery and insisted that women had a right to investigate a husband's economic standing. And in what quickly emerged as a new literary genre, women wrote fiction and advice manuals that provided hints for efficient household organization, demonstrating how a wife might "save the fruits of [her husband's] labor and by her industry add to their little income."<sup>69</sup>

✓ The prescriptive literature of domesticity, then, must be understood as an ongoing "contractual" debate between women and men over the allocation and management of household resources. This debate began as a process of reconceptualizing household property and labor relations between spouses who expected to achieve a comfortable subsistence. The strains of marital negotiations prompted a growing consciousness of women's vulnerability to men's control of household resources and led some women to question for the first time their economic dependency. At the same time, the blame directed toward women who asserted an "ostensible equality" of interest and authority in the organization of housing and home life also directed attention away from larger social and economic changes. Wealth was viewed as a problem of social competition and inflated ambitions rather than as a problem of the powers of appropriation. Thus reflecting on the "fatal inroads of want and distress" during the 1829 recession, the *Mirror* identified the "wasteful expenditure of money" by the rich, "imitated by the next descending ranks," as the cause of poverty and urged wealthier New Yorkers to set an example of "prudence, economy, and temperance." "Extravagance is the ruling evil—indulgence in sensuality the prevailing vice. These must be corrected. The poor will want less—the rich will have more. The former will not then experience the degradation of suing for relief—the latter the mortification of denying it."<sup>70</sup>

If women and men in the city's middling ranks struggled over the economic claims and social authority of "the home," comparable

tensions emerged among women and men whose household budgets had less margin to support such quarrels. When a workingman retained primary control over the family's cash and household goods, his food, drink, and recreation could come at the expense of his wife's and children's clothing and food. Examining the extreme cases of wife assault and even murder, the historian Christine Stansell concludes that in court "records of most domestic quarrels, conflicts over practical household arrangements unleashed men's rage." In the less extreme case, working-class "boys' " sport of insulting well-dressed ladies aired hostility toward women who implicitly set the terms for manhood by displaying their own material standards and expectations for "respectable" womanhood.<sup>71</sup>

Cultural negotiations over women's and men's "domestic" obligations to each other spilled over into interpretations of the social meaning of domestic arrangements throughout the city. When high rents kept housekeeping conditions from meeting literary prescriptions, tensions over "the expenses of modern living" revealed especially the vulnerability of the city's middling families to their own investment in "the opinion of the world at large." Thus, although James Fenimore Cooper had confidently declared in his *Notions of the Americans* that "no American who is at all comfortable in life will share his dwelling with another," by the 1830s many New Yorkers who prided themselves on having achieved a comfortable subsistence nonetheless shared houses with other families. Evangelical families such as the Floys could invoke religious principles to reject "fashion"; families of "tradesmen" could call forth values of republican simplicity and economy; the *Mirror* could denounce "empty ceremony." Yet in their very vulnerability, the city's middling ranks looked to the values of respectable home life to clarify their distance from the thousands of New Yorkers who exercised even less control over the conditions of housing.<sup>72</sup>

Amidst ongoing personal quarrels over the expenses of modern living, middling New Yorkers turned to two social rituals—promenades and visiting the poor—to affirm and enact their common domestic values. "Our public promenades are becoming more fashionable," announced the *Mirror* in 1825. The Sunday stroll had taken on new life as a secular amusement. The *Mirror* vigorously campaigned for the Common Council's improvement of the Battery, which quickly became a place of "popular resort." To families whose parlors and neighborhoods fell short of prescription, promenades offered an alternative arena of "visiting" and structured spontaneous encounters on "safe ground." Self-conscious promenade crowds maintained codes of propriety—from proper dress to rituals for introductions—that had evolved alongside domestic hospitality. Indeed, modern dwellings provided both a

touchstone and a backdrop for this public ritual. Instructing its readers in the rules of the promenade (keep to the right), the *Mirror* recommended sites that would "repay the admirers of fine scenery." "It is not known to all our townsmen that the spot formerly occupied by Vauxhall gardens is at present converted into a spacious and stately street, ornamented with the most costly private dwelling houses," it advised. "These structures attract crowds of spectators, and are deservedly objects of attention." The *Mirror's* editors were confident that figuratively and literally, New Yorkers would unite in their admiration of modern dwellings that defined their common standards and goals.<sup>73</sup>

The custom of visiting the poor, which also assumed a new ritual form in the 1820s and 1830s, further allowed respectable New Yorkers to define their own minimum standards of "moral" home life. Although men led such key charities as the Society for the Prevention of Pauperism, women organized their own societies for relieving widows and orphans, advocating temperance, and campaigning against prostitution. Expressing some sense of gender loyalty in their charity work on behalf of "indigent females," respectable women also used benevolence to articulate and defend their own expectations and claims to men's support. Moral reform campaigns extended inextricably linked home and religious duties to the civic arena and found evidence for the depravity of the city's laboring classes in their "domestic habits." Perceptions of the quality of home life as evidence of moral quality structured class interactions by permitting "respectable" New Yorkers to define "undeserving" tenant families as outside the community of mutual obligation.<sup>74</sup>

Systematically excluded from many of the benefits of a new "standard of living," New York's laboring families preferred, when possible, independent poverty to the charity of reformers who in visiting—often without invitation or notice—determined recipients' worthiness by observing their domestic habits. Poor families exercised little control over domestic property; they lived in a world of cash, credit, and personal property—possessions that gained much of their value from their ability to be traded, pawned, or sold. Living within budgets that constantly forced choices between purchases of food, fuel, furnishings, clothing, and entertainment, wage-earning families often rejected middle-class prescriptions. Household furnishings mattered less than clothing and shoes; hospitality within tenant houses followed different codes, and clothing could provide more efficient heating than fuel and a more readily visible expression of self-esteem.<sup>75</sup>

Despite visitors' insistence on home life as evidence of moral character, laboring New Yorkers could not afford to rest their own feelings of

social respect on housing conditions. The poor, after all, knew the social circumstances of their own poverty: the death that had removed an essential family member from the household economy; low wages whose value diminished further in the face of high rents and expensive fuel; restrictions of employment based on race and nationality. And knowing their employers, they probably understood the extent to which the value of their own labor was realized in someone else's virtuous home life. Poor New Yorkers had other means of affirming common loyalties and obligations, ranging from the camaraderie of saloons and street life to Afro-Americans' churches. Yet the bourgeois cultural definition of a proper home life—building on and recasting the republican language of personal independence, male protection, female virtue, and corporate family interests—became a powerful concept, one that introduced new ways of measuring the legitimacy of claims to public respect and assistance.

"A standard of living is of the nature of habit," Veblen observed.<sup>76</sup> Those standards included habits of interpretation as well as of consumption. The transition to industrial capitalism did not deliver an improved standard of living on a silver platter. New Yorkers in the first quarter of the nineteenth century struggled to define the necessary ingredients of their own self-respect and particularly the cultural value of "independent housekeeping." By placing the conflicting economic interests of domestic employers and servants, landlords and boarders, husbands and wives, and rich and poor within the frame of morality, they clarified their own standards of judgment as well as of need. Interpreted as a measure of personal virtue, proper home life became the social yardstick that marked out the distance between the city's "respectable" citizens and its laboring classes.

Even as respectable New Yorkers were acquiring the habit of explaining social inequality as the consequence of moral failings, they saw in deteriorating tenant neighborhoods a larger threat to their own values. The Democrat Asa Green satirically pointed to housing's status as the emblem of social order when he proposed a remedy to the riots that had marked the 1830s in New York City. He reminded readers of his 1837 city guide of the riot act:

I charge ye all, no more foment  
This feud, but keep the peace . . .  
And to those places straight repair  
Where your respective dwellings are.

"Were a magistrate in New York to read the riot act out in the words of

our model," Green concluded, "it might safely be answered: 'We have no "dwellings," how then can we repair to them?' Those who have houses of their own are seldom inclined to leave them for the purpose of demolishing the houses of their neighbors." By the late 1840s, a Whig editor saw more radical implications in the housing relations of working-class neighborhoods. "An immense proportion of the present misery of the poor," he insisted, "arises from the associated community—the practical *Fourierism* in which they are forced to live and which does far more than any other cause to destroy those feelings of attachment and of moral responsibility, which belong to the idea of the home."<sup>77</sup>

The "progress of luxury" had found its justification in the "idea of the home." Yet the habit of mind that understood modern dwellings as institutions of public order itself was formed by debates that arose when government officials, developers, and wealthy householders carried the precepts of private home life into public policy. In the face of a public campaign to improve the *city's* "character" and with it the value of real estate, housing's republican meaning as an institution of independent livelihood gave way to the "liberal" equation of respectability and prosperity.

## CHAPTER 5

### Public, Private, and Common: The Regulation of Streets and Neighborhoods

"I AM WELL PERSUADED that the plans now in progress by our [municipal] corporation for ornamenting and improving the city must meet the approbation of every person who feels an interest in its character and prosperity," a "communication" to the *Mirror* observed in 1826. "It is indeed gratifying to perceive the evidence of a more enlightened view and a more liberal spirit than were prevalent at former and even some more recent periods."<sup>1</sup>

Such confidence in a "more liberal spirit" came from many directions in the 1820s. With the adoption of universal white manhood suffrage, democratic republicans dismantled the political privileges of landed property and rank. Economically, the opening of the state-sponsored Erie Canal spurred the development of western markets and launched a decade of economic expansion in New York City. Descriptions of "the age of egalitarianism" often conflate the liberalism of democratic politics and laissez-faire economics, but we do well to note contradictory "liberal" tendencies in these two developments, a contradiction pointed up by the object of the *Mirror* correspondent's praise. In applauding "a more enlightened view" he was referring not to the withdrawal of government from the workings of the market but to the municipal corporation's expanded program for building new streets, promenades, and squares. And this "liberal"—generous—public intervention in the city's spatial economy marked an expanded conception of local government's responsibility in organizing the city landscape to accommodate citizens' needs.

In the context of the Revolution, republicans had opposed their vision of commonwealth to the inherited privileges associated with imperial rule. And for a generation following the Revolution (the "former period" noted by the *Mirror's* correspondent) the meaning and

political organization of the commonwealth—and particularly the relation of proprietorship and political rights—remained subjects of intense debate. New Yorkers who advocated abolition of the political privileges attached to landownership also expressed new confidence in the power of an unregulated market to preserve access to real property as the means of personal and civic independence. Thus, in intervening in the local spatial economy, the street commissioners who designed the grid had envisioned a city landscape that would accommodate a mixed petty proprietary and commercial economy and facilitate the circulation of all commodities, including land and housing. The “utility” of the 1811 grid lay in its assertion of social and political neutrality.

The adoption of universal white manhood suffrage further denied freeholders’ claims to special privileges and special virtues in determining state policy and the public good. But if landownership could no longer establish political status, it continued to shape local political practices. In the 1820s, domestic property—housing—assumed a new preeminence in the real estate market, in the lives of propertied New Yorkers, and in local governmental policy. And popularly elected city officials (Whigs and Democrats alike) found a new utility in the government’s promotion of local economic expansion through public improvements—new or widened streets and open squares—which enhanced particular residential neighborhoods and raised aggregate land values. This utilitarian policy assigned status to land and housing not as a means or measure of personal independence but as a vital investment sector of the city’s commercial economy; and it embraced a vision of houses and neighborhoods organized not as productive resources but as social settings that testified to residents’ moral character.

Precisely because on its face the abolition of the propertied franchise opened the political process to egalitarian possibilities, we must examine how negotiations over the uses of state authority entered into the construction of new property and housing relations. Propertied New Yorkers who competed within the real estate market pursued often antagonistic strategies to maximize their individual gains. But the use of state power—particularly when local government laid claim to the legitimacy of a larger “public interest”—offered one means of coordinating and arbitrating individual and class interests in the organization of the city’s social geography.

In the same way that householders, developers, and journalists defined the respectability of dwellings by contrasting them with multi-tenant housing, bourgeois New Yorkers measured the city’s value as a place to do business and reside by contrasting its amenities with those of other cities, particularly of European capitals. Whatever the arguments on behalf of government disengagement from the economy, in

practice public improvement policies in the 1820s and 1830s sanctioned and even subsidized elite residential development and condoned the omission of new amenities and utilities in working-class neighborhoods. These policies, which saw an interlocking public good in encouraging respectable home life and rising land values, bore down on the household and neighborhood economies of the city’s wage-earning people. With the intersecting vocabularies of “character” and “prosperity” so characteristic of housing discussions emerging again and again in proposals to reshape the public landscape, that unity of conception revealed a darker side of New York City’s “liberal spirit.”

Even as developers, householders, and city officials argued for the “public” benefit of ornamented residential neighborhoods and rising land values, poor New Yorkers gave new shape to an older concept of common rights—the rights of citizens not to be excluded from the benefits of community resources. In the 1820s and 1830s, propertyless New Yorkers’ practice of common rights, their use of the streets to extract a living from unlicensed peddling, prostitution, foraging, gambling, or theft, prompted aldermen to adopt new strategies to enforce public authority and private property rights. Thus city officials introduced redevelopment policies to eliminate older impoverished tenant neighborhoods that relied on the street economy’s marginal (and “immoral”) pursuits and implicitly contradicted a city improvement program premised on the correlation of character and prosperity. Yet, in the end, these early slum-clearance efforts also revealed a larger contradiction that stood at the heart of the city’s emerging social landscape: for some landowners and landlords, the “immoral” conditions of poverty had become a source of prosperity.

In order to understand local government’s role in the formation of capitalist property and housing relations, we must first examine the political faith that a redefinition of the political public—the “commonalty” of New York City—would open that polity to all white men, unite them in an understanding of shared public and private goals, and remove the question of landed property’s social power from the political agenda. This faith emerged in the process of local political negotiation at the very moment when real estate was assuming a new centrality within the local economy.

*“The Nature of Government Must Change”:  
Redefining the Commonalty*

Although we associate American revolutionary politics with the formation of a new nation-state, the constitution of republican sovereignty

also transformed the structure of the local polity. Charters issued by royal governors in 1686 and 1730 had constituted New York City's political public as a closed municipal corporation composed of the "Mayor, Aldermen and Commonalty of the City." "Commonalty" was not an inclusive term: in order to gain membership in the corporation and the right to vote in city elections, a man was required to own land or pay a fee to become a "freeman," a status granted to artisans whose skills were essential to the colonial port economy. Nor was the municipal corporation viewed primarily as an agent of governance. The chief responsibility of its officers, as it had been for directors of the West Indies Company, was to organize and administer the town's infrastructure—its streets, docks, and markets—in such a way as to promote and facilitate imperial trade. "The strength and increase of our good subjects in . . . our frontier province of New York," Governor John Montgomerie had reasoned in his 1730 charter, "does in great measure depend on the welfare and prosperity of our said city, wherein the trade and navigation thereof are chiefly and principally carried on . . . and we . . . are very desirous and willing to give encouragement to the said city."<sup>2</sup>

Toward the goal of developing the colonial port, charters had endowed the municipal corporation with extensive property—exclusive rights in common lands and in shoreline water lots that accommodated slips and wharves. Public authority derived primarily from management of these municipal properties, and most public revenues came from license fees and quitrents. Elected and appointed officials had promoted and regulated the port's expansion by issuing conditional grants, leases, and licenses; by directing the construction of streets, wharves, and markets; and by restricting traffic obstructions or "public" nuisances. Proprietors, who reaped the dividends of port development, paid for the construction of streets and wharves that adjoined their land. Though the city corporation had been chartered primarily to serve the interests of an "imperial class" of English officials and merchants, its operation, like that of the colonial system as a whole, was instrumental in the formation of New York's local ruling class. The development of water lots into wharves and landfilled streets had especially merged the interests of the municipal corporation and the city's merchant elite.<sup>3</sup>

The imported English practice of assigning public welfare and disciplinary responsibilities to church officials and householders limited the obligations of the municipal corporation to the city's propertyless residents. The Anglican church administered the almshouse and, through church wardens, managed outdoor relief to needy New Yorkers who

could demonstrate that they were legitimately "settled" within the community. Municipal authorities also looked to the household system of governance and the authority of household heads to preserve public order. Every householder in the mid-eighteenth century, for example, was expected to contribute to the maintenance of the night watch by assigning household members to perform that duty.<sup>4</sup>

Colonial New Yorkers had understood membership in the "commonalty" as a status analogous to that of a shareholder in a chartered corporation. In the context of the Revolution, however, "public" acquired a more inclusive and generalized meaning. In forming Committees for Public Safety, for example, patriots implicitly identified and claimed sovereignty on behalf of a commonalty that extended beyond chartered or enfranchised status. In New York, it was just this implication of an open citizenry that prompted conservative patriots to reconfirm New York City's royal charter in the 1777 state constitution, that is, to preserve the autonomy and privileges of the closed municipal corporation. Yet the ascendancy of republican theories of commonwealth also prompted a redefinition of the relationship of the public corporation, the sovereign state, and city residents. Fearful of New Yorkers "who viewed corporate power as inherently corrupt," the historian Hendrik Hartog has argued, late-eighteenth-century municipal officials sought state legislative sanction for their right to determine the common good and to govern the republican city.<sup>5</sup>

In many respects, the scope of the Common Council's activities and public authority did not change significantly with the republican shift from an administrative to a governing identity. Minutes of the Board of Aldermen in the four decades following the Revolution suggest the breadth of regulatory powers derived from the mercantile tradition. City officials licensed butchers, carters, and boardinghouse keepers; rented out market stalls; hired inspectors of wood, meat, flour, and lime; maintained the assize on bread; granted ferry and carting franchises; issued ordinances on the removal of refuse, the filling of sunken lots, and the construction of new wharves and streets; and responded to a steady stream of petitions for appointments, tax and assessment relief, and dispensations. Thus aldermen continued to manage local markets alongside public properties. Still, the Common Council's operation as a representative body rather than a closed corporation changed the conception of local government and posed new questions regarding city residents' rights to participate in the political process.<sup>6</sup>

The reach of municipal regulatory powers had long supported a system of political patronage and deference—the constant brokerage of favors, votes, jobs, and influence—which in turn organized the local



political process into factional competition. In the context of the Revolution, however, political factions engaged in a larger debate over the nature of the polity itself, and particularly over the definition and reach of democratic political rights. By the late 1790s, New York Federalists and Democratic-Republicans (Jeffersonians) engaged in bitter struggles to control the state legislature and the municipal corporation (as well as the national government). Seeking to affix a clear and dangerous social identity to their political opponents, each group addressed the meaning of property relations in the definition of citizenship. Jeffersonian merchants and artisans accused Federalists of being aristocrats who betrayed republican principles by preserving landed and monopolistic privileges, including the propertied franchise. Federalist "gentlemen of property and standing" in turn charged that liberal republican leaders, disregarding the distinctions of property, would unleash the mob.<sup>7</sup>

As debates over opening the political public to propertyless citizens moved from the high ground of party principle to the low ground of party interest, practical victory on either side depended on recruiting loyal followers who elected party leaders. Even as they debated property qualifications and the status of "freemen," both Federalists and Jeffersonians showed their willingness to manipulate the New York City franchise to serve their own political ends. Thus Federalist mayors effectively abolished the category of unpropertied municipal voters by refusing to grant freeman status to new city artisans.<sup>8</sup> And since men who held land in more than one ward customarily voted for more than one alderman, Jeffersonians tried to enlist additional voters through joint ownership schemes. Thus in 1801 Federalist aldermen contested Jeffersonian votes in the Fourth Ward, where thirty-nine "tenants in common" jointly purchased a house just before the election to qualify as voters; and in the Fifth Ward seventy-four "freeholders" had claimed equal shares of a house valued at \$4,000 to meet the \$50 property requirement. Only after heated debate did a Federalist majority on the Board of Aldermen disallow these "combinations."<sup>9</sup>

Aldermen's further efforts that year to examine the qualifications of voters whose claims to proprietorship were tied up in family estates or debt exposed other practical problems with freeholding as a definitive political condition. What was the "stake in property" that established a claim to political rights? Could a man vote if he possessed a vested remainder in fee on his mother's life estate in real property? No. Could he vote if property had been conveyed to his mother in trust for him? Yes. Could a man vote if he had contracted to purchase property and paid £20 "as interest on the purchase money which he considered part

of the consideration"? No. Could he vote if he had paid the purchase money for a deed executed in another grantee's name? Yes. The 1801 "scrutiny" of contested voters revealed the ambiguities of membership in the commonalty and the uncertainties of propertied status as a measure of a man's public worth.<sup>10</sup>

The political privileges of landownership were giving way in the face of market relations that ideologically served republican affirmations of equal access to proprietary independence and pragmatically undermined the condition—and hence the authority—of absolute proprietorship. Yet perhaps what is most striking about such controversies was the ease with which leaders of both parties abandoned political principles derived from a landed social order in the interest of expanding the base of public power.

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, propertyless men—with the support of party leaders seeking their votes—continued to struggle for admission to the sovereign public, for the full rights and powers of citizenship. At New York's 1821 constitutional convention, debates over the abolition of property qualifications for the state senate franchise echoed earlier Federalist-Jeffersonian exchanges. Thus Chancellor James Kent, a Federalist, conjured up the danger of "men of no property, together with the crowds of dependents connected with great manufacturing and commercial establishments, and the motley and undefinable population of crowded ports" dominating the Legislature. "The tendency of universal suffrage," he concluded, "is to jeopardize the rights of property and the principles of liberty."<sup>11</sup> Still, much of the groundwork for democratic arguments on behalf of opening New York's political public to all white men had been laid by the market dissolution of traditional meanings of landed property.

