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CONSUMING CLASSES:

CHANGING FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN NEW YORK CITY, 1790-1860

by

CINDY R. LOBEL

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

CONSUMING CLASSES: CHANGING FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN NEW YORK CITY, 1790-1860

by

Cindy R. Lobel

Advisor: Professor Carol Berkin

During the early nineteenth century, New Yorkers experienced a food revolution, brought about by well-documented improvements in industry, transportation, technology, and communications, as well as the growth of New York City in terms of size and population. By the 1830s New Yorkers of varied social backgrounds had access to foods that had been out of reach for previous generations. New public dining options, including restaurants, ice creameries, and oyster cellars, emerged to cater to a variety of patrons. The dining room became an increasingly requisite component of the proper middle-class home. Antebellum diet reformers and a host of other cultural arbiters participated in a shrill public discourse on proper food choices and food-related behaviors.

As eating became a public act, and one increasingly tied to commerce, one's food choices and manner of eating became an ever-more important marker of status

and gentility. Rather than serving as a democratizing force, increased access to new food-related consumer items contributed to increasing social stratification. The expansion of access to items formerly identified as genteel led to a degentrification of those items. Performance and ritual, rather than just goods, now served as the central markers of gentility. As the food revolution confronted New Yorkers concerned about class status, *how* they ate became much more important than *what* they ate.

"Consuming Classes: Changing Food Consumption Patterns in New York City, 1790-1860," traces these developments and examines the social and cultural impact of new patterns of consumption on an urban population in the post-Revolutionary and antebellum periods. In so doing, it addresses and clarifies some of the large questions historians have asked of the antebellum period. These questions focus on: the impact of the consumer revolution; class formation and identity; the simultaneous rise of political democratization and social stratification and inequality; nineteenth-century urban development; the shifting line between public and private spheres in the antebellum city; and the workings of gender in the determination of social class. "Consuming Classes" also provides the first concerted scholarly study of new food options and changing eating patterns in antebellum New York City.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am frequently asked, when I describe the topic of this dissertation, if I am able to write off restaurant meals. The answer is no. While I shall not, therefore, acknowledge the IRS, numerous other institutions and individuals have aided me immensely in the years spent researching and writing this dissertation.

My greatest thanks go to my advisor, Carol Berkin. She guided this dissertation from its initial stages through its completion, meeting with me every three to four weeks, reading and commenting on every page, including many that ended up in the recycling bin. Her intellectual brilliance and analytical talent are matched only by her generosity as a mentor and friend. This dissertation is incalculably better than it would have been without her direction. Her constant and vocal support, encouragement, and faith in my abilities eased and even made enjoyable the often grueling and sometimes demoralizing process of earning a Ph.D.

Thanks also to Lou Masur, whose passion for nineteenth-century history led me to the subject of this dissertation. His scholarly insights and personal advice have made me a better historian and helped me to keep things in perspective. His emphasis on the historian's, as well as the writer's craft have served me in good stead. Thomas Kessner has served as a model of scholarly discipline and collegiality since I acted as his research assistant my first semester of graduate school. I thank him for his rigorous critiques and his gentle guidance. Thanks to David Nasaw, who encouraged me to speak, sometimes

to his regret, and for his careful reading and comments on my dissertation. And I thank Barbara Welter, who taught me the importance of vigilant documentation and humane criticism, and who shared her encyclopedic knowledge of nineteenth-century sources and monographs with me. Each of these members of my dissertation committee has contributed in specific and valuable ways to my thinking and formation as a historian. Their insightful comments on my dissertation reminded me that, in choosing to pursue my Ph.D. at CUNY, I chose well. I would also like to thank Ann Fabian, whose generosity as a teacher is as impressive as her creativity as a scholar. Many thanks to Betty Einerman, who took care of myriad administrative tasks and always made sure that all of my papers were in order.

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Perry, Alex Sherwin, and Jennifer Todor. Christine Hobbie helped me through the process. Thanks also to Peter Kafka for getting me across the bridge.

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Visiting the United States from France in the 1790s, Félix de Beaujour marveled at the relatively high standard of living enjoyed by Americans. Basing his assessment on the food options available even to Americans of modest means, Beaujour wrote: "The poorest individual . . . is better fed . . . here than in any other country. . . . Every day of their lives, they eat more in the United States . . . and that too of expensive things and those which elsewhere are considered luxuries."[1] This view of the United States as a horn of plenty, and of American workers as its lucky and willing beneficiaries continued throughout the nineteenth century. It seemed self-evident to America's guests that this land of acquisitive spirit, abundant natural resources, and seemingly endless expanses of rich farmland would provide constant and copious nourishment to its inhabitants.

And so it did -- for some. The pre-industrial United States was indeed a bounteous land. The new nation's borders – established in the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War – stretched from the Atlantic Coast to the Mississippi River, from the southern border of Canada to the northern border of Florida. After

[1] Chevalier Félix de Beaujour, quoted in Charles H. Sherrill, *French Memories of Eighteenth Century America* (1915; Reprint, Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 80.

Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase of 1801 and the annexation of Florida in 1819, the United States encompassed 1,800,000 square miles of fertile land.[2]

As the nineteenth century began, the United States was overwhelmingly rural, with approximately ninety-five percent of Americans living on farms. While these farm families produced many of their own staples, including corn, wheat, meat, dairy products, and fruits and vegetables, only the wealthiest farmers achieved self-sufficiency in food. The costs and land requirements of producing large supplies of foodstuffs were simply out of reach for most landowners and up to one third of those who tilled the land did not own the land they worked. Smaller freeholders and tenant farmers depended on the market for many of their consumables, and were thus vulnerable to its vagaries. Rural day laborers, and, especially, the slaves of African descent who worked on farms, fared significantly worse than even small landowners and tenant farmers.[3] While not necessarily self-sufficient, free white farmers and their families generally had enough to eat. Variety was another matter. The amount of land and labor necessary for raising and preparing numerous crops for personal consumption made this practice prohibitive for any but gentlemen farmers. Even those farmers who produced a multitude of food crops did so in part for the market.

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[2] George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 4.

[3] Lorena Walsh, "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living in Late Colonial and Early Antebellum America, 1770-1840," in *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living Before the Civil War*, eds. Robert E. Gallman and John Joseph Wallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 219-20; Jeanne Boydston *Home & Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36; Elaine N. McIntosh, *American Food Habits in Historical Perspective* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 77-83; Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food: A History of Food Habits in the United States* (1941; Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 10-24; Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 3-4.

Rural Americans could purchase condiments, seasonings, sugar, and spices from local stores and itinerant peddlers but those of limited means did so sparingly.[4]

The American diet of the preindustrial period was monotonous and relatively unchanged from the seventeenth century.[5] When Amelia Simmons included preparations for eighteen kinds of vegetables, fifteen types of beans, and fourteen varieties of fruit in her 1796 cookbook – the first of its kind to be published in the United States – she was being optimistic. Most of her compatriots subsisted on a diet of corn, potatoes, salt pork, and stale bread with few spices, seasonings, or fresh vegetables to add variety.[6]

Ironically, city dwellers were more likely to enjoy a varied diet than their rural counterparts. Milk, fresh fruits, vegetables, and other perishable items were less likely to be produced in urban areas than in rural. But the former benefited from better transportation and communication networks that ensured more diversity of foodstuffs in their markets. The same ships that brought luxury household items and other dry goods from overseas also carried spices, sugars, teas, and preserved delicacies. Meanwhile, local farmers brought a variety of agricultural goods to urban

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[4] McIntosh, *American Food Habits*, 77-83; Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 10-24; Walsh, "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living," 219-20.

[5] Of course, the American diet did not remain static over the course of the colonial period. During the eighteenth century, rural families experienced improvements in both the quantity and quality of their foodstuffs. These developments, however, were minor in comparison to improvements that would occur beginning in the late eighteenth century. On changing food practices over the colonial period, see: Sarah Francis McMahon, "A Comfortable Subistence: A History of Diet in New England" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1982). See also McMahon's article, "A Comfortable Subsistence: The Changing Composition of Diet in Rural New England, 1620-1840," *William and Mary Quarterly* 42 (January 1985): 26-65.

[6] Amelia Simmons, *American Cookery, or the Art of Dressing Viands, Fish, Poultry, and Vegetables, and the Best Modes of Making Pastes, Puffs, Pies, Tarts, Puddings, Custards and Preserves, and All Kinds of Cakes, from the Imperial Plumb to Plain Cake. Adapted to this Country, and All Grades of Life. By Amelia Simmons, an American Orphan.* (Albany: Charles R. and George Webster, 1796); McIntosh, *American Food Habits*, 77-83; Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 10-24.

markets. In New York City, which became the preeminent port in the country after the American Revolution, a traveler or city dweller could find virtually any kind of food.

Whether he could afford to buy it was another question. For if the country diet was abundant but monotonous, the city diet was potentially diverse but also potentially sparse. Like their rural cousins, urban workers ate a diet high in starch, and low in everything else – including taste and diversity. The image, forwarded by foreign visitors, of American workers eating meat on a regular basis fueled the notion of the United States as a land of plenty and opportunity. American workers did eat more meat than their European counterparts, but not nearly as much as one would assume from reading travel accounts. Except in the spring, when cattle were sent to slaughter, fresh meat was a rarity in the city and even wealthy urbanites only occasionally ate it. On those few instances that urban workers and their families did have meat, it was likely to be salt pork or blood pudding – a sausage made from the by-products of butchering.[7]

The very wealthy – whether they resided in urban or rural areas – had access (literally) to a world of food. Those with means could grow or buy almost any food available today although, of course, they did not use today's cooking techniques and recipes. Travelers who had the good fortune to dine in the homes of the American elite never failed to marvel at the diversity, complexity, and abundance of their hosts' tables. For example, George Washington's French guest, the Marquis de Chastellux wrote of a dinner the General hosted for twenty guests: "The repast was . . . composed of eight or ten large dishes both of butchers' meat and chicken,

[7] McIntosh, *American Food Habits*, 84-5.

accompanied by vegetables of different sorts, and followed by a second course of pastries, comprising everything under the two denominations of 'pyes and powding.' After these two courses they removed the tablecloth and served apples and a quantity of nuts, which George Washington generally ate for two hours, meanwhile proposing toasts and indulging in conversation."[8] Many foreign observers came away from meals such as these with the impression that all Americans were as well and interestingly fed. But they were mistaken. A meal such as this would have cost far more money than the ordinary individual possessed. At the time, the average unskilled worker's wage was a mere 25 cents per day.