If all adult men had *access* to land, the status of being propertied or unpropertied did not represent a fundamental or permanent—and hence politically meaningful—social division. Nor, within Democratic-Republican thought, did those two opposed conditions necessarily represent opposed interests. "The desire of acquiring property is a universal passion," declared the delegate David Buel, Jr. Given this common ambition, Buel dismissed the Federalist "supposition that, at some future day, when the poor shall become numerous, they may imitate the radicals of England or the jacobins of France; that they may rise, in the majesty of their strength, and usurp the property of the landholders." Such a specter was "so unlikely to be realized," Buel confidently concluded, that "before [it] can happen, wealth must lose all its influence; public morals must be destroyed; and the nature of our government changed."<sup>12</sup>

For Buel and other advocates of abolishing land-based political privileges, private property's claim on the state ended with the right to be "made secure," and such a basic right did not require special representation. Nor could it claim special virtue. Affirming that all men's aspiration to proprietary independence within the commonwealth would unite them as a public, delegates to New York's 1821 constitutional convention voted to enfranchise adult male taxpayers and those who had served in the militia. For purposes of taxation and voting, owning personal property was as good as owning land.<sup>13</sup>

The new constitution, however, introduced one exception. Delegates imposed a new property qualification of \$250 on Afro-American male voters. The intention of disenfranchising all black men was evident; the particular requirement "add[ed] mockery to injustice," charged a dissenting delegate, since the convention knew that "with rare exceptions, [blacks] have not the means of purchasing a freehold." Prohibited for nearly a century to own property, New York's Afro-Americans had secured the legal right to devise or inherit land only in 1809. The majority of the delegates, however, implicitly endorsed the position that when blacks were not "permitted to a social intercourse with the whites . . . the distinction of color is well understood. . . . It is unnecessary to disguise it, and we ought to shape our constitution to meet the public sentiment." Whatever the appeal to racist sentiments, the 1821 constitution itself defined the distinction of color as one of property.<sup>14</sup>

Whether proclaiming men's "natural rights" to the property of their own labor while condoning slavery until 1827 or imposing property barriers to exclude free blacks from citizenship, New York republicans' investment in white supremacy contradicted their own highest egalitarian aspirations. By mandating Afro-Americans' inferior political status, delegates especially accommodated the "public sentiment" of city craft workers who feared labor competition and of city householders who desired a cheap, "servile" domestic labor force. It was not the only contradiction in egalitarian thought, but surely at that historical moment—the moment at which the issue was confronted—the very confidence that property qualifications would effectively exclude blacks from the polity exposed New Yorkers' determination to maintain their social hierarchy in the face of a new "democratic" political order. That is to say, at that moment delegates self-consciously reached back to the conventions of landed society to make political rights contingent on economic power.

Fifty years of debate over the political status of proprietorship culminated in 1826 with the New York State Legislature's passage of universal white manhood suffrage. In New York City, a new charter

further opened the municipal corporation by providing for the popular election of the mayor. With the exception made on the basis of race, the overt rule of landed property for men had come to an end.<sup>15</sup>

In New York City, however, landed interests continued to define and determine the "public interest." As the delegate David Buel had predicted, the very nature of government restricted the reach of local popular sovereignty. The political authority of propertied citizens stemmed in part from the mercantile origins of the municipal corporation itself, particularly the long-standing identification of local governance with the maintenance of the municipal corporation's properties and the city's commercial infrastructure. How public officials fulfilled their obligation to organize streets, wharves, and markets was a matter of immediate concern to the city's traders, who transported goods, and to adjacent proprietors, who both bore the costs and reaped the financial benefits of government's actions in organizing the built environment.

Traditional mercantilist understandings of the municipal corporation's public duties and authority intersected with new perceptions of the Common Council as the representative body not simply of voters but of taxpayers. By the 1820s, municipal finance had shifted from rents and fees collected from public properties to taxes on private property. The legitimacy of local governments' actions depended on the broad consent of citizens whose money supported public expenditures. Despite propertyless white men's participation in city elections, merchants, proprietors, and taxpayers maintained the closed character of the local political process by controlling the agenda, budget, and policies of city government.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1821 constitutional debates, Martin Van Buren, though rejecting Chancellor Kent's arguments on behalf of the property franchise, had pragmatically acknowledged that landed interests would remain at the core of politics. "Basing representation on property," he had argued, was desirable only "to protect property against property. . . . It is when improvements are contemplated at the public expense and when for those and other objects, new impositions are to be put upon property, then it is that the interest of different sections of the [city] come into contact—and then it is that their respective weight in the legislature becomes important to them."<sup>17</sup> Propertied citizens did not need protection from propertyless voters; because people without property were not subject to government's "impositions," their claims on government's powers would remain marginal. Different "sections" of propertied New Yorkers, in contrast, engaged in intense competition over state policies that directly impinged on their material interests.

Within a government organized to arbitrate the competition of "property against property," how did propertyless New Yorkers (including women and children) make claims on the social resources that sustained the city's political economy? Their labor produced much of the city's "common" wealth, but the nature of government restricted their political claims. Despite the bold experiment of the Working Men's Party in 1829, journeymen and laborers who formed the ranks of the Jacksonian party looked primarily to local government—as they had done for half a century—for job patronage. Or they campaigned for public services (free schools) or protections (lien legislation) that only indirectly addressed the shifting balance of economic power. The historical and constitutional definition of local government's limited powers and responsibilities, the party system, and workingmen's own commitment to private property constrained both the organization and the expression of the overt class politics that posed propertyless against propertied in antebellum New York City.<sup>18</sup>

In a sense, then, the arguments of advocates of universal white male suffrage were borne out. The emerging social antagonisms of the market economy, between employers and workers, landlords and tenants, did not move onto the formal political agenda as *overt* issues that fell within the range of legitimate governmental action. Still, by their very presence within the community and through the occupation and uses of space, growing numbers of propertyless New Yorkers exerted indirect pressures on the process of city government and on the political negotiations of property against property. As housing conditions cast class relations into a new social geography in the 1820s and 1830s, most struggles over local public policies did not take place in the electoral arena. Rather, landowners, leaseholders, tenants, and "vagrants" asserted their conflicting interests and needs in response to the Common Council's day-to-day decisions regarding city development, public welfare, and the preservation of public order. These "administrative" issues overlapped in the regulation of public property, particularly the making and uses of the city's streets.

#### "Wealth Must Lose Its Influence": Public Improvements

The streets of New York were the city's common ground, the place where people of all walks of life encountered one another as they worked, socialized, or simply passed by. But the streets were not common property. Not all citizens had equal claims to the uses and the benefits of the streets. Rather, streets were public property, owned by

the municipal corporation. From the early eighteenth century, the underlying aim of the corporation's street policies was to promote commerce in the very literal sense of facilitating the unimpeded circulation of commodities. In addition to passing ordinances to open new streets, the Common Council proscribed stoops, awning poles, and piled building materials or merchandise that obstructed traffic; and aldermen regulated the activities of licensed hawkers, carters, and even leaseholders in moving their houses. Eighteenth-century municipal officials had seldom found it necessary to explain the advantages of the corporation's policies to port proprietors.<sup>19</sup>

Into the early nineteenth century, aldermen drew on this mercantile tradition to present their reasons for mandating particular improvements in simple formulaic terms that asserted an unelaborated "public convenience," "advantage," or "utility" to the neighborhood. In dissolving the institutions of mercantile monopoly, however, aldermen in the republican city had found it necessary to emphasize their commitment to the redefined *general* public good. Thus, when breaking a ferry franchise monopoly, one committee had explained that "the convenience, safety and accommodation of the Community are the principal objects to be attained," and further, that it was "perfectly immaterial and totally foreign to the principles which should govern the decisions of this board, to enquire whose property is benefitted or is not benefitted by [improvements]."<sup>20</sup>

Whatever their professed interest in accommodating the "Community" as a whole, in determining where and when to build new streets or utilities aldermen did have to inquire whose property was benefitted, for such calculation became the basis of paying for public works. According to the benefits assessment system, adjacent proprietors were assigned the costs of opening streets or public squares (and later of introducing sewers and water and gas lines) because whatever the larger public advantages, proprietors immediately gained from the enhanced convenience, rents, and land values that accompanied new traffic and development. The assessment system and local property taxation established an essential principle of reciprocity between private and public interests and benefit; in doing so, it also divided the interests of propertied and propertyless New Yorkers by establishing the former's greater claims on local government's policies.<sup>21</sup>

In the decades following the Revolution, settlement north of Chambers Street drew more and more proprietors into negotiation with city officials as to when and at whose expense vacant land would be brought into "productive use," that is, rendered accessible for development. The 1811 grid plan had prescribed the street layout, but the Common

Council determined the timing of taking land, assessing damages and costs, and grading, paving, and widening streets. The Board of Aldermen (and later the Board of Assistant Aldermen) made daily decisions largely in response to petitions and remonstrances. Proprietors—landowners and long-term leaseholders—engaged in fierce personal and political competition over the locations and costs of street improvements. Much of the conflict turned on varying real estate investment strategies set against particular neighborhood histories of land use. Since any proposal regarding the streets immediately met with remonstrances, the aldermen identified and counted signatures on both sides of any proposal and often accepted majority rule; the majority that mattered, however, was not a street's residents but rather the people who held title to the property or had an interest in it.<sup>22</sup>

With the real estate market booming between 1825 and 1835 (despite a recession in 1829), city officials found that there were often conflicting interests even in the same piece of land. Large landowners generally passed on tax and assessment costs to their long-term leaseholders, claiming that the latter enjoyed the immediate benefits of public improvements. But sometimes long-term leaseholders risked losing everything to this principle. In one extreme but perhaps telling 1827 case, a judge described the situation of the leaseholder of John Jacob Astor's Vauxhall Gardens, a popular pleasure ground: "Madden, the tenant of Astor, had a lease for fourteen years on the garden; and was bound [by covenant] to occupy it as a garden and nothing else; he was obliged to pay \$750 rent at all events, and to pay assessments for opening streets through his garden, thereby destroying the property for the only use to which he could apply it." The damage to Madden was great, the judge acknowledged, but Astor experienced no loss, as he still could collect rent, and furthermore, "the property would be returned to him and instead of a garden he would have a great many building lots with the street already made at the expense of Madden, whose interest was destroyed by it."<sup>23</sup> The case, affecting one of the most popular resorts in the city, became something of a local cause célèbre and went through numerous appeals until Madden's estate won its case. But though Astor ultimately had to share some of the assessment costs, he alone reaped the capital gains of land developed into the impressive colonnaded row houses of Lafayette Place.<sup>24</sup>

Such protracted controversies and the willingness of some proprietors to challenge assessments in court pushed city officials to elaborate ad hoc judgments as to the convenience and utility of particular improvements into larger policy statements. Early in the century aldermen had justified assessments by reminding proprietors that they

immediately benefited from improvements. In the 1820s, however, city officials began to reverse the logic of the relation between public and private benefit to argue that public improvements were desirable *because* they increased the value of private property. Often aldermen blurred the lines of argument, as when they recommended the extension of Lispenard Street to Broadway because "the street will be much improved and the property materially advanced in value."<sup>25</sup> But by the 1830s, aldermen's recommendations (like judges' opinions) had begun to incorporate petitioners' arguments and viewed street openings and modifications through the lens of the competitive real estate market. Thus when advocating the widening of Chapel Street in 1836, aldermen reported that "it is a well known fact that for a great many years past, property in the neighborhood has been in a very low and depressed situation [literally as well as financially] . . . and while the price of land in other parts of the city has doubled, trebled or even quadrupled in value, this land has not at all advanced in price. . . . Hence arose the proposal for widening the street."<sup>26</sup>

The shift in emphasis revealed a new way of looking at the city's landscape and in effect commuted land's use value into exchange value: the goal of public improvements was not simply to facilitate the circulation of traffic and commodities but rather to encourage the profitable circulation and use of real estate itself as a commodity. The "public" was to benefit not simply in traffic convenience but in the city's promotion of a particular economic sector. Thus officials rhetorically constructed an entrepreneurial public that identified its collective interest as aggregate economic growth and placed the real estate market at the center of the local economic expansion.

The shift from mercantile to commonwealth to utilitarian conceptions of public improvement policy derived in part from the shift in the municipal corporation's own goals as a proprietor and an institution. In 1813 the comptroller had suggested the city's immediate identification with private property owners when he explained that he was "at all times desirous to enhance the value of the public property and to render it more productive," and recommended a project that would serve the corporation's own proprietary interests "and also improve the City."<sup>27</sup> In other words, the city, like any other proprietor, measured the value of an improvement by its immediate impact on land use and productivity. But as the source of public revenues shifted from fees, licenses, and rents to taxes, the Common Council's interest in improving its own property gave way to policies aimed at increasing the tax base, a political strategy that also represented an effort not to increase the tax *rate*. This "self-interest" of the municipal corporation in

submerging the costs of its operation in the profitability of real estate investment blended easily with utilitarian arguments that rising land values were in and of themselves a "public good" that perforce "improved the City."<sup>28</sup>

If the municipal corporation's expanded program of public improvements in the 1820s derived its legitimacy from an earlier mercantile tradition, it also signaled the formation of new "political" coalitions that were identified less by party affiliation than by common interests in real estate development. At the center of these coalitions stood various groups of investing proprietors. Some lower Manhattan merchants and landlords urged street widenings that initiated the commercial upgrading of older blocks of stores and artisan houses and shops. Petitioning rentiers and developers were subdividing and distributing large "farm" tracts north of the central business district to tap the burgeoning residential market. And hundreds of lesser proprietors who purchased or leased vacant lots from rentiers or developers supported the opening of streets that would permit them to realize the value of their petty investments and speculations. As property taxes attached new carrying costs to landownership, these "sectional" real estate interests intersected with city proprietors' more general interest in a policy that kept the general tax rate down by enlarging the aggregate base. Even downtown merchants who owned property primarily for their own enterprises welcomed policies that spread the tax burden away from the lower wards, where land values were highest.<sup>29</sup>

Support for local governments' promotion of real estate as an investment sector was not limited to investing proprietors or taxpayers. New York's petty artisan proprietors (for example, Greenwich Village weavers) most suffered the impact of public improvements when rising rents pushed them out of their neighborhoods. But for many wage earners the inconvenience of moving when rents rose mattered less than opportunities for employment on street projects. In 1818, the Chelsea rentier Clement Moore attacked these laborers when he protested public improvement policies that required him to help pay for the grading and opening of streets through his cherished country estate. In Moore's mind, the whole "liberal" policy of street improvements arose not from city officials' alliance with real estate interests but rather from artisan officeholders' concessions to a propertyless constituency.

"Sometimes a considerable portion of our corporation are mechanics," Moore charged in an angry pamphlet, "and persons whose influence is principally among those classes of the community to whom it is indifferent what the eventual result of their industry may be to society



Junction of Broadway and the Bowery. Engraving by George M. Bourne, 1831. Phelps Stokes Collection; Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs; The New York Public Library; Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

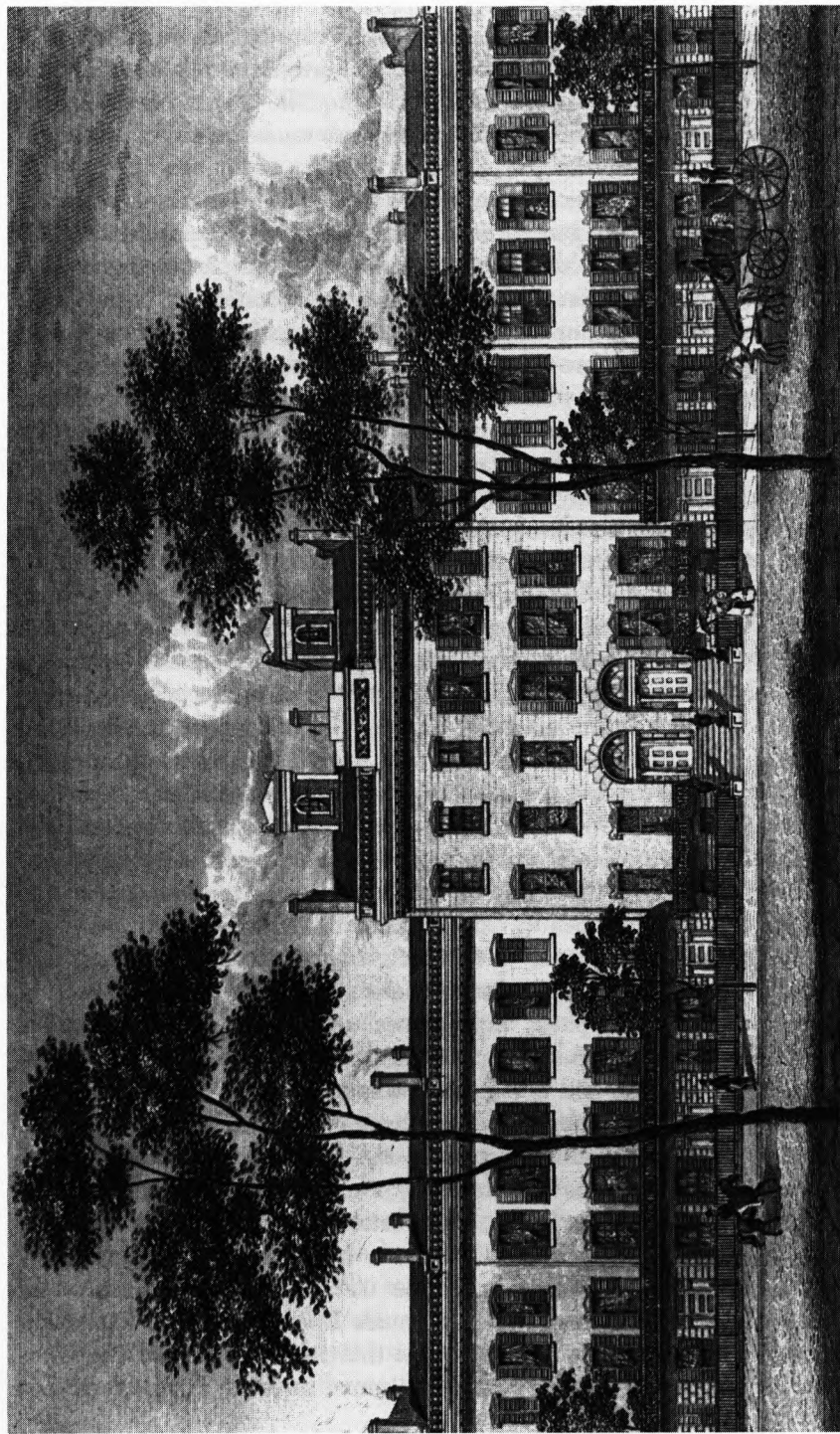
if they but obtain employment and are well paid out of the pockets of their richer fellow citizens." Contemplating the expense of opening new streets on his Chelsea farm, Moore envisioned a conspiracy of "cartmen, carpenters, masons, pavers and all their host of attendant laborers" who "would find their account in having the streets of the city yearly ploughed up and dug down and filled in and in moving the houses pulled to pieces and rebuilt as fast as hands could be found and money obtained for these purposes." Before the depression of the 1840s, public officials seldom explicitly acknowledged the link between public works and jobs. But the long history of party patronage suggests that, for all his bitterness, Moore had correctly identified a key issue in some propertyless New Yorkers' support for a policy that by promoting rising land values also endorsed rising rents.<sup>30</sup>

Rentiers such as Moore complained that public works were defacing Manhattan's natural beauty. But another loosely constructed "political"

coalition saw in a utilitarian policy of public improvements an opportunity to enhance their own residential neighborhoods. This group—who might be identified as the producers and consumers of ornamental city improvements—drew on the rhetoric and values of home life to advocate the construction and embellishment of “respectable” neighborhoods, public squares, and promenades. Identifying their own material and cultural interests with the city’s status vis-à-vis other cities, developers and elite householders presented themselves as *the* public whose “good” required such amenities as those found in European capitals. Such newspapers as the *Evening Post* and the *New-York Mirror* (whose editors identified themselves as “orthodox in our morals, our religion and our politics”) actively lobbied for programs that brought the city’s image up to new standards of “convenience, taste and elegance.” New York’s “embellishment and beauty,” the *Mirror*’s Samuel Woodworth declared in 1825, “will give her a fair claim to rank among the most elegant cities in the world.”<sup>31</sup>

In the late 1820s, policies to improve the city’s public image went hand in hand with new strategies for investment in residential real estate. To embellish the “monotonous” interchangeable city blocks, proprietors and developers combined restrictive covenants with an accelerated campaign for government favors. In 1828, for example, when Isaac Pearson offered for sale at \$12,000 the row houses he had erected on Bleeker Street between Greene and Mercer, the purchasers were required to covenant that the “ten feet between Bleeker Street and the front walls of the dwelling houses there erected shall forever hereafter be and remain open court or space and not appropriated or occupied by any edifice or wall nor in any manner obstructed otherwise than by an ornamental fence or railing enclosing the same.”<sup>32</sup> Having created the effect of a uniform residential park, Pearson gained the Board of Aldermen’s permission to rename his Bleeker Street block Leroy Place. The Common Council also endorsed the private zoning of Lafayette Place, Waverly Place, Irving Place, and University Place, granting developers permission to enclose parts of the block with railings and/or to adopt new names to distinguish their addresses from the streets they occupied.<sup>33</sup>

The trend toward “enclosed” residential blocks threatened to transform the city’s street system. Thus in 1834, faced with proposals for “Lorillard Place” and “Rutgers Place,” Jacksonian aldermen reconsidered the public interest in converting streets into “places.” At issue was not whether the local government should encourage elite residential development, for the aldermen “expressed unfeigned gratification at the very great and beautiful changes which within a few years past



Leroy Place. Drawing by A. J. Davis, engraved by Dick, c. 1830. From *Fay's Views of New York*. Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.

have taken place in the style of buildings for the city." Rather they worried that such "refinements" posed an inconvenience to visitors and residents trying to follow street directions. The already established "places" remained as publicly sanctioned class enclaves within the egalitarian grid.<sup>34</sup>

If commercial interests in convenient traffic directions occasionally overrode residential elegance, other projects revealed public officials' essential sympathy with efforts to organize the real estate market to support new class values. Correlating the appreciation of beauty and land values, the developer Samuel Ruggles was especially successful in persuading the Common Council to modify the city street plan and even to provide subsidies for his elite residential parks—Irving Place, Gramercy Park, and Union Square. In 1831, in response to Ruggles' petition to create Gramercy Park, the Street Committee concurred that they "ought not only to lay out more public squares but also to facilitate enterprising individuals in laying out private squares." Accordingly the committee recommended a special tax apportionment for land on which Ruggles "intend[ed] to prevent the purchasers . . . from erecting other buildings than private dwelling houses. He also propos[ed] to enclose the square with an ornamental iron fence, maintain the same at his own expense, and keep it forever unoccupied so as to admit the free circulation of air."<sup>35</sup> Ruggles did not intend to admit the free circulation of the public. As with St. John's Park, only the proprietors of its bordering houses held keys to Gramercy Park. In the case of Ruggles' development of Union Square, the city itself supplied the ornamental fence to create a park out of the "shapeless ill-looking place devoid of symmetry," and again explained its logic by reference to the twin benefits of public beauty and advanced land values.<sup>36</sup>

The alliance of real estate developers, bourgeois householders, and public officials gained its greatest momentum with the speculative construction of residential parks and "places" on the city's periphery. Tax money went to transform such spaces as the old paupers' burial ground of Washington Square and to create new spaces such as Tompkins Park; and even without subsidies or special dispensations, the high prices and rents of new luxury dwellings covered the private assessment costs of ornamenting such spaces as Gramercy Park. Then, too, once a new tone to the neighborhood had been established, aldermen received sympathetically petitions such as the one from the developer Dudley Selden, urging that a sliver of land be taken to widen Art Street in Greenwich Village. Selden, who had "made liberal offers" to the blacksmith who owned the land, complained that the blacksmith's shop was "a wretched hovel . . . [and] a great nuisance to the neighborhood and

must of course very materially lessen the value of his [Selden's] property." The aldermen concurred in the "propriety" of taking the protesting blacksmith's lot "for public purposes."<sup>37</sup>

In the city's older, commercially and residentially mixed neighborhoods, the economic calculus of public improvements rested on a different ground. The 1832 cholera epidemic, for example, prompted petitions to establish a park at Corlear's Hook, the center of the shipbuilding industry. The Committee on Public Lands regretfully responded that although they were "fully aware of the importance of public and open places in large and populous cities and would always recommend their establishment when such measures [could] be accomplished without too much individual sacrifice," they found the Corlear's Hook proposal "too inexpedient inasmuch as the cost would be enormous . . . [and] there would be but a small portion of the land sufficiently benefitted to induce the owner [the industrialist James Allaire] to encounter the large assessments." A park in a working-class neighborhood could yield only a limited return in increased rents. In addition to the landowner's veto power, the aldermen also pointed to merchants' need to reserve shoreline property for commercial uses.<sup>38</sup>

City officials and real estate developers recast the rule of property in New York City in the first third of the nineteenth century by mobilizing public authority to support private proprietors' pursuit of profit in real estate. Like the British Board of Trade, city officials offered encouragement to the city's entrepreneurs, but they did so in the name of a democratic public and addressed themselves to the market circulation of land and houses rather than goods. In the twentieth century, this logic of public improvements for the sake of private accumulation has become firmly entrenched in prevalent versions both of "human nature" (the necessity of incentives) and of rational economic behavior (efficient allocations of land use). But what were the implications of this *new* government policy that encouraged and even subsidized real estate development in the early nineteenth century?

With the population steadily expanding, new streets needed to be opened, and in theory access to vacant lands on the city's periphery would ultimately reduce house prices and rents for propertyless New Yorkers by increasing the supply of buildings. Indeed, in theory all New Yorkers should have benefited equally from the squares opened in the 1830s and the sewers and water lines laid in the 1840s and 1850s. But some New Yorkers were more equal than others.

As had been true on Chambers Street two decades earlier, the building of elite residential blocks in the vicinity of Washington Square and Union Square removed the scattered houses and shops of artisan land-

owners and leaseholders. And as promised by the very logic of the assessment system, landholders who footed the bills for public improvements recouped those costs in advanced land prices and rents. In an era when investors were only beginning to define the prospects for profits in the housing market, returns from the residential parks and "places" north of Canal Street fueled investors' expectations and speculations on other "uptown" streets. "The exceeding rapid increase of our population, and the measures which have been taken to lay out and form public squares," the aldermen explained, "have so much enhanced the value of lots in their vicinity as to render it desirable for persons of lesser means to turn their attention to situations somewhat more removed . . . where lots can be purchased at such a moderate rate as to come within their means." But as aggregate land values rose, fewer and fewer New Yorkers could gain access to proprietorship or afford the space for independent housekeeping.<sup>39</sup>

Unlike the "private improvement" of Chambers Street, the new patterns and relations of city land use were actively shaped by the local government. The political process offered neither precedent nor means for consulting the propertyless public on how the city's landscape should be organized. Decisions regarding the locations of new amenities and utilities rested on the aldermen's weighing of proprietors' competing petitions; the inconvenience of relocating tenants—and the larger implications of social displacement—seldom tipped the policy scales. Furthermore, the exclusion of propertyless New Yorkers from the decision-making process, as well as their relative weakness within the real estate market itself, meant that wage-earning tenant families could not share in new public utilities and amenities. Landlords, who saw little prospect of recouping from wage-earning tenants the assessment costs of sewers and water and gas lines, generally opposed the introduction of utilities into the city's working-class neighborhoods and tenant houses.<sup>40</sup>

The inequities of power revealed in city policy, however, reached much deeper than whether propertyless New Yorkers could participate in the decision-making process or enjoy the benefits of parks, sewers, and water in their neighborhoods. The priority assigned to investment—the abstraction of land use into competitive returns on costs—marked the final abandonment of the republican vision of independent proprietorship as a common political goal and a new accommodation of land's circulation as capital. This policy, which promoted rising land values and separated the claims of investment from those of customary or prior use, left the city with a new problem: "Where are the poor to go?"<sup>41</sup>

The aldermen who rhetorically entertained this question when they considered petitions to widen and "enhance" Chapel Street quickly concluded that "go where they may, they cannot do worse." But the poor could do worse. The answer to the aldermen's question was that poor New Yorkers would go into denser and denser tenant houses and into the city's streets. Even as the Common Council asserted increasing confidence in its power to improve the city through the regulation of the streets, conflicts over definition and uses of public space grew sharper in the late 1820s and 1830s. And as they did so, the struggles of "property against property" over the moral agenda and costs of public improvements revealed counteralliances among propertied New Yorkers whose income or profits came from the "street economy" of the city's poorest neighborhoods.

#### *"Public Morals Must Be Destroyed": Neighborhood Renewal*

New York City's housing and property relations were changing within a contradictory political context. On the one hand, the granting of universal white male suffrage suggested that landed property had lost its power to control the social and economic order. On the other, new claims of landed property to profit had gained local government's endorsement. Thus the utilitarian alliance promoted the "public interest" of rising land values and subsidized elite residential development. But New York's public—the body of the city's residents—was larger than the constituency that set policy.

The policy of improvements had immediate implications for city residents who stood outside emerging utilitarian coalitions. Such "gentry" rentiers as Clement Moore surrendered their exclusive control over the organization and use of their country estates to the grid's entrepreneurial development. Small independent proprietors, such as the Art Street blacksmith who was forced to move, surrendered the benefits of prior uses and personal investments in neighborhood networks and customary traffic. But the full implications of local government's endorsement of real estate as an investment sector became most evident in the condition of propertyless New Yorkers. Although largely excluded and invisible in the lobbying, negotiations, and decision making that shaped the city's landscape, the laboring poor became politically visible in their uses of the streets, especially in the city's oldest tenant neighborhoods.

By the 1820s the growing ranks of New York's laboring poor—swelled by recently emancipated blacks, Irish immigrants, single



women, and dependent children—forced city officials and taxpayers alike to redefine the political relation of New Yorkers who controlled property to those who had none. People who had no shelter and no livelihood were traditionally defined as vagrants. Distinguished from slaves, who were themselves property; from “dependents,” who came under the authority of householders; and from the indigent but settled poor who could legitimately claim the assistance of citizens, “vagrants” had no rights within the community.<sup>42</sup>

New Yorkers' campaigns against vagrants dated from the eighteenth century, when church wardens could warn paupers out of town. After the Revolution, city officials had taken over the task of conducting periodic sweeps of the streets to “bring up for examination all vagrants, negroes, common prostitutes and other persons likely to become chargeable, whom they may suspect have not gained a legal settlement to the end that they may be removed before the winter sets in.” This 1807 conflation of social categories typified the social perceptions of the era. Fears of vagrancy among blacks had recurred in debates over gradual emancipation and prompted requirements that owners have their slaves “certified” as self-sufficient by the Almshouse. Indigent single women without male protectors—implicitly “common prostitutes”—stood as a second class of people who had no claims on a social order that viewed access to property as essential to social standing.<sup>43</sup>

When such sweeps of vagrants could not clear the city of poverty, city officials and private citizens expressed increasing anger at the rising costs of poor relief. In 1817, officials charged with “providing for the Poor” complained that “many hundreds of poor persons, from different parts of this and the neighboring States, resort to New York, especially in winter to throw themselves upon the bounty of the citizens . . . produc[ing] an intolerable burden upon private and public charity.”<sup>44</sup> But in the context of periodic depressions, seasonal unemployment, Irish immigration, and the migration of blacks from Long Island, Westchester, and New Jersey after being emancipated without resources—particularly during harsh winters—transient “paupers” as a class were increasingly indistinguishable from the city’s “settled” laboring poor. By the 1820s, accusations against “outsiders” who unfairly claimed New Yorkers' assistance were giving way to new perceptions and fears of the poor as a permanent presence within the city's social landscape.

Spurred by evangelicism, the temperance movement, and the increasing visibility of poverty, middle-class New Yorkers organized new charities and paid higher taxes to reform and relieve the poor.<sup>45</sup> But the larger problem that poverty posed to the liberal program of city

improvement lay not simply in claims on the purse but in the claims of the propertyless on the uses of public property—on the streets—and by extension on the rights of private property. According to both traditional definitions of private property rights and new utilitarian concepts, one issue in regard to the use of the streets by the poor revolved around the “injury” they did to adjacent proprietors' exclusive interests in the benefits of their houses and shops.

New York's propertied and unpropertied citizens asserted different claims on the public landscape. Propertied New Yorkers proposed to order streets primarily in accordance with principles that enhanced the convenience and value of private property: principles of traffic efficiency and public image. For respectable householders, the rights of private property included protection from unwanted intrusions from the streets; through restrictive covenants they sought to extend this protection to exclude “incompatible” uses of their blocks and thus to secure their investments. For traders and shopkeepers, those rights rested on customers' unobstructed access to their shops and the restriction of competition from transients.

As peddlers, ragpickers, prostitutes, scavengers, beggars, and sometimes criminals, New York's casual laboring people used the streets as a common landscape that subverted private property's exclusionary powers. The street economy rested on the elimination of shop rents and the spontaneity of encounters. Without “overhead” payments to a landlord, it was possible to gain or supplement subsistence by peddling fruits, oysters, hardware, used clothing, or sexual favors. Scavenging, the illicit activities of shoplifting and pawning petty merchandise, and gambling could further extend wages. No less than foraging on rural common land, the “liberty” of the streets supported the city's poorest residents.<sup>46</sup>

As the street economy of the laboring poor expanded, petitioners complained in 1829 that peddlers “did injury” to the “fair and regular traders” of the city. Their offenses, as rehearsed in a petition urging the state legislature to “prohibit the practice of hawking and peddling articles of merchandise through the streets of the city,” were at once economic and moral:

- 1) The evil tendency of such mode of dealing upon public morals, many children and minors being engaged in it and it being a vagrant mode of life.
- 2) The facility it affords for disposing of stolen property and the opportunities it presents to commit thefts without detection or punishment.

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- 3) The gross imposition to which it exposes many persons and families in the quality of goods thus offered for sale.
- 4) Total want of responsibility on the part of persons engaged in the mode of dealing and the injury it does to fair and regular traders who pay rent for stores.<sup>47</sup>

X In using the language of vagrancy, the petitioners invoked the customary definition of people without rights in the community. Peddlers who did not "pay rent for stores," who were frequently children, who stole to secure life's necessities, and who did not respect the rights of the city's "fair and regular traders" challenged the social authority of private property. The small shopkeepers who sought protection from such competition welcomed local government's intervention to enforce their claims as both private proprietors and members of the legitimate public to the rights and benefits of the streets by keeping them clear of people who pursued a "vagrant mode of life."

Such conflicts between petty proprietors and the laboring poor within mechanic neighborhoods extended outward into the relations between neighborhoods. For if the peddling and foraging of the transient poor impinged on private property rights, so much greater were perceptions of the injury that the "settled" street economy of poor tenant neighborhoods did to respectable New Yorkers' expectations for the larger city's improvement. Thus alongside renewed efforts to restrict the activities of public drinking, peddling, and prostitution, officials began to focus their attention on particular tenant neighborhoods that they perceived to be breeding grounds of the "vagrant mode of life." As the municipal corporation launched a program of regrading, widening, and repaving the streets of lower Manhattan, petitioning citizens and city officials proposed a new remedy for the perceived dangers of such neighborhoods: slum clearance.

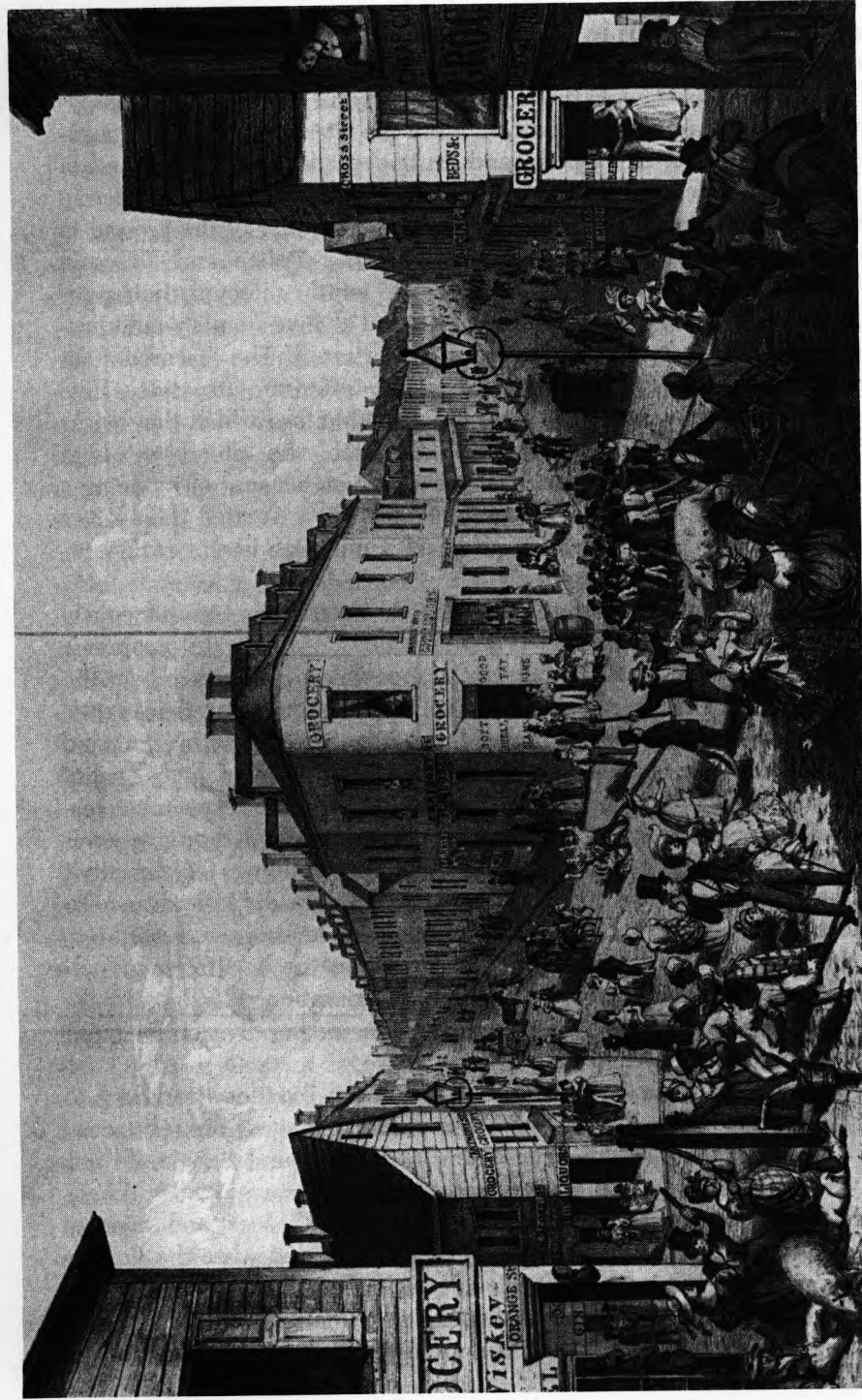
X New York City's experiments in slum clearance through the widening or closing of particular streets began in the spring of 1829, when the Common Council received several petitions to clear a triangle of land in the Five Points neighborhood of tenants, taverns, and "horrors too awful to mention." Noting that Five Points "is a place of great disorder and crime and it would be particularly desirable to rid the city of the Nuisance complained of," some 2,400 memorialists from outside the neighborhood urged the city to exercise its powers of eminent domain to take the land and to build a new city jail on the site.<sup>48</sup> City officials' claims to the unity of their moral and economic responsibility in ordering the city's streets brought them up against competing private interests, and on the same day two aldermanic

committees split sharply in response to petitions to clear the Five Points triangle.

The Street Committee, finding "that nearly all the buildings occupying the ground are in ruinous Condition of but Little value and occupied by the lowest description and most degraded and abandoned of the human species," recommended that the triangle's intersecting streets be widened to forty feet each, "the remainder of the ground to be appropriated for Public purposes."<sup>49</sup> The Police and Jail and Bridewell committees, on the other hand, jointly rejected their petition, reasoning that the low landfilled ground at Five Points would produce "great Mortality in a crowded prison." The incarceration committee observed further that however offensive its style, Five Points paid its own way: they knew "of no public use which this block, if taken, could be put to, [and] it would probably be valued very high to the Corporation as it produces a great rent on account of its being a good location for small retailers of liquor who have located themselves in the vicinity. What may be considered a nuisance has in reality increased the value of the property."<sup>50</sup>

Here was a central tension in the liberal agenda for simultaneously enhancing the city landscape and promoting aggregate economic growth. The economic advantages of respectable neighborhoods at the city's periphery lay in the rate at which land appreciated in value; landowners and developers realized the benefits of new or renamed streets and public squares by constructing buildings of high quality which attracted the city's wealthiest residents. Once a respectable residential block had been established, investment depended on preservation of the neighborhood's amenities. As the buildings of the city's older neighborhoods decayed over time, land values did not advance so rapidly. The value of such buildings to investing landowners rested less on the calculus of rates of appreciation than on the level of rents collected over and above costs. The very deterioration of old buildings reduced landlords' tax and maintenance costs; and subdivision for more tenants increased rents.

By the 1830s, Five Points and the Lispenard Meadows territory of the old Trinity Church farm were the oldest and most densely occupied neighborhoods in the city. When landlords found they could not attract "respectable" tenants, they had turned the houses over to leaseholders who operated them as brothels, gambling houses, and taverns, thus producing "commercial rents" that far exceeded what the houses would generate solely as multitenant residences. Afro-American New Yorkers, excluded from legitimate trades and unable to afford housing in other neighborhoods, often operated these "red light" establish-



Five Points, 1827. Lithograph from *Valentine's Manual*, 1855. Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.

ments, even as they preserved their respectable church and associational life within the same territory. These neighborhoods also accommodated new waves of Irish laboring families. And since it was poverty rather than race that attracted people to these neighborhoods, the spatial mixing of poor whites and blacks fanned fears of "amalgamation."<sup>51</sup>

The issue of race relations—or more precisely, the issue of blacks and whites freely socializing with one another—ran as a subtext through much of the discussion of poverty in the 1820s and 1830s. The imposition of the property qualification on black voters had revealed white New Yorkers' assumption and determination that Afro-Americans would remain among the city's poorest residents and that the cost of that poverty would be their right to vote, their very membership in the sovereign public. Northern masters who emancipated slaves frequently left them without resources; dockworkers, carters and other artisans repeatedly reasserted the color line in their trades. But the crowding and physical contamination familiar to the city's indigent blacks were also conditions that might be encountered by laboring white families confronted by chronic unemployment, the death of a primary wage earner, or separation from a family support network. Precisely because they belied assertions of the "distinction of color," poor neighborhoods with an "amalgamated" racial population became the city's most threatening emblem of poverty's "contagion." Even before racial and antislavery tensions erupted in the (1834 anti-abolition riots,) city officials sympathetically entertained new proposals for the "remedy" of clearance.

The initiative for extending the city's power of eminent domain to clear the Five Points triangle came from outside the neighborhood, because it was respectable outsiders who perceived the neighborhood as a danger to the city as a whole. The particularly offensive block contained, an 1831 report noted, nine houses "all old and mostly built of wood" and three small brick-front houses. The residents numbered "about 175 of whom more than two-thirds are vagrants, having no visible or honest means of livelihood." Furthermore, there were about 80 black tenants and 120 females, "all of whom, with the exception of perhaps 10–15, are proper objects for a Magdalen asylum."<sup>52</sup> Despite the ambiguous arithmetic, it was a familiar catalogue of people without rights in the community. By their presence, petitioners claimed, the Five Points tenants obstructed (and tempted) the flow of respectable social traffic through city streets. Thus reformers presented an argument on behalf of slum clearance which has persisted for more than a century and a half, claiming that "experience has shown that it is only

by widening the streets in the vicinity and thereby inducing capitalists to invest their funds in the erection of spacious buildings that any effectual or competent remedy can be effected."<sup>53</sup>

Five Points was certainly not the city's only poor, densely crowded, physically deteriorated, and racially mixed neighborhood; it was simply the most visible. Its proximity to Broadway and City Hall, as well as to the expanding commercial district of Chatham and Pearl streets, contradicted popular images of the city's "enhancement" and progress. And Five Points occupied prime territory between the city's commercial center and some of its finest East Side residential blocks. The 1831 clearance proposal, like that of 1829, was blocked by the remonstrance of Five Points leaseholders, who pointed out that "taking the property in question will only send the inhabitants to the neighborhood buildings and thereby crowd the greater number of the same class together." But reformers persisted, and in 1833 the triangle was cleared.<sup>54</sup>

The campaign against Five Points had only begun, and by the mid-1830s similar arguments were being marshalled in efforts to widen other lower Manhattan streets to clear out "nuisances," particularly on such streets as Chapel and Anthony, which had a concentration of black residents, taverns, and brothels. In 1836, advocates of widening Anthony Street (which intersected the Five Points neighborhood) expressed both immediate personal and more broadly conceived class interests in redeveloping the neighborhood. Among the most ardent petitioners for redevelopment were several merchants, a shipwright, a master builder, a brass manufacturer, a surveyor, and a clothier who resided on East Broadway and Monroe Street. By the 1830s, these blocks formed an island of respectability among the subdivided artisan houses of Henry Rutgers' farmland. The prominent householders were offended by the boisterous street life of the adjacent neighborhood to the east, which devalued their own environs and culturally isolated them from the rest of the city. The issue was not traffic flow per se but rather the unpleasant experience of traveling through Anthony Street to reach Pearl Street, Broadway, or any of the city's new residential parks and places. Widening and extending Anthony Street through the Points, petitioners insisted, "will afford a very commodious as well as convenient street, at present so much required by the public, which when completed can be travelled at all times by our wives and children alone, without interruption or insult, which cannot now be done without a protector."<sup>55</sup>

The East Broadway and Monroe Street householders were joined by bank and insurance company presidents, substantial retailers in

Chatham Square and Pearl Street, merchants with property intersecting Anthony Street on Broadway, and investors who held lots on Anthony itself. Retailers in this second group also urged the widening of Anthony to remove the "most disgraceful barrier" of tenant houses and brothels, which they believed deterred respectable traffic between the "elegant buildings" on Broadway and Chatham Square. Commercial proprietors and investors who supported the street's widening knew that individual initiatives in converting single lots to more lucrative use were insufficient to realize the advantages of a geographically prime location. Only through the assertion of a broad public interest could they succeed in transforming the area and along the way capture a windfall gain in land prices and rents. "Breaking up this haunt of infamy," they argued, would encourage "proprietors of adjacent ground to build houses for respectable families," which would "greatly benefit the owners of lots" and "achieve a moral improvement more effective for public safety."<sup>56</sup>

Petitions for Anthony Street's clearance mobilized remonstrances from neighborhood proprietors and landlords faced with the prospect of assessments and a change in the neighborhood's economy. Three groups came to the defense of the Anthony Street neighborhood: independent proprietors, small landlords, and rentiers. Although they had different reasons for resisting the demand for clearance, they represented a coalition of propertied interests that in the end was as central to the operation of the city's real estate market as that of merchants, developers, and respectable householders.