In short, as the new American nation began its grand experiment in republican governance, its citizenry literally had a bad taste in its mouth. The American diet was little changed from the early colonial period. While most white Americans had enough to eat, their food was not prepared with much attention. Nor was it very different from day to day. The increase of luxury items in household inventories during the eighteenth century suggests a rising standard of living for many Americans. But their food intake was little affected.[9] Middling folk may have been

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[8] Marquis de Chastellux, quoted in Sherrill, *French Memories*, 74.

[9] Historians of the colonial period have produced a significant literature on the eighteenth-century consumer revolution. These scholars counter the claim that consumption patterns among ordinary Americans did not change significantly until the late nineteenth century. They show a significant increase in consumer items among ordinary Americans beginning in the sixteenth century and increasing over time until it culminated in the late 1800s and early twentieth century. Selected works on the consumer revolution, include: Carole Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1994); Lorena Walsh, "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency: Living Standards and Consumer Behavior in the Colonial Chesapeake, 1643-1777," *Journal of Economic History* 43:1 (March 1983): 109-17; David Jaffee, "Peddlers of Progress and the Transformation of the Rural North, 1760-1860," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 511-35. In "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living," Lorena Walsh

more likely in 1790 to eat off of imported ceramic plates, but those plates were filled with the same fare that had adorned the pewter ones of a century before.

Over the course of the nineteenth century this situation would change, especially in urban areas such as New York City. Major technological and industrial developments contributed to significant shifts in consumption patterns for many Americans. Transportation improvements led the way. Immediately after the American Revolution, state-sponsored roads and turnpikes began to connect the commercial centers of the United States. After 1807 – the year Robert Fulton patented his steamboat – steam-powered water vessels plied America's coastlines and rivers. The success of the Erie Canal, opened in 1825, spawned an era of canal building in the United States. The Erie Canal solidified New York City's position as the commercial center of the United States, expanding Manhattan's hinterlands to include the Middle West. Governor DeWitt Clinton's "Big Ditch" made Gotham's merchants the middlemen between American producers and European purchasers. And it allowed for the carriage of goods in far greater quantities and at far lower prices than were imaginable before the construction of the 363-mile long waterway. Railroads emerged in the late 1820s and were built at a steady pace in New York through the 1850s. They contributed further to the ease of carriage and cheapening of goods.

In his monumental 1951 study *The Transportation Revolution*, historian George Rogers Taylor outlined the roots and significance of these transportation improvements. Since then, historians of nineteenth-century America have examined

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argues that food choices were not significantly affected by the eighteenth-century consumer revolution. The one exception to this rule was tea, which became available even to Americans of limited means during the eighteenth century.

the multiple social and cultural effects of the transportation revolution. The greater facility and cheapening of carrying goods had a major impact on the commerce of the nation. So too did a drive toward mechanization and industrialization in factories and workshops, particularly in the East. Due to industrial and technological advances, American factories could produce far larger amounts of manufactured goods, American farmers a far greater volume of agricultural product. New and improved transportation conveyances made it easier for the crops of the West to move eastward, while at the same time making it possible for the manufactured products of the East to make their way west. The United States, for the first time, witnessed the creation of an interconnected, interdependent national market, a process historians have termed the market revolution.[10]

The impact of the market revolution went far beyond commerce. Examinations of religious revivalism, political movements, reform ferment, social anxieties, attitudes toward slavery, working- and middle-class formation, changes in family life and gender conventions, and the shifting nature of the workplace have all taken as their starting point the economic revolutions of the post-Revolutionary period.[11] These studies have provided a rich understanding of the connections

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[10] For details of the transportation revolutions, see Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*. The seminal work on the market revolution is Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[11] These works include: Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Lori D. Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class History* (New York: Vintage Press, 1977); Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Joan

between the emergent market and the social movements of the nineteenth century. Scholars have paid less attention to the way that antebellum Americans dealt with the vastly expanded access to consumer goods ushered in by the transportation and market revolutions. The burgeoning cities of the early Republic were particularly affected by these developments. Thanks to an explosion of consumer goods, many previously luxury items became accessible to a much wider swathe of the population than ever before. Manufactured clothing, furnishings, dishes, and utensils increasingly graced the figures and homes of the growing middle classes.[12]

In New York City, the transportation and market revolutions ushered in a food revolution as well, and perhaps the broadest and clearest area of expanded consumer access and shifting consumption patterns was that related to food. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, many New Yorkers gained access to a world of food that their parents and grandparents could not have dreamed of. Items available only to the elite in the colonial period moved within the grasp of a far larger and less wealthy set. New food items flooded New York's public markets, along with increased quantities of familiar choices at far more affordable prices. Specialty food

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Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986); James B. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1986); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[12] As historians of the consumer revolution have argued, these developments were, in fact, a continuation (albeit in significantly intensified form) of trends that had been occurring since the seventeenth century.

shops proliferated, providing competition to the public markets and changing the way that many New Yorkers obtained their food. Food vendors and the sounds of their colorful cries filled the streets of Gotham. Technological improvements found their way into the households of many New Yorkers as well, in the shape of household appliances such as the cook stove and refrigerator. Middle-class and elite women, who could afford these innovations, were able to prepare more complicated and varied meals for their families, aided by the plethora of cookbooks published in the first half of the nineteenth century.[13]

Some New Yorkers greeted these food-related changes with concern. For many, the options were simply overwhelming and a rather shrill public discourse arose over how to deal with them. Diet reformers such as Sylvester Graham, William Andrus Alcott and Mary Gove Nichols gained an audience for their theories on diet and its connection to health and morality. They, along with the prescriptive writers, ministers, reformers, and other cultural arbiters that they influenced, provided a detailed set of instructions for dealing with the newfound abundance. Their advice centered mainly on self-control and abstinence.

As middle-class New Yorkers filled their kitchens with novel food items, they joined with many antebellum Americans in what became a transformation of urban eating habits. Eating became a public act, and one increasingly tied to commerce.

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[13] On technological changes in the home, see: Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 40-68; Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 131-156; Susan Strasser: *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 36-40, 53-74. On cookbooks, see: E.R. Fordyce, "Cookbooks of the 1800s," in *Dining in America, 1850-1900*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 85-113.

The flood of foodstuffs into New York led to the marketing of these products in the city's public markets and private food shops, part of a larger expansion in New York's retail economy. Restaurants were virtually unheard of in the 1700s, but they proliferated in the city beginning in the early nineteenth century. By the 1830s, New Yorkers had access to a range of public dining options including grog shops, oyster cellars, ice cream parlors, lunch rooms, short-order houses, and restaurants catering to the well-heeled. People of varied backgrounds were eating in commercial establishments, a practice mainly of travelers in the eighteenth century. Thus, in patronizing the new public dining establishments, New Yorkers took part in an emerging commercial world of leisure. Even within the homes of New York's middle classes, described by a generation of historians as the most private of spaces and as a haven from the harshest aspects of commerce, public and commercial modes of consumption took hold. Builders and middle-class homemakers created specialized rooms for dining, which also served as a staging ground for performance in the outside world. The diet reform movement was in many ways a reaction to the increasingly commercial and public aspects of food consumption. Yet even this movement underwent a process of commercialization as its ideas were disseminated to a larger audience over the course of the nineteenth century.

As the food choices and habits of New Yorkers became ever more visible, the behaviors one displayed around food took on greater significance. How and where one obtained food, the public dining spaces one could enter and how one behaved when there, and the rituals attached to food and eating in the domestic realm became

important markers of status and gentility for people who increasingly concerned themselves with such matters.

New York's food revolution coincided with a marked expansion in its middle-class population. Indeed, a number of scholars have identified the rise, during the antebellum period, of a distinct middle class with specific patterns of work, leisure, and consumption. In his 1985 article, "The Hypothesis of Middle Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals," Stuart Blumin identified consumption patterns as a major area of future study for scholars of middle-class formation.[14] This dissertation takes up that call by exploring the ways in which eating and public rituals of food consumption informed social status for antebellum New Yorkers.

In nineteenth-century New York, individual behavior vis à vis food and eating became a crucial component for spelling out class identity. As more and more New Yorkers gained access to consumer items that had served as markers of gentility for previous generations, the risk of opening the doors of gentility to all seemed imminent. Seeing this "trickling down" of genteel forms -- once a marker of elite status -- into the middle and lower orders of society, some scholars have argued that in the nineteenth century, gentility acted as a democratizing force.[15] But, as this study shows, the expansion of access to items formerly identified as genteel led to a degentrification of those items. Performance and ritual, rather than just goods, now

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[14] Stuart Blumin, "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Nineteenth-Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 299-338. See also: Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Ryan, *The Cradle of the Middle Class*.

[15] Richard Bushman is the primary proponent of this view. See Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), xi-xix.

served as the central markers of gentility. As the food revolution confronted New Yorkers concerned about class status, *how* they ate became much more important than *what* they ate.

In examining the ways in which members of the growing middle classes used the material of the consumer revolution to lay claim to status and gentility, this dissertation opens up a new and significant area of inquiry in the historiography of the market and consumer revolutions. It uses food as a window for understanding the impact of major structural changes on the society and culture of New York City, antebellum America's largest urban center. Indeed, exploring the social and economic underpinnings of cultural forms and output and thus tying together social and cultural history, is a central contribution of this study. In so doing, it addresses and clarifies some of the large questions historians have asked of the antebellum period. These questions focus on: the process of class formation and the development of class identity and consciousness; the tension between increasing political democratization and the simultaneous rise of social stratification and inequality; the patterns of development of urban society and culture; the shifting line between public and private spheres in the antebellum city; and the workings of gender in the determination of social class. This dissertation also provides the first concerted scholarly study of new food availability and changing eating patterns in antebellum New York City.[16]

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[16] There are, of course, many works on changing American food habits, but none focus specifically on the antebellum period. Richard Hooker, *Food and Drink in America: A History* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1981); Waverly Root and Richard de Rochemont, *Eating in America: A History* (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1976); Cummings, *The American and His Food*; and McIntosh, *American Food Habits*, for example, all explore American food habits from the colonial period through the twentieth century.

The context for this study is New York City as it developed into a national commercial center. The growth of New York and the struggle of its citizens to make sense of the city are as much the subjects of this dissertation as changing dietary habits. Antebellum New Yorkers confronted not only an overwhelming abundance of consumer choices, and an unprecedented level of access to those items, but also an urban environment that bore little relation to the small city known by previous generations. Between 1790 and 1860, New York experienced unimaginable growth, bursting far beyond its colonial boundaries and witnessing a twenty-five-fold population increase, from just over 33,000 inhabitants in 1790 to more than 800,000 on the eve of the Civil War. This last figure included almost 400,000 individuals born outside of the United States and scores of young men and women raised in the rural hinterlands of New York and New England. The walking city of the colonial period had ceded by mid-century to a booming metropolis, with separate residential and commercial districts and stark distinctions between its light and shadows. The opulent homes of the city's wealthy, and their quiet, tree-lined residential

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While "Food Studies" as a discrete field has gained a good deal of attention in recent years, there are still few works on American food habits in the early nineteenth century. Most of the recent projects on food have concentrated either on countries other than the United States, or on food-related changes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century United States. Some examples include: Susan Williams, *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Kathryn Grover, ed., *Dining in America, 1850-1900* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987); Warren Belasco, *Appetite for Change: How the Counterculture Took on the Food Industry* (New York: Pantheon, 1990); Doris Witt, *Black Hunger: Food and the Politics of U.S. Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Donna Gabaccia, *We Are What We Eat: Food and the Making of Americans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998); Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), and *Paradox of Plenty: A Social History of Eating in Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). None of these monographs focus on the period from 1790 to 1860. The one exception to this rule is Barbara Carson's *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990). Carson's study of dining in Washington, DC examines the period from 1800 to 1829.

neighborhoods contrasted markedly with the shacks, tenements, and raucous and squalid streets of the Five Points slum.[17]

The refined entertainments of the genteel bore little resemblance to the bawdy leisure pursuits of the city's laborers and young, white-collar sporting men. The magnificence of Delmonico's restaurant made it seem an entirely different entity from the grog shops, taverns, and concert saloons that served food to the less affluent. The city was a strange and alien concept to many, as were the personages that inhabited it – the confidence man, the painted woman, the individual concerned only with profit. New Yorkers struggled to find ways to make sense of the city and to navigate its tangle of social interactions and relationships. The consumer revolution provided many of them with the weapons in this struggle. The following chapters examine the ways in which they engaged this arsenal.

Chapter One, "'The Sons of Vulcans Eat Ice Creams': Consumption, Performance, and The Changing Social Geography of New York City," provides context for New Yorkers' confrontation with the revolution in food habits discussed in subsequent pages. It explores New York's development as a commercial metropolis as well as shifts in its social organization. As the city grew in size and population, it presented an alarming picture to many of its denizens. As traditional patterns of social identification and interaction ceased to function, status-conscious New Yorkers sought new ways to distinguish themselves. They did so through new patterns of behavior, including a greater reliance on space and performance to spell

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[17] George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 70-71; Eric Homberger, *The Historical Atlas of New York City: A Visual Celebration of Nearly 400 Years of New York City's History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 70-75.

out class status and identity. The need to lay claim to gentility seemed especially pressing in an environment where class identification was both increasingly important and precarious.

Chapter Two, "'Is the Appetite of the Metropolis Ever Appeased?': Technological Change and New York City's Food Markets," examines the nineteenth-century transportation and market revolutions and the expanded food options they brought about in antebellum New York City. As the municipal government struggled to keep pace with both the exploding population and the unprecedented quantities of goods entering the port, the public market system – the main source for food in New York since the colonial period – underwent a process of growth and transformation. Public markets continued to service the retail needs of nineteenth century New Yorkers but they increasingly embraced wholesale functions as well. Meanwhile, specialty food shops began to pervade the city, offering new retail choices for New Yorkers and changing the way that they procured their food. Technological changes had an impact on the kitchens and tables of antebellum New York as well. New Yorkers of middling and better means could take advantage of an ever-increasing range and quantity of food in the public and private markets, and prepare them in new ways in their modern homes. Those of lesser circumstances did not enjoy the same benefits. Thus, a growing disparity emerged between the dietary patterns of poor New Yorkers and their wealthier counterparts. Chapter Two describes *what* New Yorkers ate; the succeeding chapters examine shifts in *how* they ate.

Chapter Three, "'To See and Be Seen': New York City's Public Dining Establishments," examines the growth of New York's restaurant scene and the use of new criteria for spelling out gentility. Beginning in the late 1820s, New York witnessed an explosion of public dining options. Many New Yorkers of means embraced the publicity and opportunities for socializing afforded by the new luxury hotels and restaurants. In the expanding world of commercial leisure, they cultivated a "dining performance" that enabled them to act out their claims to status. As more individuals gained access to items that had previously connoted genteel status, and as public dining options expanded to include all but the poorest New Yorkers, space and behaviors around food became increasingly important in defining gentility. Gender played a crucial role in determining the respectability of restaurants and other public dining venues.

Chapter Four, "'The Importance of a Home': Dining and Domesticity," focuses on antebellum discussions of domesticity and the proper uses of the home. The dining room, an increasingly requisite entity in middle-class homes, was laden with symbolic meanings. Domestic advisers urged their readers to uphold the canon of domesticity and to make their homes and especially their dining rooms comfortable environments for kith and kin. Many antebellum New Yorkers rejected this advice, turning their dining rooms to public uses and replicating, to some extent, the rituals of consumption played out in the city's public eating spaces. By examining the public uses of the private dining room, this chapter shows that the domestic realm was not nearly as contained and cloistered as contemporaneous advisers hoped or contemporary historians have claimed.

Chapter Five, "'Turning All Our Refinements and Decanters Upside Down': Diet Reform and the Discourse of Food in Antebellum New York City," examines the antebellum diet and health reform movements, their central proponents, and the popularization of their tenets in antebellum America. Beginning in the 1830s, diet reformers such as Sylvester Graham and William Andrus Alcott became well-known, if often ridiculed, figures. These men and their disciples articulated a strong connection between diet, health, and character. For them, behaviors around food were important not only for spelling out gentility and status, but also for ensuring the health and stability of the individual and society. The diet reformers' programs included attacks on many of the new food choices and behaviors available to antebellum New Yorkers and other Americans. Chapter Five goes beyond current historiographical treatments of diet reform by rooting the movement in the context of changing antebellum food patterns. It thus shows that diet reform was, in many ways, a reaction to and critique of the commercialization of food and eating in early nineteenth-century New York and the United States at large.

By the 1860s, New York City's food revolution was well under way. The patterns established during the antebellum period – the increasing accessibility of foodstuffs brought about by improvements in transportation and technology; the emphasis on space and behavior rather than on access to luxury items in spelling out status and gentility; the growth and popularity of public, commercial dining venues; the growing importance of the dining room as an entertainment space in middle-class homes; and the copious discussion of food and eating and their impact on health and character – all extended into the late nineteenth century. The concluding chapter

explores some of the food-related developments of the post-Civil War period, showing the expansion of many of the trends of the antebellum period, and the legacy of New York's food revolution for subsequent generations.

CHAPTER ONE

"THE SONS OF VULCANS EAT ICE CREAMS" CONSUMPTION, PERFORMANCE, AND THE CHANGING SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY OF NEW YORK CITY

In 1786, confectioner Joseph Crowe advertised in the *New York Post Boy* the remarkable fact that "Ladies and Gentlemen may be supplied with ice cream every day" at his Broadway establishment. In the New Republic, ice cream was still a novel treat, enjoyed exclusively by the wealthy. Even they were only likely to find this confection at pleasure gardens or fancy dinner parties, such as one hosted by Dolley Madison at the White House in 1812. A foreign visitor who attended this function noted that the culmination of the refined evening came when Mrs. Madison invited her guests into the dining room where "they beheld a Table set with French china and English silver, laden with good things to eat, and in the Centre high on a silver platter, a large, shining dome of pink Ice Cream." Yet, by 1840, visitors to the United States remarked with interest upon the universality and cheapness of this former luxury item. In 1839, Englishman Frederick Marryat, upon viewing a group of unkempt New York City workers indulging in this treat, marveled at a land in which "'factory girls can carry parasols' . . . . and the sons of Vulcans eat ice-creams."[1]

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[1] Paul Dickson, *The Great American Ice Cream Book* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 21, 24; Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America with Remarks on its Institutions*, ed. Sydney Jackman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 216.

Many contemporary historians have agreed with Marryat's depiction of the United States as a place where even those of modest means could assume the consumption patterns of the wealthy. They have identified the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a time when genteel forms, once a marker of elite status, were trickling down into the middle and lower orders of society. Through perusals of eighteenth and nineteenth-century inventories of households at various wealth levels, historians have identified a relatively broad-based increase in the objects of gentility: tea sets, household furnishings, carpets, clothing, and luxury food items.