Some of the protesters were independent householders, shopkeepers, and mechanics—a stonemason, a carter, a laborer/shoemaker, a black fruitier, a milliner, a boardinghouse keeper, grocers, and the widows of a wheelwright and a carter, who lived and worked at houses they had erected or purchased on leased land; they were less interested in the investment value of their lots and houses than in protecting the site of their livelihood or independent housekeeping. Beyond the burden of assessments for improvements they didn't want, both the age and condition of their own houses and that of adjacent tenant houses kept tax costs in the neighborhood low. The brothers N. C. Platt and George W. Platt, jeweler and thimblemaker, respectively, complained that renewal would force them to relocate. The former held a "favorable lease" on a house at 17 Mulberry Street, "which will be taken away from me by such alteration, and thus subject me to the necessity of removing my residence farther from my business, which would be an item of no small importance and loss of much time, as my Clerks reside with me, and the scarcity of dwellings nearer my busi-

ness would oblige me to remove farther from it." Such householders had made their own peace with their poorer neighbors.<sup>57</sup>

The small proprietors and householders aligned themselves with a group that had a different kind of interest in the neighborhood. This second group consisted of the leaseholding landlords of tenant houses, many of which were used as brothels and taverns. The grocers Patrick Collins and Elijah Valentine, for example, owned four tenant houses; the undertaker Abram Florentine owned two houses as well as a livery stable and his own house in the neighborhood; the widow A. Guion ran a china shop and owned three neighboring houses. These petty landlords also objected that they could not afford the assessment costs assigned them under long-term leases for improvements that would remove the very tenants (wage earners and prostitutes) on whose rents the landlords depended.<sup>58</sup>

The small proprietors and landlords of Anthony Street and Five Points were joined by a group of rentiers who included some of the most prominent men in the city—Benjamin Romaine, Henry Remsen, John L. Livingston, and Peter Lorillard. In defending the "haunt of infamy" from the improving impulses of other respectable citizens, they found themselves in a somewhat awkward position. Although doubtless aware of the illicit activities that generated their rents, they defended their interests and their reputations as honorable men with paternalistic protestations on behalf of their less-secure leaseholders and charged that the moral campaign against Anthony Street was itself tainted by the crude material interests of real estate speculators. The "plan of the speculation of a few," they insisted, "would cause the beggary and ruin of many widows and orphans, as also those who hold leases, and who are bound to pay all assessments." Peter Lorillard promised that "when the leases of his property expire, he will erect good substantial houses," but reiterated his concern for his present leaseholders' risk of "ruin."<sup>59</sup>

This alliance of large and small proprietors came to the defense of the neighborhood's poor and transient wage-earning tenants, who were ultimately the source of revenues and profits from Anthony Street's houses. "We are not disposed to join in the crusade which is carried on by the speculator against the poor," they declared at a "large meeting" at the Sixth Ward Hotel, "and are not reconciled to measures that drive hundreds from their homes under the specious plea of improving a neighborhood." After all, if there was a "vicious class" in Five Points, "we desire to be informed to what location such a class can be driven more desirable than the vicinity of our criminal courts and offices of detention."<sup>60</sup>

Revealing the economic interdependency and shared vulnerability of New York City's petty proprietors, small landlords, and poorest laboring tenants, as well as the opportunism of rentiers, the meeting also reiterated charges of corruption and speculation. Thus the meeting's remonstrance stressed—probably with reference to Alderman Myndert Van Schaick, who owned three lots on Anthony and had signed a petition for its clearance—that "such [of] our fellow citizens as hold seats in the City Council, ought never to allow themselves to vote upon, much less to be active in urging measures in which they have a direct pecuniary interest." "A few interested and influential individuals," far from seeking to serve the public good, were making "exertions" for Anthony Street's clearance in order "to obtain special legislation for their private pecuniary advancement."<sup>61</sup>

Such struggles over the poorest tenant neighborhoods revealed underlying structures—the methods of "private pecuniary advancement"—that stood at the heart of the city's simultaneous drive for improvement and the steady deterioration of housing. Proprietors' and reformers' debates over widening streets and thus clearing lower Manhattan's older artisan/tenant neighborhoods arose in tandem with the beautification of elite residential blocks. "Moral improvement" won out in the initial struggle over Anthony Street's widening, but the neighborhood proprietors were able to overturn the aldermen's decision when the 1837 panic brought real estate investment and government redevelopment policy to a temporary halt. The "sudden reverse," another group of backpedaling improvers explained, meant that improvements that they had once enthusiastically advocated "would put them to great expense and destroy the present usefulness of their property."<sup>62</sup>

During the depression that followed, new market dynamics took over the redevelopment process in lower Manhattan. Faced with reduced rents, some proprietors made up their losses by adding rear houses and tenements, or by crowding in more tenants. With economic recovery other investors who had acquired land and houses at depressed prices began to build warehouses and stores. The persistence of tenant houses and the introduction of new commercial structures on streets below Canal Street precluded the building of the "elegant dwellings" envisioned by earlier reformers. Respectable New Yorkers had learned that the most socially secure neighborhoods were those on the city's periphery, and developers abandoned the effort to persuade them otherwise.<sup>63</sup>

By the 1840s, Five Points' tenant houses, brothels, and saloons had become, to many citizens' dismay, a major tourist attraction as the cen-

ter of the city's lowlife. New York's claims to the status of a European city were backhandedly achieved when Charles Dickens likened the Points to London's own notorious East End. Meanwhile, the campaign to clear the heart and history of Five Points continued well into the twentieth century, until it was finally won when courthouses and the Police Plaza were constructed on its site.<sup>64</sup>

On one level conflicts over the uses of streets and the social life of New York's poorest tenant neighborhoods revealed not the divisions between propertied and propertyless residents but rather the tensions within the local politics of property against property. Manhattan landowners and leaseholders exercised the power of their political and economic standing to petition public officials to accommodate their needs and interests in the organization of the public landscape. Their differences revolved around different modes of securing a living or realizing profits from real estate. At this level, the struggle over clearance revealed the underlying conditions of the city's emerging capitalist housing market: the vulnerability of small independent proprietors and a dual structure of profits that could be extracted out of elite residential blocks and out of crowded tenant neighborhoods. And in this respect, tenant neighborhood life, however demoralized, was integral to the city's larger economy: it both sustained the laboring classes and generated profits for a landlord class.

On another level, such struggles suggest that poor New Yorkers' survival strategies (and the very culture of a street economy) formed one arena of resistance to propertied New Yorkers' authority to define and control the public agenda for the city's "improvement." No less than the utilitarian alliances that shaped the logic of improvement policy, the street economy of the poorest tenant neighborhoods established fluid and indeterminate boundaries between public and private spaces and interests. By using the streets to secure their livelihoods, however illicit in the eyes of respectable citizens, poor New Yorkers restored the claims of common property—the right not to be excluded from the city's resources. Outside the polity, the city's poor could make few claims other than the practical possession of territory.

Public officials' impulse to find spatial solutions to the city's growing poverty was not confined to campaigns for neighborhood redevelopment. When it was not possible to remove indigent neighborhoods, city officials hoped to remove the people. By the mid-1830s, the Almshouse, Bridewell, City Hospital, and Debtor's Prison had all exceeded their physical capacities to accommodate the city's sick, indigent, and criminal residents, three categories that frequently overlapped in the eyes of men empowered to incarcerate them. Even as aldermen heard

mid-Manhattan residents' objections to placing these institutions in their neighborhoods, in 1837 the Almshouse Commissioners offered a new tactic for isolating New Yorkers who stood outside the dominant public order. "The increase in paupers keeping pace with population and receiving great addition from the want of present employment for the producing classes, together with excessive immigration from Europe," the commissioners observed, "renders it expedient to revive consideration of erecting another establishment for paupers." The aldermen agreed that it was "not improper explicitly to state . . . that great advantage would be gained by locating such establishment on an *island* separated from that on which the city is built."<sup>65</sup>

Yet, as real wages steadily declined, there was no way to remove the presence of poor people who made up the labor pool of New York City's industrializing economy. Although city officials continued to entertain proposals for public street improvements that spurred redevelopment, they increasingly turned their attention to regulating the laboring poor through police surveillance. When day watches failed to preserve the peace, city officials looked to other cities, particularly London, for new models of law enforcement, and after a decade of debate, in 1845, they instituted a new citywide police force.<sup>66</sup>

Not the least problem for the police in preserving order and protecting private property rights was the definition of public offense. One typical mid-century police report on persons taken into custody during the past three months listed 14,662 arrests (roughly three arrests for every hundred city residents). Slightly over 10 percent of those persons were arrested for, or on suspicion of, crimes against persons or property. Over 80 percent had been taken into police custody for various forms of "immoral conduct" (including 4,241 for intoxication, disorderly conduct, or both) or for "crimes" of condition (7,659 "indigents," 74 "lodgers," 431 lost children, and 428 "vagrants"). The report suggests, as reformers had claimed a decade earlier, that the everyday "nuisance" of life in poor tenant neighborhoods—the crime of poverty itself—posed the greatest threat to respectable citizens' feelings of safety and command of city streets.<sup>67</sup>

When in 1819 John Pintard decried the new "conception of morals" in New York City, he pointed to the drive for wealth and the corruption of luxury.<sup>68</sup> But when Delegate Buel listed the destruction of public morals as one condition for the political mobilization of the propertyless against the propertied, he contemplated the end of respect for private property. The difference in their emphases was more apparent than real, yet the utilitarian conception of public and private morals, by positing unqualified good in expanded competition and ag-

gregate economic growth, sanctioned the accumulative impulse without confronting its social consequences. Worrying that poverty impinged on (as well as produced) the benefits of private property, respectable New Yorkers could label it as immoral or even criminal. And the very definition of poverty's public immorality limited propertyless New Yorkers' powers to challenge the rights of private appropriation. The fact that profit itself came out of the immoral exercise of private property rights did not lessen proprietors' claims to public protection. The nature of government did not change, wealth did not lose its influence, and propertyless New Yorkers did not rise up "to usurp the property of landholders."

✓ The antebellum language of property and morality, of "prosperity and character," moved fluidly from pulpits and parlors to the offices of aldermen and real estate investors. Offended by the living conditions of the city's poorest neighborhoods, New Yorkers in the 1820s and 1830s blamed neither employers nor landlords but rather the tenants themselves. To the extent that bourgeois New Yorkers regarded a new institution of property—the home—as the measure of society's material and moral progress, it is not surprising that politicians in the 1820s and 1830s readily accommodated proposals to enhance elite residential neighborhoods and reform immoral tenant neighborhoods. The assumption that shaped propertied New Yorkers' and public officials' perceptions of poverty—that the laboring poor lacked character as well as money—also determined investment strategies within the housing market. In the liberal age of egalitarianism, rentiers and builders encountered little political resistance as they went about the business of systematically constructing a class-divided city landscape.

## CHAPTER 6

### Building a Housing Crisis

"IT IS STATED that a finished house without a tenant is not to be found in this great city," the *Niles Weekly Register* noted in 1825, "and that well-dressed families are observed to be occupying houses of which the builders do not appear to have accomplished the work so far as to have fully closed them in by doors and windows." Again and again in the early decades of the nineteenth century, newspapers, visitors, and residents reported that the city did not have enough housing, indeed that in some seasons a "private house" was "not to be had for love or money." By the 1840s, the tone of such complaints had gained a new urgency. New York City's chronic housing shortage did more than inconvenience "well-dressed families"; it permanently altered the city's social fabric. "Thousands and tens of thousands," reported the *Morning Courier* in 1847, "are compelled to exist from day to day under the constant, crushing pressure of . . . terrible sufferings resulting directly from the miserable houses in which they live." Families were sleeping in cellars under basement apartments; people without shelter were crowding the precinct houses where they were taken as "vagrants" or "indigent lodgers"; the city's mortality rate, particularly in working-class wards, was climbing. New York City faced its first major housing crisis.<sup>1</sup>

On the face of things, New York City did not lack the resources to build new housing. In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, speculative building emerged as one of the port's largest capitalist enterprises. By the 1820s, two-fifths of the city's artisans worked in the building trades, producing more than a thousand buildings a year. A decade later, the capital invested in new construction exceeded \$3 million a year, rivaling the production of ships, clothing, and shoes as a major New York industry. Yet in those same years, building failed

## Conclusion: The Housing Question

BY 1850, NEW YORK CITY'S capitalist housing market had transformed the spatial organization of everyday life and with it the social relations of real property. Landownership had lost its association with the conditions of independent proprietorship, and houses no longer sheltered and integrated trade and domestic labor. Though the proprietary house and shop persisted as a residual form, particularly in family-operated taverns, groceries, and handicraft shops, the vast majority of New York households had moved onto the cash nexus of wages and rent. The social distribution of shelter, like that of any other commodity produced for profit, measured economic power; and in the years 1785 to 1850, New York City's working people had lost power, their collective claims on the city's resources, including the value that they created as workers and as tenants. No matter how many individual families might move up and down the economic ladder, the housing market organized class divisions as permanent features of the city's social landscape.

In a culture that vigorously denied fundamental class antagonisms and celebrated "society's" progress, the construction and preservation of social distance through distinct residential neighborhoods had become a key strategy for ordering city land use into profitable investment. The displacement of older institutions of proprietary independence was only one part of a larger process that did yield the progress of an increasing social capacity to produce new material wealth. Where for centuries control of land and housing had represented the primary means of controlling labor, the organization of property relations as market relations that measured value through exchange dissolved traditional structures of social hierarchy, monopoly, and appropriation. But

in New York City, control over land and housing had assumed new social meanings and represented a new kind of social power.

By the mid-nineteenth century, landed property relations in New York City had changed in part through a change in the social composition and goals of landowners. New investors, particularly speculators and developers who bought up large tracts for construction at the city's periphery, joined and gradually replaced an older generation of merchant rentier families. These real estate entrepreneurs did not expect to attach their names to the landscape, to pass on the stored wealth of prestigious country estates to sons or daughters, or to claim political privileges. Rather they looked to sell or to develop land in a favorable market and quickly reinvest the returns. And when they asserted political power, it was through the influence of their money and strategic coalitions rather than through propertied status.<sup>1</sup>

Manhattan real estate continued to be distributed through a tiered system of long-term ground leases, building leases, and subleases. If exposés of Trinity Church's slum housing in the 1840s and 1850s and again in the 1870s prompted that venerable institution to divest portions of its eighteenth-century land grants, other rentier families and new entrepreneurs retained and distributed large tracts through ground leases.<sup>2</sup> Still, property taxes and assessments for streets and utilities made the holding of Manhattan land a luxury that could be afforded—even when the land was inherited—only through close calculation of opportunity costs: interest and taxes set against rent revenues and alternative investment outlets. Political economic theory reconceptualized "ground rent" itself to analyze not only revenues collected from tenants but even land's "cost" to an owner-occupier who might pursue alternative investments. Whereas historically land investments had been central to the formation of the city's bourgeoisie, by 1860 real estate represented one choice—and not necessarily the most lucrative—among many outlets for accumulated capital or savings, including finance, industry, transportation, and western lands.

Even as social calculations of land's value changed, fluctuations in the real estate market continued to register the health of the city's larger economy. Thus the experience of 1837 was replayed in 1857 and again in the early 1870s. Though real estate remained a relatively open sector and continued to absorb the petty capital of small entrepreneurs, each depression reinforced the trend toward institutional consolidation. By the 1870s, real estate brokerage and



management firms, incorporated building companies, financial institutions, and neighborhood real estate associations sought to coordinate competition and further landed interests in particular locales, and trade journals imparted strategic wisdom alongside recent market information.<sup>3</sup>

Some elements of that wisdom had emerged from the trials and errors of the first half of the century. As in the 1820s and 1830s, new residential construction was liveliest at the edges of the built town. For this very reason, by the 1870s Manhattan real estate investments were closely linked to transportation systems, first to the horse-drawn railways and later to the elevated railroads and subways. Having learned the benefit of public open ground in establishing residential districts, in the 1850s uptown landowners and developers embraced the creation of Central Park, more than 600 acres of landscaped beauty guaranteed to increase the value of lots and buildings in its vicinity. But the rapid growth of Brooklyn and New Jersey towns also expanded the field of real estate competition.<sup>4</sup>

Then, too, after decades of debate over the problematic respectability of multifamily dwellings, by the late 1870s Manhattan developers were shifting from single- and two-family row houses to apartments. In doing so they followed the same logic of absorbing land costs through intensified occupancy which had prompted the production of "tenements." To overcome middle-class New Yorkers' suspicions of a housing form historically associated with poverty, builders added amenities lacking in tenements—new utilities and ornamentation—and promoted the value of prestigious addresses and the "convenience" of yet a new style of "modern housekeeping." No less than the single-family dwelling, the emergence of middle-class apartments restructured domestic labor relations by reducing the need for live-in servants to guarantee the home's smooth operation and respectability. And as with the management of tenant houses, the introduction of new tiers of agents and managers whose work it was to collect middle-class rents added another layer of housing cost, even as it created another sector of managerial employment.<sup>5</sup>

Still, despite these industry-wide strategies, specific conditions of landownership, prior land use, commercial competition, neighborhood succession, and the uncertain rhythm of building cycles continued to shape the history of particular Manhattan blocks. Not until the twentieth century did government support of the residential real estate market discover in zoning a new means of regulating land use to stabilize neighborhoods and enforce spatial and social uniformity as a primary public goal. And not until the emergence of Harlem in the early

decades of the twentieth century did the Manhattan real estate market take race—as distinguished from poverty—as a primary category of spatial organization.<sup>6</sup>

Even as new uptown housing absorbed the revenues of the city's middling and elite families in the years 1850 to 1880, the city's laboring people remained concentrated in territories first claimed by the families of artisans and journeymen, especially on the Lower East Side. As each depression ripened downtown lots on the old Rutgers, De Lancey, and Stuyvesant lands by reducing acquisition costs, builders replaced earlier generations of subdivided tenant houses with tenements and launched a new cycle of filtering from within. Some of the city's older artisan neighborhoods gave way to commercial redevelopment—particularly the West Side Fifth and Eighth wards, which became the warehouse district now known as SoHo, with expanded sweatshops above the stores in cast-iron buildings. In the 1850s, as metal shops, gas-houses, and factories located along Manhattan's shores, new Irish and German working-class neighborhoods extended north into Hell's Kitchen on the West Side and Yorktown on the East Side.<sup>7</sup>

At the heart of the housing market remained the essential strategy of securing demand by restricting supply. The permanent housing crisis moved in waves, exacerbated by swells of immigration following each depression. Doubtless for thousands who settled in the city, as for the Irish in the 1840s and 1850s, tenements, however crowded, represented an improvement over the living conditions they left behind. Each generation of new arrivals adapted their housekeeping to the exigencies of crowding and mobility. And working-class families developed cooperative strategies to maintain their standard of living against repeated encroachments from landlords and employers alike—from low wages and rent hikes that in reducing housing space intensified the requirements and reduced the value of domestic labor. However frequent their change in domestic quarters, wage-earning New Yorkers created neighborhood institutions—informal credit networks, saloons, ward clubhouses, benevolent societies, unions, and church congregations—which transformed the territories of hardship into the staging grounds of ongoing social contest.<sup>8</sup>

If investment maps and the logic of the bifurcated housing market systematically created class territories, New Yorkers drew their own boundaries through the daily patterns of social traffic and interaction. By the 1850s, a new literature of "guides" that "uncovered" and "exposed" the city to its middle-class residents testified to the irrelevance of spatial proximity to social knowledge.<sup>9</sup> But the practical necessities of sharing the city landscape also exposed social and spatial

contradictions that could not be ignored. The questions that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century remain with us today: What were the social limits of private property rights? Who bore the social costs of unlimited rights of appropriation? How within a shared environment could any individual justly claim an exclusive interest in and control of resources necessary to all? These questions arose not from the most oppressed but from middle-class New Yorkers who saw in the city's mid-nineteenth-century housing conditions a danger to their own health, safety, and domestic tranquillity, and a threat to the social equilibrium of a free-market society. Their answers to these questions were constrained by the contradictions of the mid-nineteenth-century liberal republican response to the transformation of property relations into market relations. Regarding private property in land (as well as in labor) as the means to independent living, reformers who took up the housing question had limited ways of addressing the consequences of the circulation of land, housing, and labor as commodities.

### *The Politics of Property*

Challenges to the Anglo-American tradition of landed property rights first emerged not in the United States but in Europe, where the privileges of crown, church, and aristocracy came under assault, and in the West Indies, where Haiti's successful slave revolution broke asunder the landed basis of racial domination. Such New Yorkers as Chancellor James Kent warned of the "Jacobin" threat to republican institutions, but it was not just radicals who had begun to question the historical foundations and justice of exclusive rights in land or enslaved labor. Steeped in a faith in natural rights and natural laws of economic behavior, liberal political thinkers could find no principle that overrode every *man's* right to the property of his own labor, and they had begun to question the legitimacy of a landed elite's monopoly of the wealth of nations.<sup>10</sup>

American political leaders had built and compromised their nation on contradictory principles of protecting the institution of slavery while at the same time affirming private property rights that found their justification in a person's ownership of self. The compromise collapsed, but only at that moment when the principle of labor's alienability, the free labor market, had transformed the meaning of property in labor. Labor power, not persons, not the self, could be bought and sold like any other commodity. And where, as in the South, emancipated labor had no access to the means of subsistence, landowners reasserted their control over labor through their control of land.<sup>11</sup>

Having embraced the principle of free labor half a century earlier, northern republican leaders sought to secure the benefits of proprietary independence by abolishing the vestigial property relations of a "feudal order." In New York, farmers drew on the language of the Revolution for seventy-five years to attack the state's "landed aristocracy." In the 1840s and 1850s, New Yorkers struck new compromises on the meaning and extent of real property rights through constitutional and legal reforms, and the last preemptive powers of a landed social order gave way to the imperatives of the market. The political debates of the mid-nineteenth century framed the possibilities for state intervention in the housing market.