Scholars have agreed that gentility and genteel forms are a crucial aspect of the interrelated revolutions that brought about vast changes in American society from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. They have disagreed, however, on the role those genteel forms played in antebellum class formation. Stuart Blumin, Karen Halttunen and John Kasson for example, argue that the rise of genteel forms served as a means for the emergent middle class to define itself and to exclude certain groups and individuals, particularly those involved in manual labor. Richard Bushman on the other hand, argues that in the nineteenth-century United States -- a self-avowed republican society -- gentility took a special form, based on inclusion. Gentility, Bushman argues, mitigated against class consciousness and served not as an exclusionary force but as a democratizing one.[2] Bushman makes it clear that his configuration of gentility as an inclusive process represents an ideal to which to aspire and not necessarily the reality of the lives of non-genteel Americans. Whether

[2] Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990).

or not they could achieve gentility on their modest incomes, Americans of lesser means "found no formal barriers to aspiration. . . . No sumptuary laws or attitudes condemned the acquisition of genteel goods."[3]

Bushman is correct in arguing that more Americans in the nineteenth century had access to genteel goods. But the question arises: did access to luxury items necessarily lead to gentility or social equality? I contend that it did not. When applied to actual experience, gentility served not as a democratizing force but as an obstacle to equality. Bushman and other historians who have examined the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century have suggested that anyone with access to genteel forms could assume gentility. In fact, the opposite was true. Increased ownership of tea sets, furniture, forks, and silver knives did not lead automatically to a broader stratum of genteel people. Rather it led to a degentrification of those items and the lifting of the stakes of gentility to a higher level.[4]

An examination of gentility and consumption in nineteenth-century New York City makes this process abundantly clear. As the city grew and spread, its citizens struggled to make sense of the expanding metropolis around them and to navigate its

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[3] Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 421. In a republican society, Bushman explains, the idea of a lowest class was not acceptable (despite the existence of slavery in the American South). Reformers such as Catharine Sedgwick and Frederick Law Olmsted thus "looked for ways to make everyone polite, to invite everyone into the drawing room." On a more material level, "peddlers, storekeepers, and industrialists promoted vernacular gentility with an intense devotion" while politicians and rhetoricians "dinned the ears with the language of republican equality." All of these trends, Bushman concludes, "mitigated against a hardening of class consciousness and instead. . . . spread a belief in the right of every American to be middle-class." Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 421, 433-34.

[4] It should also be noted that the current study deals with New York City, a decidedly urban locale. Much of the work on refinement and the democratization of gentility has assumed a rural population. It may be true, although beyond the scope of this dissertation, that there was more class fluidity in a rural setting than an urban one by nature of the extreme wealth stratification of the nineteenth-century city as opposed to more rural locales.

ever more complicated social geography. As they witnessed and participated in the growth of a commercial consumer culture, they redefined gentility and its criteria. Thus, in antebellum New York, the expansion of access to consumer items brought about by the consumer revolution was met by an increasing emphasis on space and performance in spelling out genteel status.

The context for the changing criteria of gentility was the tremendous growth of New York City. By 1810, New York was the largest and most vibrant city in the new Republic. Over subsequent decades, it would emerge as the nation's preeminent commercial center, filled with vast numbers of inhabitants. Bursting at its seams, antebellum New York presented a chaotic, crowded, and sometimes alarming picture to natives and visitors alike. New York's development into a commercial metropolis led to a marked alteration in its social organization and the patterns governing social intercourse. On the eve of the Revolution, the city was still a tightly-clustered community gathered around the southern tip of Manhattan island, its homes places of business, its social classes living in certain if begrudging intimacy. By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, Gotham presented a significantly different picture.

Antebellum New Yorkers found themselves, unwittingly, at the beginnings of the urban age. "New York as you knew it was a mere corner of the present huge city," Washington Irving wrote to his sister in 1847, "and that corner is all changed, pulled to pieces, burnt down and rebuilt. . . . I can hardly realize that within my term of life, this great crowded metropolis so full of life[,] bustle, noise, shew, and splendor, was a quiet little City of some fifty or sixty thousand inhabitants. It is really

now one of the most rucketing cities in the world."[5] Many New Yorkers viewed the changes to the face of their city with considerably less approval than Irving. Walking through its streets, they were confronted with new spatial forms -- the grid plan, the massive buildings which, according to the New York *Times* "seem to threaten us with a stifling atmosphere of bricks and mortar," the teeming immigrant slum. They were faced with new commercial institutions – the department store, the luxury hotel, the restaurant and oyster cellar, the concert saloon. And they interacted with new and in many cases disturbing personages – the confidence man, the painted woman, the acquisitive, cutthroat businessman, the stranger with no traceable family or community connections.

Many New Yorkers struggled to create some order out of the chaos that surrounded them. Those of means increasingly separated themselves off physically from the overcrowded, disease- and crime-ridden downtown areas of the city by developing and settling in residential districts on its outskirts. But the development of residential neighborhoods defined by social class notwithstanding, New York remained a relatively compact city throughout the antebellum period, preventing complete isolation from its seamier characteristics. Individuals of means and social aspiration addressed this challenge by creating other, more symbolic ways to mark themselves off from those of the lesser orders of society. As historian Elizabeth Blackmar explains: "Relations that could not be defined through physical distance . .

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[5] Washington Irving, quoted in Eric Homberger, *The Historical Atlas of New York City: A Visual Celebration of Nearly 400 Years of New York City's History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 70.

. could be expressed and clarified through new ways of asserting social distance."[6] One way they established such distance was to create institutions of leisure and entertainment that were exclusive to members of their class. Another was to rely more on the trappings of gentility, to take advantage of the explosion of luxury, consumer items in decorating their homes and persons and thus creating an outward appearance of status.

But appearance was not enough to prove one's claim to gentility. For as we shall see, thanks to the consumer revolution, more New Yorkers than ever before had access to items that marked members of previous generations as genteel. And in an increasingly anonymous city, where class status was precarious and the fear that appearance was no longer a reliable measure of character was prevalent, other forms of social delineation were necessary. Thus, those aspiring to or hoping to maintain genteel status turned increasingly to rigid codes of conduct and new forms of behavior and performance in the commercial world of the streets, public places of entertainment, and the domestic space of their homes. In the realm of performance, or the manner of consumption, the validity of claims to gentility was tested.[7] It was not enough for those seeking respectability in the antebellum city simply to collect an array of consumer items. Rather, those items had to be displayed in a space that signified their partaker as refined and genteel. And as access to luxury items became more widely available, the behaviors that one engaged in around those consumer items became more important in delineating social status than access to the items

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[6] Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 107.

[7] For the role of performance in gentility, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 92-123; Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*.

themselves. Thus, examining not only the commodities enjoyed but also the manner and location in which one enjoyed them, indicates not a democratization of gentility but a degentrification of previously genteel items. The consumer revolution provided the material that status-conscious New Yorkers used to spell out their class position and identity. Once they gained access to a multitude of consumer items, and new public and commercial locales in which to enjoy them, they developed modes of performance and behavior that allowed them to mark themselves off and to distinguish those individuals who merited inclusion in their circles.

The example of ice cream provides a marked illustration of this shift. At the turn of the nineteenth century, ice cream was a pleasure available only to elites and a decidedly new one even for them. The very ability to partake of this item itself connoted gentility. The genteel nature of ice cream in early Republican New York is not merely assumed. The few establishments that served it, such as the confectionery shops of French immigrants Joseph Corré and Joseph Delacroix, catered only to the wealthiest New Yorkers.[8] Explicitly by policy and implicitly by price, those proprietors would only serve those of the "better sort." Delacroix, for example, announced in a 1799 advertisement that his pleasure garden, where ice cream was served, was "open every day for the reception of Ladies and Gentlemen," a category of social discrimination. And Corré charged four shillings for admission to his Mount Vernon and Columbia Gardens, a price well out of reach for New York workers, the

[8] Charles H. Haswell comments on the scarcity of ice cream in 1816 New York in his *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), 49. Corré's shop was at 115 Broadway and later 28 Wall Street, and Delacroix's at 112 Broadway. Lower Broadway was universally identified as the most beautiful and most genteel in late 18th and early 19th-century New York. See, for example: *Youthful America: Selections from Henry Unwin Addington's Residence in the United States of America*, ed. Bradford Perkins (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 17.

most skilled of whom earned an average of four shillings a day in 1789.[9] Making ice cream at home was no more economical. The ingredients – ice, luxury fruits such as pineapple, and refined sugar – were very expensive, the method time-consuming, and the machinery unaffordable to any but the wealthiest individuals.

By the 1830s this situation had changed. Technological developments led to the increased availability and hence reduced price of ice as well as new, less time-consuming methods of producing this once luxurious commodity. While the rich were still eating ice cream, it was no longer an exclusively genteel treat. It was now available to a far greater number of New Yorkers and urban Americans in general. By 1828, ice cream, once available only in elite confectioners' shops and pleasure gardens, was sold by street vendors. Where once one had to frequent Broadway to find the frozen confection, by the fourth decade of the nineteenth century, ice cream was available on the Bowery, a street associated with working-class culture and leisure. French visitor Anthelme Brillat-Savarin had remarked with bemusement on New Yorkers' curious reception of ice cream in 1794. "The ladies especially," he noted, "never tired of a pleasure so novel to them; nothing was more amusing than to watch them smirk and simper as they tasted it." The ladies of 1839, according to Frederick Marryat, would have squawked along with him at the entrance into an ice cream establishment of "about a dozen black swarthy fellows, employed at the iron-

[9] *New York Daily Advertiser*, 7 December 1799; *American Citizen and General Advertiser*, 14 May 1800; Frank Moneghan and Marvin Lowenthal, *This Was New York: The Nation's Capital in 1789* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1943), 77.

foundry close at hand, with their dirty shirt-sleeves tucked up, and without their coats and waistcoats [who] came in, and sitting down, called for ice-creams." [10]

Rather than serving as a means for inclusion in the rituals of the elite, the increased availability of ice cream and other consumer items led to their degentrification. Once ice cream became a popularly available commodity, it lost its caché as genteel. But the genteel did not need to forego this pleasure merely because their poorer counterparts were enjoying it as well. Now the means and methods of enjoyment took on greater meaning. Wealthier New Yorkers still ate ice cream of course. But they bought it at high prices and ate it in well-appointed ice-cream parlors on Broadway which replicated the décor and atmosphere of their parlors at home. On the Bowery meanwhile, street vendors sold ice cream for pennies to New Yorkers of lesser means.

George Foster, the oft-quoted mid-century chronicler of New York street life, makes the above distinction in describing the ice-creameries of the city. It is notable that he enters a fashionable Broadway ice cream parlor at the moment in his narrative when he promises his readers a brief respite from the seamier side of New York on which the rest of his exposé concentrates, "an escape for a time from the darkness and lurid glare of gas-light." Foster goes on to describe the fine furnishings and subdued atmosphere of this "ice-creamery." Unlike the other points of interest on Foster's gas-light tour of New York, this particular venue is filled largely with ladies of

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[10] Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 92; Richard J. Hooker, *Food and Drink in America: A History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1981), 124; Brillat-Savarin quoted in Paul Dickson, *Ice Cream Book*, 21; Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 216-17.

refinement. Indeed, he notes, "the great bulk of the company here is too correct . . . to require much notice."[11]

Poorer New Yorkers were eating ice cream as well, but in significantly different ways. In a mid-century illustration in *Harper's Weekly* magazine of a Bowery ice cream vendor, a shabbily-dressed man stands over a barrel, serving a group of children who contemporaries might have described as street urchins. Dressed in rags and holding brooms, the young customers compose a decidedly ungenteel picture as they stand on the crowded street devouring their freshly-scooped ice cream cones.[12] If their dress did not give away their class status, their manner of eating surely would have. For no self-respecting young lady or gentleman would have eaten anything on the streets, let alone out of a cone. The setting also is in vivid contrast to an English visitor's description of Taylor's ice cream saloon, the most genteel establishment of its sort in 1850s New York. "Among the many handsome and expensive stores in the Broadway," this gentleman notes, "Taylor's Saloon carries off the palm from all the rest, by the splendour of its furniture and appointments, which seem rather suited to a fairy palace than a sublunary café and restaurant."[13]

Thus, while ice cream as a commodity had become available to even the poorest New Yorkers by mid-century, it in and of itself did not confer gentility upon the consumer. Now the ritual around the item and the place in which it was

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[11] George Foster, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, ed. Stuart Blumin (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 133, 139.
[12] *Harper's* image reprinted in Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Bowery Days: The Chronicles of a Famous Street* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1931), 175.
[13] Alfred Pairpoint, quoted in I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498-1909, vol. 5* (New York, 1915), 1855.

consumed had become the markers of its gentility. Those of genteel status could draw the line here: everyone may have gained access to ice cream, but only the select knew the proper rituals and could gain entry to the proper spaces. The genteel were not, despite the desires of republican proponents, ready to include just anyone in their performance. For example, when Joseph Delacroix announced the opening of his Vauxhall pleasure garden for the 1799 season, he took pains to ensure that it would remain a genteel establishment. Not only were the refreshments served prohibitively expensive for all but the wealthy, but Delacroix further ensured the high quality of his customer base by announcing: "Each subscriber to bring a Lady."[14] Clearly the assumption was that a place of public resort could not possibly maintain its genteel status with an all-male clientele. Naturally it went without saying that no lady would be admitted without an escort. Nonetheless, Delacroix had trouble keeping out those New Yorkers whom he viewed as less refined. In 1803, he began charging admission in addition to the price of refreshments. He explained this change in an announcement in the *Daily Advertiser* where he noted that in previous seasons, "All persons genteelly dressed had free right to enter, many persons entering that description were not genteel in character, therefore not suited to the chief part of the company."[15] Delacroix thus identified the beginnings of the concern that appearance alone was not a reliable marker of gentility. Different barriers, in this case charging admission, were necessary to ensure the gentility of his patrons, an especially important goal since Delacroix was convinced that his desired clientele would not

[14] *New York Daily Advertiser*, 7 December 1799.
[15] *New York Daily Advertiser*, 28 April 1803.

frequent his business unless they were surrounded by people they found suitably refined.

Delacroix's care paid off. His Vauxhall Garden was universally acknowledged to be the most fashionable and genteel resort in early nineteenth-century New York. An 1807 newspaper editorial provided this widely-held assessment of Vauxhall Gardens: "This elegant place of public amusement . . . may be justly said to rival in point of elegance and beauty any place of the same kind in the European world. . . . In the United States it is without a parallel, and in this City there is no place of public resort that offers so great attraction to the gay [and] the fashionable." And William Otter, who worked as a waiter at Vauxhall, described his duties as "waiting on the gentry visiting the garden."[16]

Other less careful proprietors saw the character of their establishments change. For example, Frances Guerin, who ran a fashionable ladies' lunch room in the early nineteenth century, made the mistake of serving liquor which attracted an unfashionable clientele. His more genteel female customers stopped patronizing his shop which eventually turned into a decidedly unrefined venue: a bar. Guerin's closest competitor for the ladies' lunch trade, Palmo's Café des Milles Colonnes, suffered a worse demise. A visitor early in the century described the genteel accommodations as "far in excess of any previous essay in this country." But again in this case, the provision of liquor attracted non-genteel customers. The Milles Colonnes became a drinking saloon that no lady deserving of the appellation would frequent and by mid-century could have been an entry in Foster's exposé of

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[16] *People's Friend* editorial, quoted in Stokes, *Iconography*, 1461; William Otter, *History of My Own Times*, ed. Richard Stott (Ithaca. NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 42.

establishments that provided their debauched clientele with racy tableaux vivants (persons posed as paintings) such as "Lady Godiva's Ride" and "The Peeping Tom of Coventry." Based on Foster's description of such goings-on, there is no doubt that establishments that provided such salacious entertainments were not proper places for ladies and gentlemen.[17]

Hence, once a refined locale catered to unrefined folk, it ceased to be genteel. By mid-century, Guerin's lunch room and the Milles Colonnes were abandoned by the fashionable, who were frequenting new venues such as Taylor's and Thompson & Weller's. These two establishments, "at which an unescorted lady could order a light lunch without sullying her reputation," were elegantly furnished and by price and policy catered only to a genteel clientele.[18] Foster reminded his readers of Contoit's Garden, "for many years . . . the great place in Broadway . . . patronized by all the aristocracy, like Thompson & Weller's now." For reasons undisclosed by Foster, Contoit's developed a "suspicious" reputation "and at last the evenings were monopolized by a class of visitors who generally brought their 'spoons' (and very soft ones they mostly were,) along with them." In the end, "'respectable' people did not like to be seen going there at all, any time of day – and finally the whole concern . . . disappeared . . . and . . . everybody wondered for a few days, and talked about the growth of the city, and so forgot all about Contoit and his ice-cream which was not ice-cream, and iron spoons that nobody would carry off wrapped up by mistake in his handkerchief."[19]

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[17] Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York from 1776 to the Present* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 91-2; Foster, *New York by Gas-Light*, 82.
[18] Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 91; Foster, *New York by Gas-Light*, 138.
[19] Foster, *New-York by Gaslight*, 139.

Even Delacroix's pleasure garden eventually went the way of his worst fears. For there came a point when the invitation to ladies was not accepted and hence his requirement for gentility could not be met. In the end the biggest problem his Vauxhall faced was its location: on the Bowery. When the Bowery was a street that refined people frequented, Vauxhall could maintain a genteel clientele. But by the 1830s this avenue had become a playground for the working classes. Genteel people simply would not go there. Unless of course they were trying to avoid their fastidious friends. One who had suffered a loss of fortune or heaven forbid was carrying his own packages home might walk along the Bowery because he could be sure that he would remain anonymous in that setting. Lydia Maria Child lamented that those of genteel status began to forego the pleasantness of Vauxhall Gardens for "it being in the Bowery, is out of the walk of fashionables, who probably ignore its existence, as they do most places of entertainment for the people at large." Those of the working classes now had their own pleasure garden but they were not sharing it with those of genteel status; the latter were to be found at a new garden called Niblo's. Delacroix himself did not have to worry about the demise of his formerly fashionable pleasure garden. By this point he had sold the location to the most democratic of individuals: P.T. Barnum.[20]

What factors contributed to the shift from item to space and performance in spelling out gentility? An examination of the growth of New York into a commercial metropolis and the shifting patterns of social interaction within the antebellum city

[20] Harlow, *Old Bowery Days*, 231; Lydia Maria Child, *Letters from New York, Second Series* (New York: C.S. Francis & Co., 1845), 171; Haswell, *Reminiscences*, 230; Stokes, *Iconography*, 1694, 1762.

provides the answer. Between 1790 and 1860, New York's population grew from just over 33,000 inhabitants to over 800,000 and its geographic boundaries stretched from its pre-revolutionary limits at Chambers Street to above 40th Street. During these years, New York surpassed Philadelphia as both the largest city in the nation and its predominant commercial port, a position solidified by the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. Between 1790 and 1860, the value of imports through New York increased three times and its exports almost doubled. By 1860, New York handled over sixty percent of the nation's export trade and thirty-five percent of its imports.[21] New York was also the financial capital of the young nation – from the turn of the nineteenth century, it housed a stock exchange and more banks and insurance firms than any other city.[22] Entrepreneurs, white-collar workers, and laborers from abroad as well as surrounding states were drawn to New York City and the economic

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[21] William Pencak, "Introduction: New York and the Rise of American Capitalism," in *New York and the Rise of American Capitalism: Economic Development and the Social and Political History of an American State, 1780-1870,* eds. William Pencak and Conrad Edick Wright (New York: The New-York Historical Society, 1989), xii.