The 1846 movement to write a new constitution in New York drew strength from overlapping political developments. Popular attacks on the powers of corporations chartered by special legislation, anxieties over rising taxes that bailed out state-sponsored canals, and the pressures of creditor-debtor relations following the panic of 1837 laid the ground for a bipartisan coalition that saw in a revised state constitution a new democratic charter. Although motivated by different concerns, anticanal Barnburners, Anti-Rent farmers, and reform-minded lawyers joined in dismantling an older commonwealth tradition of direct legislative involvement in the economy. Attacking state debts (which taxed individual initiative), special charters, and feudal tenures, constitutional reformers denounced "monopolies" that ran against the democratic republican grain. They simultaneously called for a reduction of government's powers and an increase in electoral participation. Thus the 1846 constitution sharply restricted the Legislature's power to incur debts for internal improvements, endorsed general incorporation laws, and abolished state inspection of commodities. New provisions for biennial Senate elections, single-member Assembly districts, the election of judges, voter referenda on state debts, and the abolition of property requirements for officeholding aimed at bringing government action more closely under citizens' control.<sup>12</sup>

Constitutional and legal reforms of the 1840s and 1850s endorsed a laissez-faire economy and purported to shift government's role from that of an active agent in economic development to that of the groundskeeper of the neutral playing field of contractual private property relations. But while democratic utilitarian thought embraced competition as the greatest public good, laying the legal and constitutional foundations of a free-market economy required the setting of limits on preemptive property rights. Antebellum judges had themselves initiated the process of weighing absolute private rights against public policy by modifying common law doctrines that inhibited new industrial land uses. The tensions of redefining property rights and adapting them to

new market conditions without infringing on the principle of the state's responsibility to protect private property was evident in the treatment of tenure relations in the 1846 constitution.<sup>13</sup>

Advocates of the 1846 constitution saw its reforms as fulfilling the "policy of our government which was to favor free alienation of property, and to discourage the accumulation and perpetuation of large estates in particular families." Thus the constitution abolished feudal tenures, as had the Legislature by statute repeatedly since 1779. Furthermore, in an effort to end "feudal" conditions in leases for life or in fee, the constitution voided "all fines, quarter sales or other like restraints upon alienation reserved in any grant of land." Finally, the constitution incorporated the statutory rule against parole (oral) leases of more than a year's duration. By making written leases a matter of fundamental law, the state presumably encouraged tenants to reject unreasonable covenants and thereby protect themselves against feudal customs and even the common law.<sup>14</sup>

But delegates representing the cities expressed concern that these reforms on behalf of rural leaseholders would interfere with the rights and interests of urban landowners. Landlords in the "vicinity of cities" often leased their extensive speculative holdings "for agricultural purposes for long term, and in view of their being wanted hereafter for city purposes," explained one delegate, who was himself a member of a prominent Manhattan merchant landowning family. Restrictions upon the length of leases, the delegate complained, would render such lands utterly "unproductive" until such time as they might be developed for city use. Furthermore, delegates warned that proposals to restrict covenants against tenant alienation of leases "would admit of a more general construction allowing tenants to sub-rent without consent." If extended to cities, such a provision threatened the interests of landlords "who took care to know who were to be their tenants when they made leases and [who] should not be deprived of the right to do so."<sup>15</sup>

City landowners saw to it that reforms that established the principle of land's free alienability did not also discourage strategies that made real estate investments competitive with other sectors of capital. The 1846 constitution placed an "agricultural" qualifier on its prohibition of leases for terms of longer than twelve years, allowing city rentiers to continue speculative trading in ground leases of twenty-one years and longer. The restriction on covenants against tenant alienation of leases remained, however, and was largely ignored by city rentiers, who continued to covenant against subletting without permission.<sup>16</sup>

A similar ambiguity in extending private property rights by limiting traditional prerogatives of landholding emerged with the passage of

New York's first married women's property act in 1848. Despite the aggressive campaign of such of feminists as Ernestine Rose and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, most lawmakers who supported the reform saw it less as an attack on the economic foundations of patriarchy than as a measure that extended men's powers to protect dependent women. New York's wealthiest families had long used trusts to create separate estates that sheltered wives' property from husbands' obligations for debts. But reform lawyers who viewed equity jurisdiction as cumbersome and restricted in its benefits joined debtors in the campaign to place all wives' property beyond the reach of creditors. Like the mid-century general incorporation laws that replaced special legislative charters, married women's property acts can be read as part of the larger trend to promote commercial ventures by creating a personal safety net. Married women's property rights abolished the patriarchal structure of landed property and labor relations in a commercial economy that no longer questioned the rights of appropriation that those relations embodied.<sup>17</sup>

Alongside the 1846 constitution and 1848 Married Women's Property Act, the mid-nineteenth-century land reform movement broadened popular discussion of the republican conception of private property rights and indeed to many people represented a means of resolving the tensions between the sanctity of those rights and the problematic social powers of monopoly. The intellectual seeds of land reform were laid in England and Ireland, where Chartists, militant tenants, and liberal political economists all attacked the political and economic position of an elite landed class. David Ricardo and, a generation later, John Stuart Mill questioned the economic utility and social justice of land monopolies; class monopolies of the limited supply of natural resources, they argued, arose not from individual initiative but from inherited rank. If labor produced all value, what right did landowners have to collect in rising rents the "unearned" value that resulted from the labors of society as a whole?<sup>18</sup>

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, Americans gave the principles of land reform a distinctive twist. As in Europe, radical and liberal strains of land reform found different followers. New York mechanics who embraced Owenist (and later Fourierist) associationist ideas envisioned utopian communities that, replacing competition with cooperation, would share the resource of land as common property. Although Jacksonian workingmen remained skeptical that freely distributed land could resolve the conflicts they had only begun to articulate as divided interests of capital and labor, they placed land reform on their political agenda alongside free education, lien legislation, and

the abolition of banking monopolies. But when in the late 1820s such radicals as Thomas Skidmore carried Owenist principles to their logical conclusion and called for the abolition of private property, trade unionists hastened to reassure the public that they "only want to be secured in our labor and have no more intention of taking what does not belong to us than we have of taking arsenic."<sup>19</sup>

The stronger strain of American land reform drew on the agrarian republican tradition, which viewed individual proprietorship as the foundation of personal and civic virtue. Unlike Europe, the United States enjoyed an abundance of vacant land. When the frontier was opened to settlers, the nation would tap its natural resources without challenging the principle of private property rights in land (or, indeed, in labor). In the 1840s and 1850s, this faith mobilized popular support for the conquest of western territories and triggered lively debate over policies to distribute public lands to homesteaders. By the late 1850s, the antislavery movement had linked free soil and free labor, and the new Republican party endorsed liberal homesteading policies that reinforced the antislavery alliance of northern farmers, small producers, western merchants, railroads, and land speculators.<sup>20</sup>

Antebellum land reform addressed the question of the exclusive appropriative powers of landownership by promising those rights to increasing numbers of people. Attaching the republican goal of proprietary independence to migration, land reformers implicitly conceded that that goal could not be realized in eastern cities. But as taken up by the labor movement, land reform also represented a strategy to improve the conditions of working people within the free labor market: if workers' families could migrate to affordable homesteads, those who remained behind might stand in a better bargaining position. In New York City, workingmen further called on the city to distribute corporation common lands for the construction of workers' housing. At the very moment when the city took more than 600 acres of uptown land out of the market to create Central Park, unemployed demonstrators sought to apply the principles of land reform to the city's housing crisis. But with immigration accelerating, neither western migration nor cheap city lands could alleviate the condition of workers caught between employers' and landlords' drive for profit.<sup>21</sup>

Liberal land reformers, like the advocates of the constitutional and legal reforms of the mid-nineteenth century, saw in the distribution and unconstrained circulation of abundant land a solution to the threat that concentrated wealth posed to a democratic social order. Once positive state policy guaranteed the conditions of distribution, government could step back from the market and give private property rights free

reign. But if the distribution of land embodied the goal of independent proprietorship, laissez-faire principles extended to all forms of property. Even as an older order of landed property relations finally gave way to the ideology of a free market that preserved the principle of access to proprietorship, a new system of property relations had begun to emerge. In a development prefigured by the absentee ownership of land, corporations organized individual property rights as claims not on the direct use of land, labor, or other resources but as rights to revenues, "benefits" severed from use. And even as new corporate institutions and powers of absentee ownership emerged, liberal New Yorkers began to formulate a new defense of state regulation of individual private property rights in the use of city land and housing.

### *Housing Reform*

New York City's first housing reform movement, responding to conditions twenty years in the making, took another twenty years to achieve its legislative goals. By the 1850s, the housing crisis had received a decade of publicity from city officials faced with the task of explaining and controlling the rising mortality rate, from newspaper editors who called upon capitalists to undertake philanthropic building ventures, and from private charity leaders who found their agenda for moral reform overwhelmed by housing conditions that contradicted the very definition of morality attached to respectable home life. Whereas reformers of the 1820s and 1830s had focused on the contamination of particular neighborhoods tenanted by "vagrants," by the 1840s respectable New Yorkers were beginning to view housing conditions throughout the city as cause and symptom of new and dangerous social divisions. Indeed, housing conditions became a primary field of social interpretation and debate which incorporated a range of mid-century intellectual and political currents.

Discussions of agrarian land reform spilled over into the Whig *Courier's* attack on the "practical Fourierism" of working-class neighborhoods and Horace Greeley's *Tribune* editorials advocating western migration. Irish and English immigrants applied their own radical brands of land reform in attacks on parasitic city landlords. Physicians, drawing on English investigations, added a scientific gloss to moral reform efforts, stressing the impact of the social environment on individual character and the value of professional medical expertise in investigations of the problem. Utilitarian merchants who defined the public interest as an ever-expanding economy warned that poor

housing conditions and the social disorders they bred would scare away investors, customers, and new city residents. Manufacturers saw in high rents the fuel of worker militancy and in tenement life the corruption of disciplined work habits. Nativists and Whig politicians warned that unscrupulous Tammany politicians would exploit ethnic neighborhoods to their own advantage by trading drinks for votes.<sup>22</sup>

From the 1830s, commentators had readily blamed riots, disease, crime, and immorality on housing conditions; and with the depression of the 1840s, the Astor Place riot and cholera epidemic of 1849, the citywide strike wave in 1850, and the police riot and demonstrations by the unemployed in 1857, editors and reformers asserted the connection between civil disorder, epidemics, and housing conditions with increased vigor.<sup>23</sup> The imported European concept of "dangerous classes" gained currency in popular journals and books. Propertied New Yorkers, expressing fear that they were losing control of the city, blamed tenants for disregarding the prerogatives of private property rights and landlords for abusing them. Conditions in working-class neighborhoods, they argued, placed the entire city's physical, economic, and social well-being at risk. And because through voting, through disease, through strikes, and through riots, social politics asserted a class geography that did not respect class boundaries, reform-minded New Yorkers began to see a solution to class divisions in housing reform.

As part of the transformation of common law in the first half of the nineteenth century, judges had repeatedly weighed absolute private property rights against the social needs and benefits of development. In the arena of landlord and tenant law, however, absolutism had triumphed as the means to entrepreneurship. The contract principle of *caveat emptor* incorporated the ancient doctrine of tenants' absolute liability for rent and relieved landlords of any obligation to guarantee the habitability of housing. When the law failed to distinguish landlord-tenant relations from general contractual relations, the "consuming" city public had no legal means to restrain the mass production of tenant houses that lacked sanitation, heat, ventilation, and structural stability.

In the 1840s, City Inspector John B. Griscom marshaled utilitarian arguments to warn that landlords violated the basic principle of a republican society by maximizing their own profits at the expense of the public good. "A clearer understanding of the relative cost to the City of sickness and health among the poorer classes," Griscom suggested, "may be had by supposing a small section, as a court or block of buildings, containing a given number of inhabitants who are liable to be thrown upon public charity for support by the premature death or

illness of heads of families." Furthermore, he insisted, inadequate housing undermined the growth of the larger economy by producing a chronically sick and unstable work force. In order to protect public welfare, Griscom argued, the state had to intervene in the housing market.<sup>24</sup>

Precedent for state regulation of real property already existed indirectly in the state's power to tax and to assess and directly in its police power and the power of eminent domain. Positive legislation required landowners to pay for public works, and preventive laws established minimum standards for building materials used in outer walls and roofs in fire districts drawn primarily according to building density. The same public authority that supervised streets, sewers, sunken lots, piers, wells, and cisterns also monitored the "private" utilities of privies and such "nuisance industries" as bone-boiling establishments, slaughterhouses, tanneries, and soap manufactories. City inspectors could order the removal from private property of "nuisances" that were regarded as public hazards by virtue of their immediate external impact but not because they threatened the well-being of occupants of the premises.<sup>25</sup>

John Griscom drew on these precedents to recommend legislative reform as the key to resolving New York's housing crisis. "If there is any propriety in the law regulating the construction of buildings in reference to fire," he argued, choosing a particularly sensitive subject for New Yorkers, who had suffered more than one multiblock conflagration, "equally proper would be one respecting the protection of the inmates from the pernicious influence of badly arranged houses and apartments." And he urged that the definition of "public nuisance" reach into internal housing conditions: "The power given to a magistrate to pull down a building whose risk of falling endangers the lives of the inmates and passers-by," he insisted, "may with equal reason be extended to the correction of interior conditions of tenements when dangerous to health and life. The latter should be regarded with as much solicitude as the prosperity of citizens." Drawing an analogy to federal legislation regulating the number of passengers on seagoing vessels, Griscom argued that the city, too, was justified in putting "an immediate stop to the practice of crowding so many human beings in such limited space."<sup>26</sup>

In the 1850s, the merchants and manufacturers who led the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor and the physicians of the Academy of Medicine took up Griscom's recommendations and began to lobby the state legislature. But when he had recommended the legal abolition of cellar dwellings in 1845, Griscom himself had noted "that

any stringent measures forbidding the letting of underground tenements as dwellings would meet with considerable resistance from interested parties as conflicting with their personal rights and interests."<sup>27</sup> What Griscom did not say was that the "interested parties" who resisted housing reform included tenants as well as builders and landlords.

Unlike agrarian leaseholders, New York's antebellum wage-earning tenants did not organize systematic political resistance to landlords' power. Though trade unionists and Irish radicals allied themselves with middle-class land reformers in the 1850 Industrial Congress, for the most part working-class tenants engaged in the practical politics of negotiating with particular landlords and switching landlords often. Their actions within the housing market took on a collective aspect only insofar as they prompted new landlord strategies, including the subtenure system. While such reformers as Griscom attacked the rapacious greed of working-class sublandlords, many tenants were sympathetic to these community creditors, who, by "extending" the wage, sustained working-class families within the bounds of the legal economy. Then, too, tenants well knew that landlords repaired housing in order to increase rents. And finally, whereas the strongest proponents of housing reform were first Whigs and then Republicans, the majority of city tenants remained faithful to a Democratic party that opposed legislative reforms.<sup>28</sup>

In light of land reformers' preoccupation with land as a productive resource, it is worth stressing that the calls for state regulation of the housing market were not aimed at New York's landowners, the rentiers who stood at the head of the housing market. For it was the very focus on tenement landlords (the people who collected rents in order to pay rents) and on the small builders who produced tenements that made housing reform consistent with the view that the state existed to protect private property rights. Extension of the state's police power to preserve civil order, health, and safety could be ideologically distinguished from direct state intervention in the economy. So long as housing was treated as a moral and social problem rather than as a political and economic one, state action did not fundamentally challenge laissez-faire ideology. And when the issue was clearly economic—as with insurance companies' campaigns for construction standards that reduced fire risks—it intersected with a new disposition toward socializing risk and limiting liability to further commercial expansion.

If the reasoning that separated the property relations of housing from those of land, labor, and credit seems curiously compartmentalized, the isolation of housing as a discrete public health and safety issue

helped mobilize the support of the city's manufacturers and merchants. The antebellum language of housing, which erased its identity as a workplace, reinforced this narrow focus and combined with the particular conditions of New York State and New York City politics in the 1860s to shape the city's first housing reform legislation.

When housing reformers went to the Legislature in 1856, they found lawmakers elected on nativist, antislavery, and temperance platforms receptive to their cause. The coalition that within the year would consolidate into the Republican party saw political as well as social dangers in a Democratic city. In 1856 and again in 1857, legislative committees conducted fact-finding investigations into the Manhattan and Brooklyn tenant housing problem and heard lengthy testimony from medical experts who denounced the indifference, ignorance, and incompetence of city politicians on public health matters. By merging the two cities into a new metropolitan district, the Legislature technically circumvented the issue of home rule. Still, however ready Republican lawmakers were to expose and document the extent of the city's housing crisis and blame city politicians, they were uncertain of their power to resolve it.<sup>29</sup>

The first housing reform legislation came indirectly. Commercial tenants capitalized on the widespread antipathy to landlords' "feudal" powers and in 1860 secured statutory modifications of the common law doctrine of tenants' liability for rent for uninhabitable buildings. And insurance companies joined in lobbying for a series of laws that extended the boundaries of fire districts, introduced new minimum construction standards, and established a new city office for building inspection. Then, too, reformers' efforts to move health wardens from the (Democratic) City Inspector's Office to the state-controlled (Republican) Metropolitan Police Department resulted in the creation of a special division of sanitary police.<sup>30</sup>

The pace of housing reform accelerated following the devastating draft riots in 1863, the renewed threat of cholera in 1865, and the ascendancy of the Radical Republicans, who saw in social reform legislation both a means to curtail the Democrats' power (by replacing the offices of city patronage) and a positive program for "Reconstruction at Home." Then, too, in 1865 the labor movement and the German press threw their support behind the efforts of the bipartisan (and anti-Tammany) Citizens' Association to address housing conditions. Although the social divisions that underlay the draft riots were complex, propertied New Yorkers continued to express faith that housing reform could assuage the class antagonisms that the riot had exposed.<sup>31</sup>

State politicians formulated the issue of housing and public health reform as questions of party power and enforcement. In 1865, lawmakers created a Metropolitan Health Board, which, like the Metropolitan Police and Fire departments before it, removed city matters from the hands of locally elected officials and authorized a new system of housing inspection. Though aimed at eradicating the physical conditions that fed the spread of cholera, to many wage-earning tenants the invasion of Board of Health inspectors represented an assault on the integrity of their neighborhoods and domestic quarters. And as the campaign for housing reform continued, so did the resistance of small builders and tenants to measures that threatened to raise construction costs and rents without fundamentally relieving the conditions of the housing market.<sup>32</sup>

The Radical Republicans' 1867 Tenement House Act consolidated the powers of fire and health inspection and expanded the jurisdiction of the Building Department over tenement construction and conversion. The law required the filing of building plans, and it confirmed the authority of the Board of Health to inspect tenements and take action against landlords for violation of specified minimum housing standards. In an effort to overcome the confusion of liability within the city's tiered tenure system, the law required landlords and agents to post their names and addresses conspicuously in their buildings. But despite intense debate over proposals to license subletting and regulate tenement density, the reform legislation limited itself to supervising the structural elements of housing: the number and quality of utilities (one toilet to twenty persons), room dimensions and ceiling heights, provisions for ventilation and light, and building materials. These minimum standards for new buildings were a significant gain. By standardizing the product, the law also regulated competition within the building industry. How city dwellers actually inhabited the tenement apartments, however, depended on the level of wages and rents—matters beyond the purview of law.<sup>33</sup>

So long as wages remained low and unemployment chronic, working-class tenants had little choice but to crowd or to move. However bad the housing, there was little reason to expect its regulation would prompt builders to produce enough multifamily dwellings to accommodate the city's laboring people at rents they could afford. Though the law limited the rights of builders and landlords, it did not positively defend the rights of tenants. At most it sought to protect tenants as members of the "public" from houses that fell down, burned up, or fostered epidemics. And after 1870, in part as a result of the party

and class politics that had governed its passage, many provisions of the law went unenforced.<sup>34</sup>

The principle gained in the first housing reform legislation was an important one: the state could set limits on strategies of profitmaking sanctioned by private property rights. The old common law principle that restrained a landowner from using property in such a way as to injure the interests of a neighbor had been effectively recast: the city as a whole constituted the neighborhood. And in separating housing from other forms of private property, reformers sought to consider its distinctive spatial and social attributes and the consequences of inadequate shelter within a shared landscape. Yet this very separation also exposes the limits of housing reform as a solution to the social costs of capitalist property relations. The appropriative powers buried in the historical construction of "individual" property rights in land and housing, a householder's right to dependents' labor, had become class rights to the value of society's labor.