[22] Trade with the West Indies -- the basis of New York's mercantile economy during the eighteenth century -- had been forestalled by the Revolution and curtailed by British, French, and Spanish policy following the Treaty of Paris, which ended the war. But by 1788, trade restrictions had been relaxed and New York's West Indian trade was returned to prewar levels. Other markets for American products had been opened up as well in Northern Europe and the Far East. During the 1790s and early 1800s, New York solidified its position as the "queen of commerce." The French Revolution, and subsequent Napoleonic Wars, disrupted Europe's internal trade, creating an unquenchable demand abroad for American products. Additionally, as European war disrupted trade between that continent and the West Indies, American ships carried Caribbean products to European markets. New York's harbor – widely acknowledged as among the best in the world – could accommodate the new, larger ships that merchants were utilizing for their newly enlarged cargoes. Internally, New York's expanded hinterlands, and the development of turnpike systems connecting them to Gotham, increased the volume of domestic product traveling through New York's port. Cotton shipments from the South through New York also increased significantly through the 1790s and 1800s; in the years after the invention of the cotton gin in 1792, cotton production in the South quadrupled and New York served as the second most important port (after New Orleans) for this export to Europe. See: Sidney Pomerantz, *New York: An American City, 1783-1903* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 152-3; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 334-337.

opportunities with which it beckoned. Thus, the population continued to increase throughout the early decades of the nineteenth century, contributing further to the commercial growth and vitality of New York.

The increased volume of trade led to related shifts in the pace and structure of business in the city. In the 1790s, as during the colonial period, business historian Alfred Chandler explains, "the general merchant . . . . bought and sold all types of products and carried out all the basic commercial functions. He was an exporter, wholesaler, importer, retailer, shipowner, banker, and insurer." Increasingly, however, in subsequent decades, "such tasks were being carried out by different types of specialized enterprises. Banks, insurance companies, and common carriers had appeared. Merchants had begun to specialize in one or two lines of goods. . . . They concentrated more and more on a single function: retailing, wholesaling, importing, or exporting."[23] The number of merchants and merchant firms in New York thus increased exponentially between 1790 and 1840; in the latter year New York City claimed over 1300 mercantile firms providing goods for both foreign and domestic markets.[24]

Shifts in mercantile trade led to related changes in retail establishments. As merchants abandoned the retail trade in favor of more specialized or wholesale functions, and as artisans focused more on production than on distribution, a huge crop of retailers sprang up to service New Yorkers' consumer needs and wants.[25] By 1840, Broadway was lined with fashionable specialty stores selling all manner of

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[23] Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1977), 15.
[24] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 436.
[25] Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class*, 79-81.

manufactured items. On this "most showy . . . most crowded, and . . . richest fashionable thoroughfare on the continent[, t]he shops are more numerous, more extensive, and filled with more expensive and rarer assortments of goods than those of any other street in America," wrote George Foster in the 1840s.[26]

The newly specialized mercantile and retail firms required a drastically expanded workforce of clerks, bookkeepers, copiers, managers, and salespeople. These needs were filled by a massive influx of young men from rural communities in New England, pushed out of their family homes by land scarcity and declining agricultural opportunities. While many of New England's youth migrated westward, many others sought their fortunes in the countinghouses, offices, and retail stores of the budding metropolis on the Hudson.[27] Neither members of the laboring poor nor the elite, these young men swelled the ranks of the expanding middle class.[28]

Meanwhile, artisans felt the effects of New York's commercial expansion as well. During the eighteenth century, most of New York's craftsmen produced goods for local markets. The scale of their businesses was thus relatively small and conducive to traditional systems of training and apprenticeship. The workshops of eighteenth-century master craftsmen were manned by apprentices and journeymen paid by the piece who, after a period of training in these shops, could set out to become master craftsmen themselves. But in the early nineteenth century, many

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[26] George Foster, *New York in Slices: By an Experienced Carver* (New York: W.F. Burgess, 1849), 12.
[27] Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Bourgeois Discourse and the Age of Jackson," in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 80-81; See also Allan Stanley Horlick, *Country Boys and Merchant Princes: The Social Control of Young Men in New York* (London: Associated University Presses, 1975).
[28] For changes in work and their contribution to the expansion of the middle class, see Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 66-108.

master artisans saw opportunity in the foreign export trade. Repositioning themselves as entrepreneurs, they increasingly turned their workshops over to producing bulk quantities. Methods of mass production were implemented in many trades such as shoemaking, tailoring, and other light consumer items. Master craftsmen could increasingly turn to unskilled laborers – and they found a ready supply among the city's growing population of immigrants and laboring poor – to produce goods that formerly required the skills of a journeyman. Many skilled workers were forced into wage labor and witnessed a distressing degradation of their crafts and limited opportunity to achieve the status of a master craftsman. And many of the smaller master craftsmen found themselves unable to compete with the larger workshops employing numerous workers.[29]

Some journeymen and small master craftsmen managed to maintain a relatively comfortable subsistence even in the context of changing work patterns. But many more found themselves among the ever-growing ranks of the laboring poor, squeezed into the squalid districts around the East River and in the Five Points slum. The social distance between them and the entrepreneur-masters increased considerably as the latter group entered the middle class and, in some cases, the elite.

It should be noted that changes in craft production were both gradual and uneven. The structure of some trades – such as butchering, baking, and shipbuilding -- remained relatively untouched by changing market realities. And even in those trades that were affected, not all journeymen and small master craftsmen suffered. In terms of middle-class formation too, the process was ongoing and categories of

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[29] Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 24-60.

inclusion in the middle class based on occupation are, at times, vexing. Furthermore, class status in the antebellum city was extremely precarious. The boom-and-bust nature of the economy, the scarcity of credit, and the vagaries of the market combined to make the life of a struggling entrepreneur a potential struggle indeed. Nonetheless, by the third decade of the nineteenth century, the ranks of both the middle and working classes and the visible markers of class distinction – residence, work, and patterns of leisure – were growing ever more marked.

As the pace of trade accelerated and the size and scale of businesses grew, the face of the city changed accordingly. New York remained a walking city into the 1800s but whereas in earlier periods, city blocks housed a somewhat chaotic mélange of trades, businesses, and residences, spatial organization along economic lines began to characterize the city in the early nineteenth century. Importers and commission merchants began to enter into partnerships and consolidate their businesses, a process made evident physically by the enormous three- and four-story brick warehouses they constructed along the East River waterfront. By 1800, the dockside area was given over exclusively to large warehouses and retail stores. Artisanal homes and workshops, as well as merchant dwellings that had once shared the waterfront with stores and warehouses, were driven inland or northward. As demand for retail and commercial property on the East River grew, so did the waterfront itself. In 1795, the Common Council laid out plans for two new streets – West Street and South Street -- to be built on landfill on the western and eastern shores of Manhattan. Merchants began commercial building on the west side as well, building fifteen wharves by 1807 to deal with the increased traffic coming down the Hudson River. Indeed much of the

postwar construction, both commercial and residential, took place on the streets leading to the Hudson, the area most affected by the fires of 1776 and 1778.

New York's physical and commercial growth and its ever-more visible social stratification were inextricably linked. Unlike their colonial counterparts, nineteenth-century merchants and professionals were increasingly choosing to set up residences away from their businesses.[30] These homes, formerly located in the "court end" of town on and around the Battery and Bowling Green Park were ever more likely to be found in the tree-lined neighborhoods of the northern regions of the city such as Hudson Square and Greenwich Village. Industrial developments and urban rebuilding spurred this trend along. New transportation options such as omnibuses and street railroads, services priced out of the range of many New Yorkers but well within the means of the elite and middle classes made commuting possible.[31] The Great Fire of 1835, which destroyed large swathes of the city and necessitated the reconstruction of much of the downtown area, accelerated the separation of commerce and domesticity. Commercial structures replaced the burned-out

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[30] This trend toward separate work and residential space had begun in the first decade of the nineteenth century; according to city directories, only one tenth of New York's merchants or professionals had offices separate from their homes in 1800 as compared to more than half a decade later.

[31] Both omnibuses and street railroads emerged on the scene in the 1830s. Omnibuses, horse-drawn vehicles with seats for twelve passengers and standing room, cost eight to twelve-and-a-half cents for a one-way trip within the city. By 1837, 108 omnibuses served New York City's commuters. By 1853, the number had soared to 683, carrying over 100,000 passengers daily. The New York and Harlem line was the first street railroad line licensed by the Common Council. Horses pulled the railroad cars along a track laid down on the street. The Harlem Line was soon joined by the New York and Erie and Hudson River Rail Road lines (both of which extended far beyond the bounds of New York City but provided transportation by horse-drawn rail car within the city limits). By 1852, the three rail lines were carrying 2.5 million passengers a year into New York City. Fares on the street lines were similar to those charged on the omnibuses. Diana DiZeriga Wall, *The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1994), 52-3; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 655-6; Homberger, *Historical Atlas*, 76.

residences in the former court end of town and the wealthy and middle classes continued to relocate to areas farther north.

Increasingly, as historian Elizabeth Blackmar has shown, property ownership was concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest New Yorkers. As the population spread up Manhattan Island, wealthy New Yorkers bought up land to be filled with homes constructed by speculative builders. In many cases, landowners and developers – Trinity Church is one example – included covenants in their ground leases requiring leaseholders to build substantial houses, constructed of brick, and set back from the street. They also prohibited "nuisance trades" such as meat processing, baking, and brewing, and other "offensive" establishments, such as stables and slaughterhouses, from these areas. They thus ensured that these new neighborhoods would be occupied primarily by residences owned by persons of means. Land prices rose considerably and many artisans and most wage earners were forced to rent homes or to occupy subdivided dwellings. New York's elite built their own homes in separate residential areas and rented homes to less fortunate New Yorkers in the growing tenant districts.[32]

Meanwhile, the changes in manufacturing that led to the degradation of status for so many craftsmen spelled the decline of the home workshop. Laborers were far more likely to live in neighborhoods away from their places of work and their employers. So too were the young clerks who swelled the ranks of the middle class. Unlike their eighteenth-century counterparts, this new crop of white-collar workers did not necessarily rely on family connections nor complete a lengthy period of apprenticeship to achieve their positions. They tended to live apart from their

[32] Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 100-104.

employers, in boarding houses or the new hotels that began to dot the city landscape in the 1830s. Middle-class families, meanwhile, were also relocating to neighborhoods associated mainly with people of similar economic circumstances. Modest brick row houses began to line the streets of the West Village, Bowery Village, and Brooklyn Heights.[33]

While linked to commercial and demographic factors, the development of distinct and distinctive class neighborhoods grew, in part, out of the effort of New Yorkers of means to separate themselves off from the most fearsome aspects of urban life. As the population swelled and the city failed to keep pace, the crowded dockside districts became associated with epidemic diseases, as well as vice, crime, and poverty. Furthermore, the downtown areas of the city increasingly housed venues of commercial leisure and vice from which many genteel folks hoped to shelter themselves and their families. Periodic outbreaks of mob violence also led many wealthier New Yorkers to seek refuge from the downtown areas and to set up neighborhoods where they were assured some distance from the hoi polloi.[34]

At the same time that New York was experiencing an economic and commercial boom, its population of poor had increased considerably. Eighteenth-century laws governing the poor were no longer sufficient, especially as the population of New York continued to expand. Periods of economic downturn – which occurred frequently even during the years of New York's commercial expansion -- were especially hard on those who already suffered from poverty and had nothing to fall back on and no skills to capitalize. Immigrants poured into the

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[33] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 727-8; Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 149-153.
[34] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 371-74, 715-17.

city in the early decades of the nineteenth century, many of them unskilled and penniless, contributing further to the numbers of New York's destitute. Many found housing on the squalid streets between Broadway and the East River, abandoned by the wealthy and middling types who had settled here prior to the Revolution. Shacks and shanties were interspersed among the houses, warehouses, and workshops they left behind, which themselves were converted into subdivided and boarding houses for sailors, journeymen, and wage laborers.[35]

Tenant neighborhoods associated with the laboring poor became increasingly alarming environments for many New Yorkers of the better classes. Stories abounded, for example, of the squalor, filth, vice, and danger of the Five Points neighborhood, already notorious by the 1830s.[36] The sensational press relished in

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[35] Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 49; Stansell, *City of Women*, 9.

[36] The development of the Five Points began with the draining of the Collect or Fresh Water Pond, which was anything but fresh. As early as 1785, a New Yorker described the Pond as "a very sink and common sewer. . . . like a fair every day with whites, and blacks, washing their clothes, blankets, and [other] things. . . all their suds and filth are emptied into this pond, besides dead dogs, cats, etc. thrown in daily." Tanners, brewers, and butchers whose workshops were in the vicinity of the Collect used it as a dumping ground as well for the refuse and offal of their trades. The area surrounding the water was swampy and the slimy runoff from the polluted pond filled the streets surrounding it, such as Mulberry, Roosevelt, Orange, Bancker, James, Oliver, Catherine, and Rutgers Streets. Houses lining these streets sunk into the mucky ground, their basement floors filled with mud and water in heavy rains. In 1802 the Common Council ordered the draining and filling of the pond in the hopes that a fine residential suburb could be developed in the area. By 1813, the Collect had been converted to dry land. But the "fine" residents never materialized. Instead, wealthy New Yorkers bought up plots of land for real estate development. While many artisans remained in the area, many left for greener pastures, leaving their homes behind to be subdivided into boardinghouses by absentee landlords from more desirable areas of the city. These landlords erected wood frame structures as well, which they also rented to wage-earners. In the 1810s, about half of the population of this area – soon to be known as the notorious Five Points -- was made up of artisans and their families. The other half was comprised of wage laborers crowded into the boarding houses and subdivided buildings that characterized the still-marshy environs of the late Collect Pond. Among these laborers was a significant number of New York's free blacks whose families had long inhabited this area on the outskirts of town; fifteen percent of the neighborhood's population in 1825 was African American. Many of the Irish immigrants who began to swell the city's foreign-born population in the 1790s settled here as well. By the 1810s, the area had become a slum. See: Pomerantz, *New York*, 230,

describing the dreadful conditions of this neighborhood, providing a window for its readers on the most squalid aspects of city life. "In the afternoon of each day, when drunkenness is at its height," reported a writer for the New York *Sun* in 1834, "the most disgusting objects, of both sexes, are exhibited to the eyes of the examiner. Indecency, squalid poverty, intemperance and crime, riot and revel in continued orgies, and sober humanity is shocked and horrified, at the loathsome spectacles incessantly presented." At night, "the streets and sidewalks are literally blocked by swarms of sturdy vagabonds . . . the grog shops are filled . . . horrid oaths and execrations burst upon the ear from every tipling house and brothel, and the most abominable indecencies of every kind . . . are perpetrated and heard. . . . If ever wretchedness was exhibited in a more perfect garb, if ever destitution and degradation were presented in more disgusting forms, we confess we have never yet beheld them."[37]

The Five Points served as the most blatant example of the dangers and terrors of city life and writers who sought to expose those horrors never failed to provide an account of this neighborhood. But those who wished to describe and document the experience of the new metropolis and the hazards it presented did not need to venture into the notorious Sixth Ward. Observers frequently remarked upon the unseemly aspects of the city's commercial districts. Richard Gooch, an English visitor who published a scathing report of his tour of the United States complained of the "mean . . . appearance" of the shops along Broadway, the "windows . . . kept so dirty, that I

278, 288-90; Burroughs and Wallace, *Gotham*, 391-2; Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-Century Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 14-16; Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 92-3.

[37] *New York Sun*, 27 May 1834, 29 May 1834, quoted in Anbinder, *Five Points*, 24.

was often obliged to rub off the filth to see any object that dimly appeared from the interior," and the "disgusting sight" of the "slovenly unshaven fellows that present themselves at the doors in the characters of shopmen, not only in Broadway, but in every part of the city." He decried as well the "beastly condition" of the streets, "with the exception of one or two." "Filth of all sorts," he grumbled, "is hourly shot out of every house into them. . . . New York is one *huge dunghill!*"[38]

The city presented more symbolic dangers as well. In the flood of literature produced in the antebellum period that attempted to describe and make sense of the city, the toxic aspects of the metropolis seemed everywhere evident. This literature, which included both exposés of the city such as *The Miseries of New-York; The Mysteries and Miseries of New-York; New-York by Gas-Light: With Here and There a Streak of Sunshine;* and *Lights and Shadows of New-York Life*, and conduct-of-life manuals geared toward the young men and women migrating from rural to urban areas, spelled out a host of perils and risks that the city and its denizens presented.[39]

Foremost among them were the commercial entertainments that proliferated throughout the city in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Ministers and conduct writers recognized that the young men they advised needed some form of recreation to unwind from the pressures of conducting business. But they feared the venues and options the city provided for those seeking that release – dance halls,

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[38] *America and the Americans – In 1833-4. By an Emigrant, Richard Gooch*, ed. Richard Toby Widdicombe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 14-16.
[39] On conduct manuals and city exposés, see Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 44-69, 74-80.

saloons, theaters, gambling dens, and "the various modes of sinful pleasure."[40] As dangerous as the entertainments that these locales provided were the people one might encounter in them. Of particular concern was a new urban character: the confidence man, an individual who was not what he seemed, who presented an aspect of benevolence and friendship but held as his goal the corruption of innocent youth. This figure was, by the estimation of conduct writers, everywhere and ready to pounce on every unwitting youngster who made his way into the city.[41]

Those unbridled youths flooding into the city were themselves an alarming presence. Unlike in earlier periods when household heads could keep watch over and influence the behavior of the apprentices, clerks, and journeymen who lived under their roofs, now large numbers of single youths lived in separate residential districts from their employers and were released in the evenings to entertain themselves as they saw fit. Many of them participated in the sporting man's subculture, with its bawdy and sometimes bloody entertainments. These included various forms of gaming, such as cockfighting and prize fighting; consorting with prostitutes; and visiting theaters, concert saloons, and other venues for salacious entertainments. The antebellum sporting man's culture was a very visible one on the streets of New York, with groups of rowdy youths roaming its avenues and sometimes wreaking havoc with their boisterous and occasionally violent behavior.[42]

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[40] Daniel C. Eddy, *Young Man's Friend: Containing Admonitions for the Erring; Counsel for the Tempted; Encouragement for the Desponding; Hope for the Fallen* (Boston: Dayton and Wentworth, 1855), 90.

[41] On the figure of the confidence man, see Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 1-55.

[42] On sporting men's culture, see Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1820* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), 92-116.

The explosion in the conduct literature in the 1830s and beyond reflected in part an effort by reformers and other members of the respectable classes to assert control over the behavior of an enlarged transient, youthful, and in their estimation, potentially dangerous population. The notion of uncontrolled and uncontrollable elements pervading the metropolis was part of a larger concern about the perils of public space reflected in the conduct literature, the city exposés, and travelers' accounts of visits to New York. The changing social geography of the city contributed to the perception of the dangers of urban amusements and of the dreaded seducer.

And contemporary accounts suggest that the conduct advisers' worst fears were realized. The Minutes of the Common Council reveal numerous petitions and complaints against the rowdiness and bawdiness of both working-class and middling youths. The murder of the beautiful and refined prostitute Helen Jewett in 1836, and the subsequent trial of Richard Robinson, the nineteen-year old clerk and scion of a wealthy Connecticut family indicted (and eventually acquitted) for her murder, serve as a window into the bawdy subculture in which many young clerks, free of parental and employer control, participated.