Those limits could be seen more clearly in one of the nineteenth century's most radical social movements—Henry George's campaign for a single tax on land. In his 1879 *Progress and Poverty*, George drew on antebellum land reformers' critique of the social monopoly of natural resources to argue that "the great cause of inequality in the distribution of wealth is inequality in the ownership of land." The solution therefore was to eliminate the benefits of landownership when it was severed from land use, to tax away landowners' "unearned increment," the ground rent they collected from appreciating land values. The community created that value through its labors, and no individual could claim exclusive rights in the common property of natural resources. With a single tax on land, George argued, "no one could afford to hold land that he was not using, and consequently, land not in use would be thrown open to those who would use it."<sup>35</sup>

It was a remarkable critique and program in a nation that had enshrined private property rights in land as its unique heritage and the foundation of republican government. George rejected the call of antebellum land reformers for the distribution of public lands through homesteading policies. Having spent time in San Francisco, he had observed at firsthand the monopolization of western lands by railroads, speculators, and mining companies. "Any measures which merely permit or facilitate the greater subdivision of land," he insisted, could not offset the "tendency to concentration." Instead, George called for a single tax that would inhibit speculation and landlordism and restore land to the people who occupied and used it; such a measure would not

infringe on property rights in improvements that contributed to material progress.<sup>36</sup>

The abolition of rentiers' right to expropriate social wealth in ground rent, George argued, would free capitalists and workers to cooperate in the shared project of increasing that wealth. Thus, though he abandoned earlier agrarian land reformers' faith in homesteading, he shared their producerist assumptions and analysis of land's benefit to industrial workers. If the alternative of independent proprietorship was restored, "competition would no longer be one-sided. Instead of laborers competing against each other for employment and in their competition cutting down wages to the point of bare subsistence, employers would everywhere be competing for laborers, and wages would rise to the fair earnings of labor." Furthermore, employers would bid "against the ability of laborers to become their own employers upon the natural opportunities freely opened to them by the tax which prevented monopolization."<sup>37</sup>

George brought his program to New York City, and in 1886 he formed an alliance between the city's trade union movement and middle-class reformers and ran for mayor as the United Labor Party candidate. Few labor leaders shared his optimism that the single tax represented a permanent solution to poverty or that the elimination of land monopoly would reconcile the interests of capital and labor. Yet in the 1880s the cooperative labor movement itself, and particularly the Knights of Labor, had moved far beyond shop-floor relations to experiment with multi-issue community organizing.<sup>38</sup>

George's mayoral campaign found its institutional base in the independent political culture that had sprung up in the city's ethnic neighborhoods. As the historian David Scobey has shown, the George campaign organized "pledge drives, neighborhood meetings, and street-corner rallies . . . supported by informal social networks within the working-class community and by the rhetorical traditions of organized labor." Unlike efforts at housing reform twenty years earlier, the George campaign mobilized wage-earning families who saw improved housing conditions as only one of the benefits of abolishing land monopolies. And though the insurgent party was defeated, the threat of working-class militancy prompted propertied New Yorkers to renew discussion of housing reform as a solution to class conflict.<sup>39</sup>

Yet George's ideas were symptomatic of the larger problem of limiting a critique of private property to only one of its forms. By the late nineteenth century, rentiers who collected an unearned increment were not simply landowners, for land no longer stood at the heart of the American economy, and its unequal distribution was not the only

source of social inequality. A program that captured the landed wealth of an Astor or a Vanderbilt left untouched the even greater wealth—and appropriative powers—of a Morgan, Rockefeller, or Carnegie. Nor would the abolition of property in land affect the power of the stock- and bondholders who "owned" the means of industrial production. Property relations had moved beyond the family and market relations that determined labor's access to land and housing as resources for independent subsistence. Corporate absentee ownership had "socialized" the ownership of capital—and claims on the value of labor—without risking the principle of exclusive appropriation. Capitalists in effect paid landowners the private tax of ground rent in exchange for the historical legacy and legitimacy of private property rights. If George, no less than Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, declared that property in land was theft, socialists took the argument the next step and called for the abolition of all private property.<sup>40</sup>

The first half of the nineteenth century yielded contradictory concepts of private property rights within the liberal tradition. On one level, the triumph of laissez-faire claims to absolute property rights reinforced the concept that the state exists only to protect those rights. On another, nineteenth-century housing reformers formulated the concept of an overriding public interest that justified the expansion of the state's police power to restrain the exercise of property rights that infringed on the "domestic tranquillity" of the community as a whole. The two conceptions opened the way to the weighing of private interests and public consequences so characteristic of land-use regulation today. And in a sense George's single-tax campaign recovered a third tradition of property rights—that of common rights in natural resources. New theories of social limits on private property rights have emerged when the social costs of exclusive appropriation have been felt to be too great. These debates continue as New York City once again faces a housing crisis.<sup>41</sup> In order to address the contemporary housing question it is necessary, as it was in the past, to look at how the larger structures of property and labor relations have emerged and worked together to determine people's access to shelter. To view these relations as having a history is also to see the possibility of their future transformation.



shift from the pattern in 1807, when proprietary masters tended to move to the periphery. See n. 13 above.

57. For typical Rutgers ground leases, see RC, 210:66, 67; 212:358.

58. For descriptions of the Seventh Ward, see Henry Taylor, *New York as It Was Sixty Years Ago* (Brooklyn, 1894), pp. 24-25; G. W. Sheldon, "The Old Shipbuilders of New York," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 65 (1882): 224-36. For early pockets of poverty in reclaimed marshland of the Seventh Ward, see Ford, *Slums and Housing*, 1:86; and for complaints, MCC, 1784-1831, 2:440-41, 5:192.

59. Henry B. Yshope, *The Disposition of Loyalist Estates in the Southern District of New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), pp. 154-56. For construction patterns, see James Hardie, *A Census of New Buildings Erected in the City of New York in the Year 1824* (New York, 1825), pp. 5-14. In 1827 a grocer sold a house at Broome and Sheriff streets to a widow for \$3,100, while the cooper Adam Pentz leased a house for four years at Forsyth and Division for \$156 a year: RC, 232:292, 210:66-67. See also Rush Hawkins, "Corlear's Hook, 1820," NYHS. Another Hester Street notice in the *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, Dec. 2, 1829, offered "for sale or to let" a two-story brick-front house with nine rooms and two kitchens "for a large or two small families."

60. CA, Mar. 6, 1817.

61. Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 107-42, offers the best account of the "metropolitan industrialization" of antebellum New York City. Wilentz's table 11, p. 404, shows that by 1855, 48.6% of manufacturing was done through outwork, 15.5% took place in "garret shops," 5.0% in "neighborhood shops," and 30.9% in factories (predominantly for ironworks, stonecutting, and printing). See also Lindstrom and Sharpless, "Urban Growth and Economic Structure," pp. 170-71, showing that 78.9% of manufacturing was for the local market in 1840.

62. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, pp. 237-63, 266; Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power*, pp. 33-36.

63. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, pp. 265-68; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, p. 402.

64. On ethnicity, see Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1949), pp. 39-47. The social differentiation of the East Side and West Side below 14th Street can be seen in contrasting density in 1830. On the Lower East Side (Wards 7, 10, and 13) density averaged 11.5 persons per improved lot, while the West Side's Wards 8 and 9 averaged 9.7 persons. The quality of new construction is also reflected in the appreciation of land values. Assessed land values in Ward 7 increased from approximately \$4.0 million in 1825 to \$5.5 million in 1830 (1,326 improved lots, the majority under Rutgers' covenants). Land values in Wards 10 and 13 rose from \$4.3 to \$5.9 million in 1830 (2,485 improved lots on the old De Lancey farm). On the West Side between 1825 and 1830, land values in Ward 9 more than doubled, from \$4.4 million to \$9 million (2,539 improved lots). See BAA Documents 1, no. 37 (Dec. 5, 1831): 130-31, and no. 4 (Dec. 5, 1831), unbound, Appendix. See table 4.

65. On the 1840 journey to work, see Pred, *Spatial Dynamics*, pp. 207-13; Stott, *Worker in the Metropolis*, pp. 402-3, and on social geography in the 1850s, 373-404. See also Peter Knights, "Population Turnover, Persistence, and Residential Mobility in Boston, 1820-1860," in Stephan Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Cities: Essays in the New Urban History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), pp. 258-74.

66. Duer, "Anniversary Address," pp. 18-19; *New York Mirror*, Feb. 2, 1828.

67. Sam Bass Warner coined the phrase "walking city" in *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973). He suggests the social bonds of proximity in *The Private City: Philadelphia*

in Three Periods of Its Growth (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp. 10-11, 16, 21, 50.

68. James Fenimore Cooper, *Home as Found* (1838; New York: Capricorn, 1964), pp. 42-43.

#### 4. *The Social Meanings of Housing, 1800-1840*

1. *Letters of John Pintard to His Daughter Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, ed. Dorothy Barck, NYHS Collections 70-74 (1937-1940), 1:42 (Dec. 18, 1816).

2. For Pintard's biography, see Barck's sketch in her Introduction to *ibid.*, pp. ix-xx; Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 242-43; David L. Sterling, "William Duer, John Pintard, and the Panic of 1792," in Joseph Frese and Jacob Judd, eds., *Business Enterprise in Early New York* (Tarrytown: Sleepy Hollow Press, 1979), pp. 99-132; Thomas Bender, *New York Intellect: A History of Intellectual Life from 1750 to the Beginnings of Our Own Times* (New York: Knopf, 1987), pp. 48-50.

3. *Letters of John Pintard*, 1:137 (July 29, 1818), 182 (Apr. 12, 1819).

4. The geographer James Vance offers one of the best theoretical statements of the separation of "work" and "home" in "Housing the Worker: The Employment Linkage as a Force in Urban Structure," *Economic Geography* 42 (1966): 294-325. As Jeanne Boydston argues in "Home and Work: The Industrialization of Housework in the Northeastern United States from the Colonial Period to the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1984), pp. 3-25, the picture of domestic households "separated" from the economy and the problem of conceptualizing the ongoing economic value of housework begin with historians' emphasis on the realization of the value of labor through the exchange of cash and commodities. Thus, for example, women's work in manufacturing goods in the household, particularly cloth, is categorized as "productive labor," while the household production of family clothing (which continued well into the nineteenth century) generally is not. The issue then is how to analyze the decline in the household production of commodities for exchange in relation to ongoing housework (including the expansion of some forms of housework, such as, in bourgeois households, the work of entertaining). Boydston and others have tried to demonstrate the economic value of housework through calculations of the savings that derive from "purchase avoidance" as well as from the direct labor of food preparation, the maintenance of house and clothing, and nursing the sick. When so many of these household "products" are also available through the market, as in the late-twentieth-century service economy, it is perhaps easier to recognize the economic value of the labor that produces them. But analytic language that opposes "work" and "home" continues to impoverish our analysis of nineteenth-century women as historical agents who, though constrained in the exercise of power, fully participated in and contributed to the construction of a new system of social and economic relations. Thus to point to the decline of household commodity production as a removal of "work" from the household is to see but one part of a much larger restructuring of the economy which included an ideological redefinition of what constituted labor, that is, the equating of labor's value with its cash equivalent rather than with its product. See also Jeanne Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Antebellum Housework and Working-Class Subsistence," *Radical History Review* 35 (1985): 7-25; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York City, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), pp. 11-16; Alice Kessler Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-31. Belinda

Bozzoli offers a valuable analysis of another theoretical dimension of this problem, the impact of domestic economic relations on the larger processes of social change, in "Marxism, Feminism, and South African Studies," *Journal of South African Studies* 9 (1983): 139-71.

5. *Letters to John Pintard*, 2:220 (Jan. 27, 1826).

6. In thinking about the question of how people classify social attributes and assign cultural value in relation to housing, I have been influenced by the work of the anthropologist Constance Perin on twentieth-century American housing. See *Everything in Its Place: Social Order and Land Use in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 20-80.

7. Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of Housework* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), pp. 19, 33-37, 51-53, 67-68, 85-96, 104-12; Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), pp. 127-47; Charles Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp. 17-18 and, for after 1840, 183-89. For heating in New York row houses, see *Letters of John Pintard*, 4:8 (Jan. 28, 1832); and an article in *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 10, 1829, recommending taking a "stove plate and pipe in your rooms which you wish to warm and let[ting] the pipe go round and round until it has distributed the heat." See also Siegfried Gideon, *Mechanization Takes Command* (New York: Norton, 1969), pp. 528-30 (stoves), 659-67 (baths), 684-86, 692 (bathrooms). Boydston, in "Home and Work," pp. 195-96, argues that we should be careful in celebrating "labor-saving" improvements in housing; women at the time often expressed skepticism at inventions that could increase their maintenance responsibilities or introduce new hazards. While such caution is well taken, I am more inclined to accept the claims that plumbing, heating, and cooking utilities made housework less arduous. For respectable women's domestic responsibilities, see Boydston, "Home and Work," chap. 5; Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 127-47; Nancy Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 19-100.

8. Robert Greenhalg Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (1939; Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984), pp. 245-51; Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1973), pp. 56, 59, 64, 100-101, 211-14; Frederick Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 180-81, 205-6. On attitudes toward reciprocity in antebellum marriage, see Carl Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 26-40.

9. On Mrs. Pintard's efforts to negotiate with her husband's employers, see *Letters of John Pintard*, 2:4-6 (Feb. 17, 1821). The intensity with which Pintard felt his own "shame" was clearly expressed in his response to his son-in-law's financial difficulties following the 1829 recession: 4:39-40, 45-46, 63-64. In 1790 the Pintards had owned two slaves.

10. Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 12-43; Carol Lasser, "The World's Dread Laugh: Singlehood and Service in Nineteenth-Century Boston," in Herbert Gutman and Donald Bell, eds., *The New England Working Class and the New Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), pp. 74-75.

11. Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *WMQ*, 3d ser., 44 (1987): 689-721; Grant Thornburn, *Forty Years' Residence in America* (Boston: Russell, Odiorne & Metcalf, 1834), p. 211; *CA*, Apr. 20, 1801.

12. For typical travelers' comments, see Bayard Still, *Mirror for Gotham: New York as Seen by Contemporaries from Dutch Days to the Present* (New York: New

York University Press, 1956), pp. 111, 112. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 20-30, points to contradictory tendencies in "republican" attitudes toward women and stresses the prevailing mysogyny evident in New York men's attitudes toward women's sexuality at the end of the eighteenth century. See also Lewis, "Republican Wife," pp. 713, 715-16, 720.

13. Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), pp. 189-231, 269-88; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), pp. 269-88. I have found Hazel Carby, "Uplifting as They Write: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1984), pp. 4-77, helpful in thinking about the construction of new gender prescriptions in relation to class hierarchies. Carby analyzes the interdependent figures of planter women's "true womanhood" and female slave "depravity." See Boydston, "Home and Work," pp. 101-24, for attitudes revealed in discourse on "economy" during the early national period.

14. Arson incident in Elizabeth Bleeker Diary, NYPL, Jan. 25, 1805: "Our black girl attempted to set fire to our house by placing a brand of fire in the garret in the eves of the house . . . she claimed that she had done [it] but could give no reason." Cf. Edward Probyn Memorandum Book, NYHS, July 9, 1819: "Black girl expected for setting house on fire." On working conditions, see Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 44-103, 193-235; Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 155-68. See also Richard Stott, *The Worker in the Metropolis: New York City, 1820-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), ms. pp. 111, 210-11.

15. *Letters of John Pintard*, 1:137 (July 29, 1818), 181 (Apr. 8, 1819), 150-51 (Oct. 26, 1818), 148 (Oct. 12, 1818), 169 (Mar. 15, 1819), 184 (Apr. 23, 1819). In Pintard's mind, servants did not relieve a wife of her responsibility for household labor; rather they placed her in a management position. Thus he sympathized with his daughter, who was having "trials and difficulties with bad servants, the most embittering of all domestic evils. . . . A husband can escape from them, but the Wife, if a housekeeper herself, is chained down to the constant scene of reiterated trouble & uneasiness, that keeps her in a continual fret & renders [her] unhappy & unpleasant to all about her": 2:80 (Aug. 29, 1821). For examples of Elizabeth and Louisa Pintard's housework—particularly the annual spring house cleaning—see 1:9, 129, 188, 196, 300, 315-16; 2:43, 46-47, 50-51, 315, 350.

16. *Ibid.*, 1:182 (Apr. 12, 1819). On the recruitment of servants, see Carol Lasser, "Domestic Service in New England" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1981), pp. 123-67.

17. Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 34, 63-65; Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1949), p. 67. For a powerful example of a black servant's ability to maintain personal autonomy in a New York City white household, see the Harriet Jacobs [Linda Brent] letters in Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1984), pp. 73-79.

18. *Letters of John Pintard*, 1:182 (Apr. [12], 1819), 215 (Aug. 28, 1819), 125 (June 1, 1818). Hannah cared for her one-year-old child at the Pintard house and then returned to New Brunswick, N.J., according to Pintard, "to exchange her brawling brat for as troublesome a boy about 3 years old." Two months later she left with her husband, who was to be emancipated; her replacement, Jane, had "left her husband in the country who came to town in quest of her, & found her out by means of her sister." These women or their parents may have been former slaves of the Bayard family in New Jersey. Pintard refused to pay Hannah wages,

"as Mr. Bayard desired me to stop them to discharge some debts wh she had left unpaid in Princeton. I discharged her for her conduct and her ingratitude": 1:184, 188, 204, 298.

19. Ernst, *Immigrant Life*, pp. 65-68; and for the 1855 ethnic distribution of domestic workers (92% of whom were foreign-born), 215; Dudden, *Serving Women*, pp. 63-64; see also the observations of Karl Bernhart in Still, *Mirror for Gotham*, p. 111. Dudden suggests that when it became increasingly difficult for New York employers to maintain a mixed staff in the mid-nineteenth century, white women, particularly Irish women, displaced blacks from domestic service. Although Afro-Americans had dropped to 5% of the city's population in 1840 and to less than 2% by 1855, the fears and pressures of job competition exacerbated the hostility of the Irish toward them. For Pintard's view of servants as "insect vexations," see *Letters of John Pintard*, 3:271.

20. Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants, annual reports, 1826-1830, NYHS. Pintard was vice-president of the society; see *Letters of John Pintard*, 2:240, 254, 259-60, 271; 3:23-24, 27.

21. *New-York Mirror*, March 25, 1826.

22. On the classificatory language of moral reform, see chap. 5 below.

23. Stott, *Worker in the Metropolis*, p. 111; *New York State Census* (New York, 1855).

24. For travelers' comments on boarding couples, see, e.g., John M. Duncan, *Travels through Part of the United States and Canada, 1818-1819* (Glasgow, 1923), 2:375-6; Francis Grund, *The Americans in Their Moral, Social, and Political Relations* (London, 1837), 1:238; and Still, *Mirror for Gotham*, pp. 90-91. Frances Trollope describes young Philadelphia boarding couples in *Domestic Manners in America* (1832; New York: Vintage, 1960), pp. 282-85. The Pintards made an exception for the summer boarding of Mrs. Pintard and Louisa, but Pintard complained to Eliza of the "general promiscuous boarding houses with confined apartments & crowded inmates, who might or might not be agreeable to your very particular Mother": *Letters of John Pintard*, 1:80 (Sept. 28, 1817). For Pintard's dismay that his mother-in-law would have to board rather than live with family members, see *ibid.*, pp. 136, 182-83. For Thornburn's calculus, see *Forty Years' Residence*, p. 211.

25. John Griscom, "Annual Report of the City Inspector," BAA Documents 9, no. 59 (1842): 190. For changes in household utilities after 1840, see Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, pp. 183-89; Elizabeth Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of New York's Early Apartments* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming). Utilities—gas, water, and sewerage—became increasingly important in the organization of new respectable neighborhoods. On the geography of water, gas, and sewer lines in relation to elite residential districts before 1860, see Eugene P. Moehring, *Public Works and the Pattern of Urban Real Estate Growth, 1835-1894* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), pp. 94, 98, 100-104.

26. Isaac Holmes, *An Account of America Derived from Actual Observations during a Residence of Four Years in That Republic* (London, 1823), p. 128. The Italian visitor Salvatore Abbate e Migliore found in 1845 that "second rank society" had "two or three servant girls, boarding houses three to six," at \$4 to \$6 a month: Still, *Mirror for Gotham*, p. 91. On artisan housekeeping, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 51-52; Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 306-8.

27. *Letters of John Pintard*, 3:63, 4:8 (Jan. 28, 1832), noting that "were it not for the Pennsylvania anthracite coal mines, this city wd be in a most awful condition.

The consumption of Fuel with every economy is immense. . . ." Stott, *Worker in the Metropolis*, p. 331, points out that working-class housing conditions were far better in New York City than in most immigrants' native lands; my own emphasis is on the decline of domestic working conditions in relation to those of an earlier generation and of other households in the city.

28. Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread," pp. 19-22.

29. John commons et al., *Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark, 1910), p. 315; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, pp. 253-54.

30. National Trades Union, "Report of the Committee on Female Labor," in Commons, *Documentary History*, 6:281, 282; cf. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 137-41. It is noteworthy that the committee called upon "benevolent women" to support striking needleworkers without reflecting on the extent to which those benevolent women, as the employers of domestics, had a vested interest in reduced female wage rates.

31. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 106-20.

32. For the shifting literary construction of ideal places, see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973). I find Nina Baym, *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), a particularly useful reading of the literature of domesticity. See also Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1977), and Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

33. See chap. 2 above. Pintard recalled New York City's "boisterous" New Year's visiting in the 1760s, with a "dram at every house." To "keep up acquaintance with kindred branches," children "were universally sent to visit the family relations": *Letters of John Pintard*, 2:382 (Dec. 27, 1827). Paul Gilje describes colonial New Yorkers' tolerance of plebeian "frolics" on New Year's: *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 21, 22, 252. For regulation of sexual mores, see John D'Emilio and Estelle Freeman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 30-32, 34-38.

34. Esther Singleton, *Social New York under the Georges, 1714-1776* (New York: Ira Friedman, 1902). Although historians have generally dismissed Joseph A. Scoville [Walter Barrett], *The Old Merchants of New York City*, 5 vols. (New York, 1885), its anecdotes offer glimpses into bourgeois manners in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

35. "Tea Party," *New-York Mirror*, Apr. 17, 1824. On front and back parlors, see Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, pp. 14-25, and "The Bond Street Area," *NYHSQ* 16 (1972): 378-87. For parlor rituals, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies*, pp. 92-123. Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, pp. 336-38, was delighted by the gentility of prominent New York houses after "sojourning among an 'I'm-as-good-as-you population'" in the provinces.

36. James Fenimore Cooper, *Home as Found* (1838; New York: Capricorn, 1964), p. 78. Trollope particularly disliked the custom of men's and women's separate entertainment; see *Domestic Manners*, pp. 298-99, 339.

37. *Letters of John Pintard*, 1:143-44 (Sept. 14, 1818). Bender analyzes Clinton's and Pintard's activities as examples of "patrician culture": *New York Intellect*, pp. 50-58.

38. Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), pp. 31, 96, 215-25; Rev. Ward Stafford, *New Missionary Field: A Report to the Female Missionary Society* (New York, 1817), pp. 6-7.

39. Carroll Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), pp. 120-24; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 60-98; Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, pp. 126-59; Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 24-37. On evangelicalism and work discipline, see Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), pp. 79-115. Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, pp. 343-45, reported on a Sunday excursion to a Hoboken park:

Many thousands of people were scattered through the grounds; of these we ascertained, by repeatedly counting, that nineteen-twentieths were men. The ladies were at church. . . . It is impossible not to feel, after passing one Sunday in the churches and chapels of New York, and the next in the gardens of Hoboken, that the thousands of well-dressed men you see enjoying themselves at the latter, have made over the thousands of well-dressed women you saw exhibited at the former, into the hands of the priests, at least, for the day. The American people arrogate to themselves a character of superior morality and religion, but this division of their hours of leisure does not give a favourable idea of either.

40. Edward Probyn Memorandum Book, NYHS, e.g., Feb. 4 and Feb. 5, 1812 (church visits); Jan. 4 (Fourth Ward committee for visiting the poor) and Feb. 3, 1814; Jan. 5 and Feb. 2, 1815 (twenty people to tea); *The Diary of Michael Floy, Jr.: Bowery Village, 1833-1837*, ed. Richard A. E. Brooks (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), passim. Perceptions of legitimate continuities between church and home were demonstrated in a different way in 1811 when a "Mrs. Touchstone" vigorously answered a letter in the *Independent Mechanic* denouncing women who nursed their babies in church. See Howard Rock, ed., "A Woman's Place in Jeffersonian New York: The View from the *Independent Mechanic*," *New York History* 83 (1982): 437-44.

41. *Letters of John Pintard*, 3:51 (Dec. 16, 1828). To help spread the temperance word, the *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 1, 1830, reported on New Year's open houses: "The ladies were holding their annual levee, receiving and exchanging the compliments of the season with their male visitors and treating them to coffee instead of wine and punch."

42. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 41-62, gives a vivid portrait of antebellum tenant neighborhood life. See also Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread"; and Carol Groneman, "'She Earns as a Child; She Pays as a Man': Women Workers in a Mid-Nineteenth-Century New York Community," in Milton Cantor and Bruce Laurie, eds., *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1977), pp. 83-100.

43. *Diary of Michael Floy*, p. 81 (Apr. 28, 1834).

44. Thomas Chamberlain Diary, May 26, 1835, NYPL. Cf. James Boardman's description, quoted in Still, *Mirror for Gotham*, p. 112:

The boarding houses of those numerous classes, the smaller shopkeepers and merchants' clerks, are in general miserably furnished. . . . It is by no means uncommon to see four, or even five or six beds in the same room, and these are of the meanest description without furniture even in the depth of winter: a chest of drawers is, indeed, a rara avis; each boarder making a general de-

pository of his trunk or portmanteau, as poor Jack does of his chest in the forecabin of a ship.

45. Holmes, *Account of America*, p. 128.

46. See, e.g., *MCC*, 1784-1831, 3:101 (Aug. 5, 1802), 4:71 (Aug. 26, 1805). On the male youth in the city, see Diane Lindstrom, "The Economy of Antebellum New York City" (paper presented to the Social Science Research Council, New York, November 1983, table 7, p. 24). On journeymen's popular culture, see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 52-56; on hours, Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, pp. 250-52.

47. *MCC*, 1784-1831, 4:389 (Mar. 30, 1807); 7:729 (Apr. 14, 1814); see also 4:327, 396; 7:669; and for non-Sunday complaints, 4:371; 7:415, 677. Gilje, *Road to Mobocracy*, pp. 207-20, identifies Sunday harassment of evangelical churchgoers as "a clash between middle class and plebeian cultures" or between "evangelicals and traditionalists."

48. "Report of the Committee for Suppressing Immorality," *MCC*, 1784-1831, 7:71-76 (Mar. 18, 1812); proposal to the Legislature, 7:82-84. For identification of the Presbyterian lawyer Joseph Hedden (Ward 6), the Dutch Reformed sailmaker Peter Wendover (Ward 8), and the tanner Richard Cunningham (Ward 4) and their property holdings in 1808 and 1815, see Edmund Willis, "Social Origins and Political Leadership in New York City from the Revolution to 1815" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1968), pp. 338, 342, 356. Gilje, *Road to Mobocracy*, discusses "street and tavern riots," pp. 239-46.

49. On licensing, see "Report of the Joint Select Committee on the Subject of the Reorganization of the Police Department," BA Documents 3:564-65; and on licenses by ward, 592-93. See also *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 10, 1829.

50. Historians have richly documented the rituals of male working-class sociability in the nineteenth century, but we still have a very limited understanding of how the institutions of popular culture intersected with home life. See, e.g., Bruce Laurie, "Nothing on Compulsion: Life Styles of Philadelphia Artisans, 1820-1850," *Labor History* 15 (1974): 366-77, and *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), chap. 2; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 53-59, 257-66; and Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). Paul Groth, "Forbidden Housing: The Evolution and Exclusion of Hotels, Boarding Houses, Rooming Houses, and Lodging Houses in American Cities, 1880-1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1983), does explore the housing side of casual laborers' experience of the city.

51. See Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 63-75, 170-92; and Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "City of Eros" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1987), chap. 3, on the emergence of "parlor houses." See also Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 109-28.

52. Stott, *Worker in the Metropolis*, pp. 410-12, discusses the social geography of boardinghouses in the 1850s, and notes their concentration below Canal Street (table 7.1).

53. *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 15, 1832. See also, Peter Buckley, "To The Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York, Stony Brook, 1984), chap. 3. Also expressive of the declining social respectability of boardinghouses in the period 1830-1860 is Thomas Gunn's

satire, *Physiology of New York Boarding Houses* (New York, 1857).

54. *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 15, 1832; June 11, 1836. Hotels, of course, have a much longer history of accommodating transients; see, e.g., Henry Fearon's descriptions in *Sketches of America: A Narrative of a Journey of 5,000 Miles* (London, 1818), pp. 22, 115. For residential hotels, see also Cromley, *Alone Together*, chap. 1. Another response to the problematic position of boarding or hotel-residing gentlemen in the structures of respectable socializing was the formation of men's clubs. See *Diary of Philip Hone*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927), p. 263 (May 27, 1837), on the formation of the Union Club as an alternative for "bachelors" who dined "en garçon."

55. Thornstein Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), in *The Portable Veblen*, ed. Max Lerner (New York: Viking, 1948), p. 110.

56. Joseph Kett, "The Stages of Life, 1790-1840," in Michael Gordan, *The American Family in Socio-Historical Perspective*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), pp. 229-54, esp. 244-45; Degler, *At Odds*, pp. 66-85.

57. Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Ladies*, pp. 9-20, 92-123.

58. *New-York Mirror*, Dec. 27, 1823.

59. *Ibid.*, Dec. 29, 1832. See also, Edward Pessen, "Philip Hone's Set: The Social World of the New York City Elite in the Age of Egalitarianism," *NYHSQ* 56 (1972): 285-300; Jaher, *Urban Establishment*, pp. 246-50.

60. *Diary of Philip Hone*, p. 235. For New Year's rowdiness in the late 1820s, see Gilje, *Road to Mobocracy*, pp. 254-60.

61. On the decline in parental control, see Degler, *At Odds*, pp. 9-14; and Daniel Scott Smith, "Parental Powers and Marriage: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (1973): 419-28. In stressing the antebellum decline in parental control of courtship and the rise of an ideology of companionate marriage, historians have tended to overlook the construction of circles of socializing that indirectly regulated the marriage market. For an exploration of the relation of feminism to the changing ideology of marriage in the mid-nineteenth century, see William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 38-129.

62. *Diary of Michael Floy*; see, e.g., pp. 126, 203, 205, 206, 226, 228, 230, 234, 236, 238-40, 242-43; and p. 3 (Oct. 10, 1833) for "women's business."

63. Jane Mount v. James Bogert, *New-York City Hall Recorder* 3, no. 12 (December 1818): 193-202.

64. *Letters of John Pintard*, 1:164-66 (Jan. 21, 1819), 288 (Apr. 14, 1820), 178 (Mar. 27, 1819), 173-74 (Mar. 15, 1819).

65. For Louisa's marriage and arrangements for the house, see *ibid.*, 2:147, 195-96, 219, 221-25, 227, 231-32; 4:32. For Elizabeth Brasher Pintard's dissatisfactions, see 3:37 (Oct. 13, 1828), 65 (Feb. 27, 1829), and 134. For another prominent New Yorker's anxieties over housekeeping expenses with a \$2,500 annual income, see *Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 1:324-25.

66. *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 3, 1824.

67. *Ibid.*, Aug. 6, 1826.

68. The tradesman's letter is reprinted in Rock, ed., "A Woman's Place," pp. 456-58. Cf. "Women's ostentation is the ruin of half the tradesmen," *Weekly Messenger*, Nov. 8, 1817; see also Jan. 17, 1818; Dec. 12, 1817. The *Messenger's* publisher, Alexander Ming, had been a leader of Painite free-thinking circles in the early nineteenth-century, and went on to become a Working Men's candidate for the state legislature in 1829; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 184, 196, 198, 200, 201. Although the *Messenger* (1817-1820) was oriented to a slightly less self-

conscious middling audience than the later *Mirror*, it still disseminated a new vocabulary of domesticity, in part through the frequent reprinting of English articles. In keeping with Ming's political sympathies, the *Messenger*, like the *Mirror*, advocated female education (e.g., Jan. 10, 1818), even as its stories expressed concern over whether "an expensive education" would "unfit [daughters] for life" (Nov. 8, 1817). Joining the debate over "unnecessary ceremonies in our republican institutions," Ming reprinted on Jan. 3, 1816, a controversy in the *National Register* over whether Mrs. Monroe would follow the precedent of other presidents' wives and return visits; cf. Apr. 25, 1818, on Mrs. Monroe's "levee."

69. For New York women's defense of their virtue, see *New-York Mirror*, July 16, 1825, and Feb. 4, 1826; on choosing a good husband, Aug. 27, 1825; and on saving the fruit of the husband's labor, Jan. 1, 1824. See also May 1, 1824, and July 2, 1825. A *Mirror* article of Aug. 14, 1824, typically recommended "order in the arrangement of our employments and industry in their performance," with an "exactness in distribution of [the wife's] time" to allow for a program of self-improvement. These same recommendations form the core of two of the most widely consulted manuals on housekeeping, Lydia Child's *American Frugal Housewife* (1836) and Catharine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841). My reading of the *Mirror's* articles and stories supports Nina Baym's argument that woman's fiction in this period "represented a protest against long-entrenched trivializing and contemptuous views of women": *Woman's Fiction*, pp. 22-50.

70. *New-York Mirror*, Dec. 12, 1819.

71. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 77-83.

72. James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans* (Philadelphia, 1833), pp. 129-30; cf. James Hardie's observation in his *Census of New York Housing in 1824* (New York, 1825), p. 3, that readers could calculate two households per house. For Floy's principled rejection of luxury, see *Diary*, p. 5 (Oct. 16, 1833). For a discussion of "consumption" in relation to new class formations, see Stuart M. Blumin, "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 318-37.

73. *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 22 and June 4, 1825; Nov. 3, 1832. The *Mirror* campaigned especially hard for the improvement of the Battery, including the addition of park benches, which the Common Council resisted for fear of attracting vagrants; see, e.g., articles on Mar. 5, May 23, June 18 and 15, July 2 and 23, 1825; and victory declared, Apr. 8, 1826. On keeping to the right, particularly on Broadway, June 25, 1825. See also Daniel Bluestone, "From Promenade to Park: The Gregarious Origins of Brooklyn's Park Movement," *American Quarterly* 39 (1987): 529-50.

74. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 34-36, 68-75; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman"; Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change*, pp. 38-68. The "ritual" of home visiting by members of committees and benevolent societies was followed by meetings that heard and decided on the merits of individual cases. The *Weekly Messenger*, Dec. 5 and 27, 1817, reprinted the Fourth Annual Report of the Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females.

75. Floy (*Diary*, e.g., pp. 205, 206, 212-13, 215-16, 219-20) organized a benevolent society at Bowery Street Church to make visits to the "deserving" poor in the neighborhood and then negotiated with almshouse commissioners on behalf of particular recipients, especially for fuel. On Feb. 9, 1836, Floy visited

the Police office to see that all my widows were supplied with wood. . . . A poor black man who had his ticket for potatoes was constantly shoved off and

the most degraded Irishman supplied. I spoke rather sharp and asked the man that supplied him if he was not ashamed of himself to serve a poor aged man thus, altho black. He looked somewhat sheepish, saying, "well let him wait until his betters are served." The black man after many fruitless efforts went away with nothing. I found out he was a member of the Methodist Church; that his wife and daughter were sick. I promised to visit him.

One wonders what the man's fate would have been had he not been a Methodist.

76. Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, p. 144.

77. Asa Green, *A Glance at New York* (New York, 1837), p. 93; *Morning Courier*, Jan. 30, 1847.

##### 5. Public, Private, and Common: The Regulation of Streets and Neighborhoods

1. *New-York Mirror*, Apr. 29, 1826.

2. Montgomerie's charter is in *A Compilation of Laws of the State of New York Relating to the City of New York*, comp. Henry E. Davies (New York, 1855), p. 163. Hendrik Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power: The Corporation of the City of New York in American Law, 1730-1870* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), pp. 13-43, stresses that the business of the corporation was managing its own properties.

3. George Ashton Black, *History of Municipal Ownership of Manhattan Island . . . to 1844* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1897); Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power*, pp. 44-68.

4. Black, *Municipal Ownership*, pp. 18-19, 26; Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783-1825* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 41-51; and David M. Schneider, *The History of Public Welfare in New York State, 1609-1866* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), pp. 45-51; *MCC*, 1675-1776, 5:77-81, 196-97; *Iconography*, 4:664-65.

5. Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power*, pp. 84-100, quote on p. 99; Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 362-74; Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), pp. 161-90.

6. *MCC*, 1784-1831, *passim*. On the city's licensed trades, see Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), pp. 205-29, and Graham Hodges, *New York City Cartmen* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), pp. 108-28. See Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power*, pp. 133-39, on the issue of sovereignty in relation to the municipal corporation's shift to "governmental" identity.

7. For eighteenth-century political patronage and factions, see Hodges, *New York City Cartmen*, pp. 31-40, 42-46; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, pp. 140-48, 366-68. For New York politics in the 1790s, see Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), pp. 84-86, 521-23, 538 (noting that suffrage became a lively issue starting in 1797), 568-72. For a discussion of Federalists' and Jeffersonians' rhetorical and ideological differences in the 1790s, see Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), pp. 55-73. For an overview of New York political parties, leaders, and factions, see Jabez Hammond, *The History of Political Parties of the*

*State of New York from the Ratification of the Federal Constitution to December 1840*, 2 vols. (Albany, Van Benthuyzen, 1842), vol. 1. For a valuable interpretation of the powers of government and particularly of the Legislature's sovereignty in this period, see L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Authority: Public Economic Policy and Political Development in New York State, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 64-74.

8. Hodges, *New York City Cartmen*, pp. 82-83, 107, 112-13; Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power*, pp. 135-36.

9. *MCC*, 1776-1831, 3:61-62, 73-85 (Ward 4), 60-61, 72 (Ward 5).

10. *MCC*, 1776-1831, 3:65-70.

11. Merrill D. Peterson, *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), p. 194. Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, 1801-1840* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919), remains a classic, if flawed, account of New York politics in this period.

12. Peterson, *Democracy, Liberty, and Property*, pp. 205-6.

13. The 1821 constitution is reprinted in *Revised Statutes of New York* (Albany, 1836), 2:39.

14. Peterson, *Democracy, Liberty, and Property*, pp. 230, 226. For context see Dixon Ryan Fox, "The Negro Vote in Old New York," *Political Science Quarterly* 37 (1917), 252-75; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 77-78, 82-83 on New York, and 64-112 for a discussion of the disenfranchisement of Afro-Americans in other northern states. Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 217-18, corrects Fox's interpretation of Federalist and Whig patronage of black voters and finds that only 16 Afro-Americans were qualified to vote in New York City in 1825, 68 in 1835. For the defeat of New York's 1846 constitutional amendment abolishing the property qualification for Afro-Americans, see Curry, pp. 222-23.

15. Amendment 2, ratified Nov. 6-8, 1826, in *Revised Statutes* (1836), 2:50; new city charter in Davies, *Compilation of Laws*, p. 50.

16. Edward D. Durand, *The Finances of New York* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), pp. 16-17.

17. Peterson, *Democracy, Liberty, and Property*, p. 211.

18. On the Workingmen's movement, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 172-216. On the evolution of New York City politics and patronage, see Amy Bridges, *City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 20-27, 70-78.

19. Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power*, pp. 33-43.

20. *MCC*, 1784-1831, 4:25-26 (July 1, 1805). For examples of unelaborated approval of street improvements, see *ibid.*, 3:35, 50, 118 (1801); 4:47 (1805), 201 (1806); 7:528 (1813), 730, 740 (1814); 8:785 (1818). Cf. Sam Bass Warner, *The Urban Wilderness* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 55-84.

21. *Laws of New York, 36th Session* (Albany, 1813), chap. 136, secs. 177-92. After the aldermen mandated the opening or widening of a street, street commissioners were appointed by district supreme courts to award damages for the taking of land and to apportion the costs among adjoining proprietors, including those within a prescribed "vicinity" of the improvement, who, unlike abutting proprietors, could not offset the assessments with awards for land taken for streets. See

Stephen Diamond, "The Death and Transfiguration of Benefit Taxation: Special Assessments in Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of Legal Studies* 2 (1983): 201-40 (on New York City in this period, 206-14); and Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power*, pp. 167-75, who notes (pp. 171-73) that the courts thwarted landowners' efforts to cash in on the 1807 plan by retaining the fee on land that was intended for streets and for which the city would award damages.

22. Petitions and remonstrances were referred to a street committee, which then made a recommendation. Although the aldermen rejected the argument that improvements could be undertaken only upon proprietors' petition as early as 1807, the absence of such petitions in some instances sufficed to block action. See *MCC, 1784-1831*, 4:667 (Dec. 14, 1807) and 18:11-12 (Apr. 20, 1829), in which a committee argued that there was no precedent for exercising the power of eminent domain or imposing assessments for "improving" a block in Five Points without adjoining proprietors' support. Proprietors who opposed the regulation of 17th Street in 1831 invoked the principle of "no taxation without representation" and complained that "a number of those whose names are attached to the objectionable petition are not responsible for the payment of a single cent of the expenses which they seem willing to impose on others": petition, Sept. 30, 1831, Common Council Documents, "Streets," box 2761, Municipal Archives, City of New York. By the 1830s, aldermen had introduced a distinction between improvements that were "local" in character, and therefore required the support of adjoining proprietors, and those that served "the public at large." See, e.g., the Street Committee's rejection of a proposal to close Art Street: *BA Documents* 2, no. 5 (Aug. 22, 1835): 24-26. Street committees, however, were far from consistent in recognizing this distinction. See also Eugene P. Moehring, *Public Works and the Pattern of Urban Real Estate Growth* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), pp. 53-76.

23. *Astor v. Hoyt*, 10 New York Common Law Reports 965 (1830).

24. Thomas Gannett, "A History of Pleasure Gardens in New York City, 1700-1865" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1978), pp. 336-39; on Lafayette Place, *New-York Mirror*, Nov. 3, 1832; Charles Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp. 78-81.

25. *MCC, 1784-1831*, 11:24 (Mar. 13, 1820).

26. *BA Documents* 2, no. 128 (Apr. 26, 1836): 667; cf. *BAA Documents* 2, no. 23 (Dec. 30, 1833): 149-53, esp. 151.

27. The comptroller was proposing to purchase land adjoining Government House: *MCC, 1784-1831*, 7:556 (Sept. 6, 1813).

28. Durand, *Finances of New York*, pp. 16-17. In supporting the city's \$20,000 investment in filling and landscaping Tompkins Square, aldermen noted that "considering the depressed state of property in this part of the city, your committee deem it a matter of policy to afford it every opportunity of improvement." The city would be "reimbursed by rising taxes" from the anticipated construction of houses costing from \$6,000 to \$10,000 on lots that two years earlier "would not sell for \$200": *BA Documents* 2, no. 7 (June 9, 1834): 54-55. Aldermen also continued to view improvements in the light of the municipal corporation's own interests as a proprietor. Thus in endorsing a proposal to open a public square from 23d to 28th streets at Fifth Avenue, on the site of the House of Refuge, the Committee on Public Lands and Places had "no hesitation in saying that a material benefit will result to the city treasury" from the "large appreciation of value" of thirty-four acres of common land "but a short distance above": *BA Documents* 3, no. 98 (Feb. 29, 1836): 517. See a similar statement of the municipal corporation's "interests" in embellishing Union Square in order to "increase taxes paid into the city treasury"

and promote "the pecuniary interest of the public by encouraging the extension of the city toward the great body of common land": *BA Proceedings* 7:317-19.

29. For merchants' support of commercial upgrading of lower Manhattan streets, see, e.g., proposals to widen Mill, Stone, and John streets, *BA Documents* 2, no. 41 (Nov. 11, 1835): 179-82; and no. 42 (Nov. 23, 1835): 183-86. For the aldermen's consciousness of the "great variety of persons many of whom are anxious to erect buildings" between 14th and 42d streets (which, they noted, had been "entirely laid out into town lots"), see a report in favor of opening streets to 42d Street in *ibid.*, no. 36 (Nov. 4, 1835): 155-62. For a table listing all street improvements from 1830 to 1839, see *ibid.*, 5, no. 45 (Mar. 25, 1839): 462-97.

30. [Clement Moore], *A Plain Statement Addressed to the Proprietors of Real Estate in the City and County of New York* (New York, 1818), in NYPL.

31. *New-York Mirror*, Jan. 15 and June 11, 1825. In its issue of May 20, 1826, the *Mirror* introduced a "City Improvement" column that regularly reported and advocated street improvements; see, e.g., July 29, 1826; Feb. 2, 1828; Mar. 27, 1830; July 16, 1836. The concern with city embellishment is noticeably absent from earlier New York "parlor publications," such as Alexander Ming's *Weekly Visitor*, published in the late teens. For the *Evening Post's* advocacy of improvements, see, e.g., Nov. 17, 1835.

32. New York County Clerk, Register of Conveyances, 234:514; *BA Proceedings* 6:410; Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, p. 42.

33. Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, pp. 78-79, and for Irving Place, *BAA Documents* 2, no. 47 (Jan. 28, 1833): 289-91. For Washington Place and Waverly Place, see *BA Proceedings* 4: 148, 238, 283. For University Place, *BA Documents* 5, no. 77 (Mar. 26, 1838): 579-81.

34. *BA Proceedings* 6 (May 23, 1835): 321-22. Although from 1831 street committees repeatedly objected to renaming blocks within continuous streets, they were less consistent in deciding what constituted spatial continuity. For examples of other rejections, see *ibid.*, 6:323; 7:14, 65, 80, 141. Cf. Street Committee's endorsement of proprietors' petition to change the name of Augustus Street to City Hall Place "with a view to neutralize unpleasant associations connected with the present name of the street . . . the more so in as much as a great number of very elegant houses are now in the course of being erected": *ibid.*, 6:260 (Mar. 7, 1834).

35. D. G. Thompson, *Ruggles of New York: A Life of Samuel B. Ruggles* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), pp. 56-60; Board of Aldermen and Assistant Aldermen Documents (1831-1832) 1, no. 3 (Dec. 5, 1831): 2, 6-7; *BAA Documents* 1, no. 37 (Dec. 5, 1831): 125-33.

36. *BAA Documents* 1, no. 43 (Dec. 19, 1831): 153-61.

37. For other examples of the Common Council's policy on public squares, see *BA Proceedings* 4:157-59 (Jan. 21, 1833; 31st to 34th streets at Fourth Avenue); and *BA Documents* 2, no. 10:39-41 (June 22, 1835; Mount Morris Park), no. 17: 67-68 (July 20, 1835; Murray Hill), no. 47:203-5 (Nov. 23, 1835; Abingdon Square), no. 85: 439-46 (Feb. 15, 1836; Madison Square). For the embellishment of Washington Square (and indeed its successive transformation from a burial ground to a parade ground to a "park"), see *BA Proceedings* 3:31-32, 52, 64. For a debate over policy with respect to taxing such "private squares" as St. John's Park and Gramercy Park, see *BA Proceedings* 2:43, 131-33. For the Art Street blacksmith, see *BA Documents* 2, no. 69 (Sept. 14, 1835): 335-37.

38. *BAA Documents* 2, no. 45 (Feb. 25, 1833): 329-31.

39. *BA Documents* 2, no. 36: 160.

40. Moehring, *Public Works*, pp. 94, 98, 100-104.

41. BA Documents 3, no. 28 (Apr. 26, 1836): 152.
42. MCC, 1784-1831, 4:577 (Sept. 28, 1807); cf. p. 1 (May 20, 1805).
43. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York City, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986), pp. 11-23. Vivienne L. Kruger, "Born to Run: The Slave Family in Early New York, 1626-1827" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1985), pp. 926-27, 943, shows that concern over the economic position of free blacks, who were largely excluded from skilled jobs, was not misplaced. In 1814-15, 70% of New York City's black families received outdoor public relief.
44. MCC, 1784-1831, 8:360-62 (Nov. 17, 1817); cf. *Weekly Visitor*, June 27, 1818.
45. Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, pp. 87-88, 90, 134-36, 243-58; Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 34-36, 64-75; Carroll Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), chaps. 3-5, 7.
46. Stansell, *City of Women*, pp. 13-14, 50-51, 184, 193, 204-5; Jeanne Boydston, "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Antebellum Housework and Working-Class Subsistence," *Radical History Review* 35 (1985): 13-14, 18.
47. "Memorial of the Mayor and Aldermen for Passage of a Law on the Subject of Hawking and Peddling," County Clerk Filed Papers, box 3080, Municipal Archives, City of New York.
48. MCC, 1784-1831, 17:587, 643, 652, 760; 18:632; *New York Mirror*, Apr. 18 and May 9, 1829.
49. MCC, 1784-1831, 18:19-20 (Apr. 20, 1829).
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12 (Apr. 20, 1829).
51. On the residential locations of Afro-Americans, see the maps in Curry, *Free Black in Urban America*, pp. 35 (1835) and 69 (1852); Rhonda Freeman, "The Free Negro in New York City in the Era before the Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), pp. 218-19. See also Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1987), pp. 52-59 on Five Points, esp. 58-59 on black brothel proprietors and 63 on Church Street's "African Grove," on Trinity Church land. Gilfoyle has done a remarkable job of mapping New York City's brothels throughout the nineteenth century. For the racial, ethnic, and occupational structure of the Sixth Ward, including Five Points, from 1810 to 1835, see Carol Grone-man Pernicone, "The 'Bloody Ould Sixth': A Social Analysis of a New York City Working-Class Community in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1973), pp. 22-31.
52. For racial and ethnic conflicts in Five Points and Lispenard Meadows, including the 1834 anti-abolition riot, see Paul Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 145-70.
53. BAA Documents 1, no. 44 (Dec. 19, 1831): 163-67. For the *Evening Post's* advocacy of the clearance of Five Points in the early 1830s, see James Ford, *Slums and Housing, with Special Reference to New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 1:92-93.
54. BAA Documents 1, no. 68 (Jan. 13, 1832): 281.
55. *Ibid.*, 3, no. 106 (Mar. 13, 1837): 689-90. Identifications from *Longworth's American Almanac and New York City Directory* (New York, 1836-1837). The aldermen had rejected an earlier petition because owners on the street opposed the project 3 to 1: BA Proceedings 6:52-53 (Dec. 23, 1833).
56. BA Documents 3, no. 106: 685-89, 691-92.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 700-704, 707-9.
58. *Ibid.* Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," describes the economics of leaseholding

- brothel proprietors, pp. 143-49, and lists leaseholding proprietors of brothels on Anthony Street, pp. 132-33.
  59. BA Documents 3, no. 106: 693, 696. For John L. Livingston's properties in the area (and his extensive investment in brothels) see Gilfoyle, "City of Eros," pp. 128-36.
  60. BA Documents 3, no. 106: 694-96, 698-99. Another group of proprietors in the vicinity, including other East Broadway householders, who would be assessed for the widening of Anthony, also protested the cost: pp. 704-6.
  61. *Ibid.*, p. 696.
  62. For the discontinuance of the Anthony Street improvement see *ibid.*, 4, no. 6 (June 17, 1839): 91-98; cf. 4, no. 28 (Aug. 2, 1837): 183-86 (William Street merchants).
  63. The panic of 1837 and the subsequent depression prompted a larger re-evaluation of city policy and particularly of rising taxes and assessments. Thus in a reversal of policy, a committee charged with evaluating the city budget over the 1830s concluded that the nearly \$46,000 spent on "embellishing" public spaces, and particularly Union Place, had been an "extravagant expenditure" and "improper charge on the city treasury, inasmuch as it increases the taxes of individuals not interested in the improvement": *ibid.*, 6, no. 5 (June 3, 1839): 69-70, 90. The committee urged that in the future such assessments be charged to the "owners of property adjacent to, and benefitted" by, the improvements. In the 1840s, landowners organized to protest the entire benefits assessment system, particularly as it affected the opening of uptown streets. Their newspaper, *The Municipal Gazette*, offered a running commentary on the abuses of the assessment system, including aldermen's "corruption in promoting particular public improvements," which became a recurring theme in city politics in the 1840s and 1850s. For these struggles of "property against property" in uptown development and the building of Central Park, see Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig, "The Park and the City: Central Park and Nineteenth-Century New York" (manuscript), chaps. 1 and 2.
  64. Charles Dickens, *American Notes and Reprinted Pieces* (1846; London: 1871), pp. 52-55.
  65. "Report of the Commissioners of the Almshouse, Bridewell and House of Detention," BA Documents 4, no. 32 (Sept. 11, 1837): 210, 212; italics in the original.
  66. James F. Richardson, "To Control the City: The New York Police in Historical Perspective," in Kenneth Jackson and Stanley Schultz, eds., *Cities in American History* (New York: Knopf, 1972), pp. 272-89; and *New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 44-50.
  67. "Police Report," BA Documents 12, no. 33 (Feb. 9, 1846): 537-43.
  68. *Letters of John Pintard to His Daughter Eliza Noel Pintard Davidson, 1816-1833*, ed. Dorothy Barck, NYHS Collections 70-74 (1937-1940), 1:174.
6. *Building a Housing Crisis*
1. *Niles Weekly Register*, Aug. 27, 1825; *New York Mirror*, July 11, 1835; *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, Jan. 13, 1847.
  2. Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), p. 240.
  3. *New-York Mirror*, July 11, 1835.
  4. New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor, *First Report*



(memo), complaining that the tenant "had absconded" from 33 Park Row, which rented for \$800 a year: John Leake Papers, box 3, NYHS. One common solution was for landlords to require that tenants find a cosigner to serve as surety for the rent, another practice that came under attack from the *New-York Mirror*, Feb. 26, 1831. For an example of surety, see *Rosenbaum v. Gunter*, 3 Smith 203 (1854).

68. Buildings at 73, 75, 81, and 83 Clinton Street and 94, 46, 98, 110, and 112 Allen Street (Morgan Lewis account); multifamily houses at 136½ Mulberry (Richard M. Blatchford account); 66 Mott and 109½ Mulberry, front (Charles F. and George L. Osborn account); 184 Hester, rear (Jacob Handley account); 78 and 82 Sullivan (Uriah Levy account); and unidentified and unenumerated tenants in rear houses at 105 Thompson (Uriah Levy account) and on Allen Street (Morgan Lewis account); all in George L. Osborn account books, NYPL. Livingston to Osborn, Aug. 31, 1843, Osborn letters, NYPL.

69. Gibbons to Osborn, Apr. 3, 1843, Osborn Letters, NYPL.

70. House at 202 Houston Street, 1842-1845 (George Abbe account), George L. Osborn account books, NYPL. Abbe was a lawyer.

71. Gibbons to Osborn, Nov. 29, 1842, Osborn Letters, NYPL.

72. Gibbons to Osborn, May 4, 1843, Osborn Letters, NYPL; 52 Beekman, 1842-1843 (Gibbons accounts), George L. Osborn account books, NYPL.

73. Debits, 1842-1843 (Gibbons account), in George L. Osborn account books. One of the tenants at 16 Washington Street had apparently absconded without making the last quarterly payment, as had Meyer Isaacs at 506½ Greenwich Street. In October, Gibbons evicted from 506 Greenwich Street a Mrs. Freyer, who had not paid her \$16 monthly rent since August. See also 235 Centre Street (Estate of James Brown account, 1845-1849), Dec. 15, 1847; Jan. 20 and Feb. 18, 1848; in *ibid.*: the Osborns collected \$97 from the surety of a butcher who absconded, and sold fixtures "taken from" him to the new tenant, an awning maker.

74. House at 111 Mulberry Street, 1845-46 (George L. Osborn in account with Charles F. Osborn), George L. Osborn account books, NYPL. The Osborn brothers appear to have managed 109½ and 111 Mulberry (on long-term lease from Charles Van Rensselaer) as their own investment. See also rear houses at 184 Hester Street (Jacob Handley account), with one stable tenant and 19 other tenants moving through two other units between April 1845 and May 1849.

75. The 109½ and 111 Mulberry accounts were merged May 9, 1846, for the price, see Debits, Nov. 10, 1846, in *ibid.*

76. Accounts for 109½ and 111 Mulberry Street, 1847-1849, in *ibid.* One source of gain for landlords of older buildings was underassessment and reduced tax expenses. See Elizabeth Blackmar, "Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1785-1850" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982), pp. 584-97.

77. For an earlier example of a carpenter acting as an agent, see Joseph Newton's lease agreement with Thomas Wilson, Feb. 22, 1808, in box 2, Leake Papers, NYHS. The Osborns paid their tenant Benjamin Powell, a blacksmith/wheelwright, a 10% commission to collect rents from Morgan Lewis's rear houses on Allen Street, and the carpenter D. Hoyt worked as a subagent for Lewis's De Lancey Street properties; it is also possible that the two carpenters and a mason who leased Lewis's Allen Street houses were sublandlords (Morgan Lewis accounts, 1842-1844), George L. Osborn account books, NYPL.

78. Houses at 502, 504, 506, and 506½ Greenwich Street (Gibbons account), George L. Osborn account books.

79. John Griscom, *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York* (New York, 1845), pp. 8-9; italics in original.

80. CA, Feb. 15, 1845; "Annual Report of City Inspector" (1842), p. 170.

81. See Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots and the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), ms. pp. 155, 168-82 (on subcontracting), 258-59 (on neighborhoods). Also on working-class neighborhoods, see Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), chaps. 11-14; Richard Stott, *The Worker in the Metropolis: New York, 1820-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), chap. 8. Kenneth Scherzer, "The Unbounded Community: Neighborhood Life and Social Structure in New York City, 1830-1875" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982), argues greater neighborhood stability after 1850.

82. *New-York Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1848.

83. On workingmen and land reform, see Helene S. Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen and National Land Policy, 1829-1862* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), pp. 19-23, 48-50, 75-76, 82, 87-88, 91-92; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 186-90, 194-95, 335-43, 356-57.

84. *New-York Herald*, Feb. 1, 1848.

85. *Ibid.*, Feb. 24, 1848; *New York Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1848.

86. On the Industrial Congress, see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 369, 371, 383; Bernstein, *Draft Riots*, chap. 3. On land reform and demonstrations by the unemployed, see Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen*, p. 183; Carl Degler, "Labor in the Economy and Politics of New York City, 1850-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1952), pp. 159-60, 165-66, 194. On New York land reformers' movement into the Republican party, see Degler, pp. 305-6, 312. The movements for tenant-house and land reform were most directly linked through A. J. H. Duganne, a land reformer who chaired the 1856 Assembly tenant-house investigations (A.D. 205, Mar. 9, 1857).

87. See, e.g., Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*; Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn, Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); David Montgomery, "The Working Classes of the Pre-industrial American City, 1780-1830," *Labor History* 18 (1981): 1-22; Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800-1850* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980); Jonathan Prude, *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts, 1810-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); and essays in Frisch and Walkowitz, *Working-Class America*.

#### Conclusion: The Housing Question

1. For an example of uptown landholding patterns in the 1850s, see Elizabeth Blackmar and Roy Rosenzweig, "The Park and the City: Central Park and Nineteenth-Century New York" (manuscript), chap. 3. On the real estate investors' political relation with Tammany Hall, see Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots and the Industrial Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), chap. 7. On negotiations over the plan of streets north of 155th Street, see Peter Marcuse, "The Grid as City Plan: New York City and Laissez-Faire Planning in the Nineteenth Century," *Planning Perspectives* 2 (1987): 295-310.

2. The controversy over Trinity's property centered on whether the vestry could exercise exclusive control of property granted in the eighteenth century to the church "and all those in communion with the Church of England." See New York State Legislature, S.D. 86 (1846) and A.D. 130 (1854); Morgan Dix, ed., *A History of the Parish of Trinity* (New York: Putnam, 1906), chap. 4.

3. For trade journals, see *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* (1868) and *American Architect and Building News* (1874); for real estate consolidation, see A

*History of Architecture and the Building Trades of Greater New York* (New York, 1899) and *A History of Real Estate, Building and Architecture in New York during the Last Quarter Century* (New York, 1898). On the formation of uptown real estate associations, see Bernstein, *Draft Riots*, ms. pp. 456-64.

4. On Central Park, see Blackmar and Rosenzweig, "The Park and the City," chaps. 1 and 2; on transportation and competing suburbs, Edward Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840-1857* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), pp. 289-95; and Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), chap. 4.

5. On the construction of row houses in the 1850s, see Charles Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), pp. 139-211. Elizabeth Cromley, *Alone Together: A History of the New York Apartment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), traces the architectural and cultural history of middle-class apartments. See also Christine Boyer, *Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style, 1850-1900* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985).

6. For the history of Harlem, see Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto, New York, 1890-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

7. On the social geography of New York City in the 1850s, see Richard Stott, *The Worker in the Metropolis: New York, 1820-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming), chap. 6; and Robert Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949), pp. 39-47. The best survey of neighborhoods in the 1860s is the Citizens' Association's *Report of the Council of Hygiene and Public Health* (New York, 1865). Edward Lubitz, "The Tenement Problem in New York City and the Movement for Its Reform" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1970), pp. 351-98, draws on that report and newspaper accounts in his ward-by-ward survey of tenement housing in the early 1860s. See also James Ford, *Slums and Housing, with Special Reference to New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 1:122-204.

8. See chap. 7, n.81.

9. Examples of guides include George G. Foster, *New York in Slices, by an Experienced Carver, Being the Original Slices Published in the New-York Tribune* (New York, 1849); James Dabney McCabe, *The Secrets of the Great City* (New York, 1868); Matthew Hale Smith, *Sunshine and Shadow in New York* (New York, 1869); and Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York: Twenty Years' Work among Them* (New York, 1872). On the development of this literary genre, see Peter Buckley, "To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1984), pp. 353-66.

10. C. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Santo Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1963); and C. B. Macpherson, *Property: Mainstream and Critical Positions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

11. Eric Foner, *Nothing but Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 54-58, 82-86.

12. L. Ray Gunn, *The Decline of Authority: Public Policy and Political Development in New York, 1800-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), chap. 6; E. P. Cheyney, "The Anti-Rent Movement and the Constitution of 1846," in Alexander Flick, ed., *History of New York*, 10 vols. (Port Washington, N.Y.: I. J. Friedman, 1972), 6:283-321.

13. The classic works on the shift from commonwealth to laissez-faire ideology are Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace,

1955); Oscar Handlin and Mary Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of the Government in the American Economy, Massachusetts, 1774-1861*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969); and Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956). Morton Horwitz traces the development of new concepts of property in *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 160-210.

14. *Constitution of the State of New York* (Albany, 1846), art. I, sec. 14. See also *Report of the Debates and Proceedings of the Convention for the Revision of the Constitution of 1846* (Albany, 1846), pp. 802-5, 899-902.

15. *Debates and Proceedings*, p. 804.

16. In *Bedford v. Terhune* (1864), for example, the Court of Appeals overlooked the constitutional status of a covenant against subletting in adjudicating a dispute between a chief landlord and a leaseholder.

17. Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), esp. pp. 133-35; Linda E. Speth, "The Married Women's Property Acts, 1839-1865: Reform, Reaction, or Revolution," in D. Kelly Weisberg, ed., *Women and the Law: A Social Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1982), 2:69-91; Lawrence Friedman, *A History of American Law* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), pp. 184-86. For further discussion of the contradiction between the feminist and protective contents of the married women's property acts, see William Leach, *True Love and Perfect Union: The Feminist Reform of Sex and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), pp. 174-89.

18. Macpherson, *Property*, pp. 75-99.

19. *Workingman's Advocate*, Dec. 5, 1829. For a full discussion of Skidmore and his relation to the Working Men's Party, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: The Rise of the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 182-90, 193-96.

20. Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, pp. 335-43; Helene S. Zahler, *Eastern Workmen and National Land Policy, 1829-1862* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 27-29, 275.

21. See Blackmar and Rosenzweig, "The Park and the City," chap. 4. It is worth noting that prominent housing reformers opposed the creation of Central Park, and urged that smaller parks be located in working-class neighborhoods.

22. Combinations of moral, public health, safety, and economic interpretations of the consequences of tenement conditions can be found in the annual reports of the AICP, 1846-1860, and in John Griscom, *The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York* (New York, 1845). On the formation of the AICP and the shift from moralism to environmentalism, see Roy Lubove, "The New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor: The Formative Years," *NYHSQ* 43 (1959): 307-327. On industrialists' involvement in the AICP and interest in housing, see Bernstein, *Draft Riots*, ms. pp. 381-400 and app. J. On the medical profession's interest in moral reform, see Charles E. Rosenberg and Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Pietism and the Origins of the American Public Health Movement," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 23 (1968): 16-35; John Duffy, *A History of Public Health in New York City, 1625-1968* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1968), pp. 515-70.

23. For a survey of newspaper coverage of the housing crisis and delineation of editors' differing positions on housing reform, see Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 238-51.

24. John H. Griscom, "Annual Report of the Interments of the City and County of New York for the Year 1842, with Remarks thereon and a Brief View of the Sanitary Condition of the City," BAA Documents 9, no. 59:191-92, 204. See also Griscom, *Sanitary Condition*, pp. 42-48.

25. John Comer, *New York City Building Control, 1800-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 6-8; Ford, *Slums and Housing*, 1:75-76. On the failure of efforts to apply nuisance and fire laws to housing, see Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 208-10, 274-76.

26. Griscom, "Annual Report, 1842," pp. 175-76.

27. John Griscom, "Annual Report of the City Inspector for the Year 1845" (1846), p. 163, Municipal Archives.

28. For tenants' resistance to repairs, see chap. 7, n. 51; Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 519-20.

29. New York State Legislature, Assembly, "Report of the Special Committee on Tenement Houses in New York and Brooklyn," A.D. 199 (1856), and "Report of the Select Committee Appointed to Examine into the Condition of Tenant Houses in New York and Brooklyn," A.D. 205 (1857); Senate, "Report of the Select Committee Relative to the Improvement of Public Health, and a Sanitary Law in the City of New York," S.D. 115 (1857); Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 219-37.

30. Fire reform legislation that included building codes began in 1856 with "An Act to Provide against Unsafe Buildings in the City of New York," passed Apr. 14, 1856, *Laws of New York, 79th Session*, p. 314. This law was amended in 1859 and 1860. The 1860 act, creating a superintendent of buildings with enforcement powers, was declared unconstitutional. Its provisions were successfully incorporated in 1862 in "An Act to Amend an Act, entitled 'An Act to Provide for the Regulation and Inspection of Buildings, the more effectual Prevention of Fires, and the better Preservation of Life and Property in the City of New York,'" passed Apr. 19, 1862; *Laws of New York, 85th Session*, p. 574. In 1860 a series of tenement fires mobilized the press behind building codes. See Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 159-67, 211-18, and on sanitary police, 209-11. For the involvement of fire insurance companies in lobbying for reform legislation, see James C. Mohl, *The Radical Republicans and Reform in New York during Reconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 30, 32-34, 47, and on the creation of the Metropolitan Fire District in 1865, 52-53.

31. Mohl, *Radical Republicans*, pp. 15-20; Bernstein, *Draft Riots*, pp. 417-32; Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 409-21. For links between the draft riots and housing, see Citizens' Association, *Report of the Council of Hygiene*, pp. xv-xviii. On the cholera threat, see Duffy, *History of Public Health*, pp. 540-68.

32. On Metropolitan Board of Health legislation, see Mohl, *Radical Republicans*, pp. 69-106; Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 483-87.

33. "An Act for the Regulation of Tenement and Lodging Houses in the Cities of New York and Brooklyn," passed May 14, 1867, *Laws of New York, 90th Session*, chap. 908, sec. 17. On the passage of the Tenement Bill, see Mohl, *Radical Republicans*, pp. 139-52; Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 497, 500, 511-18.

34. On the problems of enforcing building codes, see Superintendent of Buildings, annual reports, 1867-1870, NYHS; Lubitz, "Tenement Problem," pp. 494-95. On enforcement of the 1867 bill and subsequent housing reform legislation in the second half of the nineteenth century, see Roy Lubove, *The Progressives and the Slums: Tenement House Reforms in New York City, 1890-1917* (Pittsburgh, 1962), pp. 28-32; Lawrence Veiller, "Tenement House Reform in New York City, 1834-1900," in Robert W. De Forest and Lawrence Veiller, *The Tenement House Problem* (New York, 1903), pp. 71-92; Ford, *Slums and Housing*, pp. 163-64.

35. Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth* (1879; New York: Random House [1949]), pp. 295, 413.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 323.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 438-39.

38. David Scobey, "Boycotting the Politics Factory: Labor Radicalism and the New York Mayoral Election of 1886," *Radical History Review* 28-30 (1984): 280-325; Thomas J. Condon, "Politics, Reform, and the New York City Election of 1886," *NYHSQ* 44 (1960): 363-93.

39. Scobey, "Boycotting the Politics Factory," p. 311. The George campaign won 68,000 votes, 22,000 less than the combined total Democratic vote for two candidates: Scobey, p. 286. On housing reform after 1886, see Ford, *Slums and Housing*, pp. 170-85; and Lubove, *Progressives and the Slums*.

40. Frederick Engels, *The Housing Question* (Moscow: Progress, 1975), offers a classic critique of reformers' tendency to isolate housing relations from the larger dynamics of capitalist class relations. On landownership as "fictitious capital" and circulating revenues, see David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 90-108.

41. For a discussion of weighing of rights sympathetic to private property rights, see Peter Wolf, *Land in America: Its Value, Use, and Control* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), pp. 79-100, 139-334. For a theoretical model for examining housing conditions with reference to larger social, economic, and political forces, see Peter Marcuse, "The Determinants of Housing," manuscript. On the cultural dimension of contemporary housing debates, see Constance Perin, *Everything in Its Place: Social Order and Land Use in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). For twentieth-century tenant organizing, see Ronald Lawson and Mark Naison, eds., *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986). For a thoughtful statement of how property rights might be reconceptualized as common rights, see C. B. Macpherson, *Property*, pp. 199-207.