Robinson's trial, reported widely in the new sensationalist press, exposed many New Yorkers to the details of that world. It revealed the realization of the conduct writers' fears that the young man in the city, unprotected and unwatched, would fall easily into the most dangerous vices the city had to offer and then unleash his disturbing behavior on the streets of New York. "I was an unprotected boy," Robinson wrote a year after his trial, "without female friends to introduce me to

respectable society, sent into a boarding house, where I could enter at what hour I pleased – subservient to no control after the business of the day was over."[43]

In the person of Helen Jewett – a young woman from a respectable New England family who, according to contemporary accounts, was forced to turn to prostitution after a fall from grace at the hands of a seducer – was represented the dangers to young women of falling to temptation and the downward slide in respectability and status that inevitably resulted. And the evidence presented at the trial, and the character and behavior of the witnesses called in Robinson's defense served as a demonstration of the sporting world they inhabited. Former mayor Philip Hone, who attended the trial, wrote: "I was surrounded by young men, about [Robinson's] own age, apparently clerks like him, who appeared to be thoroughly initiated into the arcana of such houses as Mrs. Rosanna Townsend's," Helen Jewett's madam. "They knew the wretched female inmates as they were brought up to testify, and joked with each other in a manner illy comporting with the solemnity of the occasion."[44]

Richard Robinson's trial thus educated many respectable New Yorkers to the more sordid aspects of urban, public life and the new characters who peopled the metropolis. It revealed as well that the concerns expressed in the prescriptive literature were played out on the streets of New York. Thus, it was not only in the poverty-ridden slums such as the Five Points where the dangers of the city were displayed. Those dangers surrounded respectable New Yorkers and, many of them feared, threatened to undermine the social fabric of the city.

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[43] Robinson, quoted in Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 97.
[44] Hone, quoted in Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett: The Life and Death of a Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 328.

That fabric seemed tenuously woven as visitors to and residents of Gotham reflected on the anonymous nature of social interaction in the city. As Mark Twain recounted in 1867, a description that would have been familiar even to New Yorkers of thirty years before:

> A man walks his tedious miles through the same interminable street every day, elbowing his way through a buzzing multitude of men, yet never seeing a familiar face, and never seeing a strange one the second time. . . . Every man seems to feel that he has got the duties of two lifetimes to accomplish in one, and so he rushes, rushes, rushes, and never has time to be companionable – never has any time at his disposal to fool away on matters which do not involve dollars and duty and business.[45]

This notion of the city as a world of strangers with little concern for the patterns of conduct and civility that governed social intercourse in a previous era grew out of the tremendous speed with which the city expanded and the rapidly shifting patterns of social interaction within it. And along with the precariousness of class position in the antebellum era, it informed the image of the confidence man and the fear at its base: How could people judge the sincerity and motives of the individuals with whom they interacted? How could they establish their own claims to status and the validity of their social position in the fluid, urban society that New York represented?[46]

Earlier generations of New Yorkers did not struggle with these questions; the city was smaller and more manageable and the means of social control more available. Furthermore, in the colonial period, appearance – in terms of dress and access to other trappings of gentility – served as a relatively reliable gauge with which to judge the status and position of strangers. Those measures dropped out to

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[45] Twain, quoted in John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 80-81.

[46] In *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 1-55, Karen Halttunen examines the image of the confidence man and the cult of sincerity that arose to deal with this figure. John Kasson also treats the question of urban growth and social dislocation in *Rudeness and Civility*, 70-111.

some extent in the nineteenth century as more and more New Yorkers gained access to consumer items that previously would have connoted luxury and gentility. As the consumer revolution accelerated in the nineteenth century, it opened up a world of goods to many individuals that would have been out of reach for their parents and grandparents.

Contemporary observers noted the increased emphasis on consumption and comfort among many segments of American society. "In America," Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, "the taste for physical well-being is not always exclusive, but it is general; and though all do not feel it in the same manner, yet it is felt by all. Everyone is preoccupied caring for the slightest needs of the body, and the trivial conveniences of life." Two decades later, writer Isaac Ferris recalled a time "when it was sufficient for a comfortable liver to have half a house, or to have one spare front-room for company." Now, he continued, "the same man must have a whole house and the first story must the thrown into parlours. It is not many years since the class spoken of were only occasionally favored with a piano; now, that instrument must be set down as a requisite to parlor equipment." He identified a similar trend in the "dietetic department," and "our social entertainments."[47]

It is in this multi-layered context – the metropolis as a new spatial form, the increasing transiency and potential anonymity of urban life, the precariousness of social status, and the concerns about the dangers of public space – that we must understand the effort by many antebellum New Yorkers to spell out their own class identity. Traditional markers of status – family connections, dress, even occupation

[47] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), 530; Isaac Ferris, quoted in Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 138.

and wealth – no longer provided a map for understanding one's position in society. By the antebellum period, New York City had become a world where older patterns of deference had given way to republican notions of equality, where fortunes rose and fell seemingly in the blink of an eye, where more and more people had access to consumer items that would previously have served as markers of genteel status, where appearance was no longer a reliable gauge of rank, and where individuals of all sorts could potentially interact in a public world of commercial amusements.

Antebellum New Yorkers struggled to make sense of the burgeoning metropolis around them, with its new spatial forms, fearsome personages, and slippery categories of social identification. Determining new ways to mark oneself off from the unwashed masses and the untrustworthy stranger seemed increasingly pressing to many of the middle classes. In the ostensibly simple but, for antebellum New Yorkers, incredibly complex act of eating, they found new ways to behave and interact and thus to hopefully shield themselves from the most intense perils of the city.

CHAPTER TWO

"IS THE APPETITE OF THE METROPOLIS EVER APPEASED?" TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND NEW YORK CITY'S FOOD MARKETS

In 1825, James Fenimore Cooper's fictitious "traveling bachelor" informed his fictitious French friend that New York City would "sooner or later" become "the empire of gastronomy." Cooper based his assessment on the plethora of foods to be found in the city's public markets. "It is difficult to name fish, fowl, or beast that is not . . . to be obtained in the markets of New-York. . . . Owing to the felicity of intercourse with the Southern states, the fruits of the tropics are found here . . . well flavoured, and in absolute contact with the products of the temperate zones. . . . It is this extraordinary combination of the effects of different climates, the union of heat and cold, and of commercial facilities, added to the rare bounties of Nature," that led Cooper to opine: "I know of no spot of the habitable world to which the culinary sceptre is so likely to be transferred, when the art shall begin to decline in your own renowned capital, as this city."[1]

Cooper, it turns out, was prophetic. While New York did not supplant Paris as an epicure's Eden, it did become the culinary capital of the United States. As the commercial center of the young nation, New York City became the central importer, exporter, and re-exporter of foodstuffs in nineteenth-century America. As

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[1] James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans as Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* (1825; reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), 136-41.

technological, industrial, and transportation improvements created a national market for consumer goods, New York became its vital hub. New York's food markets reaped the benefit of these developments. "On any morning of the five days out of the six of our weekly calendar," noted the New York *Mercury* in 1856, "Jefferson Market – in this emporium of the New World – represents a lap of luxury – the glory of a bountifully supplied and plenteous land." This "Cornucopia of the meats, the fruits, and the granaries of this fructiferous land," was irresistible to all except "a perfect monster Graham-misanthrope."[2]

Over the course of the nineteenth century, as unprecedented quantities and kinds of foods made their way into the markets of New York City, many New Yorkers gained access to a world of food available only to the elite of previous generations. Their means of obtaining food changed too as the public market system, which had dominated the food trade of the colonial period, yielded its supremacy to private food shops and street vendors. A strict inventory of New York's public markets and food shops would yield similar items from 1790 to 1860, but in far greater quantities and at far more attainable prices. New York's middle-class families also enjoyed more complex meals, as technology made its way into their homes via the refrigerator, cook stove, and other devices. New York's food bounty was not evenly spread, however. While New York's middle classes savored olives, wild game, and fresh meat in profusion, its working poor went hungry.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Manhattan's six public markets provided the majority of the food eaten by New Yorkers. New York's public market system

[2] *New York Mercury*, 9 March 1856.

was established in the seventeenth century by the authorities of New Amsterdam. While the Dutch town was surrounded by miles of unimproved lands and abundant waters, most local farmers concentrated exclusively on growing tobacco and waited for Indian traders and farmers to bring foodstuffs for sale to the marketplace near the fort. In 1656, the Dutch authorities established an official public market "on the beach opposite Hans Kiersted's house," and declared Saturday official market day. Two years later, the city established its first public meat market, operated by licensed or "sworn" butchers, of whom there were twelve at the time in New Amsterdam. By 1731, the British city of New York had five public markets and every day of the week except for Sunday was an official market day.[3]

Prior to the eighteenth century, New Yorkers were able to produce some of their own foods. They grew vegetables in kitchen gardens, raised and prepared their own livestock for consumption, and could pick fish and shellfish easily from the abundant waters surrounding the city. But with population growth, land became too valuable and scarce for food production and New Yorkers had to purchase the foods they put on their tables. By the eighteenth century, most fresh food came from the markets, which were highly regulated by the City's Common Council as it tried to prevent theft, cheating, and public health problems. Through laws and assizes, the city determined which foods could be sold in the public markets and which foods could not be sold anywhere else. By and large, perishable foods – including meat and poultry, fish, fruits, and vegetables – could be sold exclusively in the city's public markets. At times of scarcity, the Common Council might establish special assizes in

[3] Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), s.v. "Markets"; "Markets in Large Cities," *Harper's Weekly*, 16 January 1858.

the hope of maximizing provisions. Thus, in 1763, city authorities established an assize on victuals, demanding that: "No kind of provisions or victuals are to be sold anywhere but in the common market Houses of this city . . . under the penalty of L. 30 for each offence." Milk was the one perishable excepted from the list of market foods. It was carried from house to house in pails suspended by a yoke from the shoulders of a vendor, sometimes male, sometimes female. Perhaps because of the lack of regulation, New York's milk supply was notoriously poor.[4]

As the city supervised the public markets, and as certain foods could be sold exclusively in the markets, food artisans such as bakers and butchers were among the most highly regulated workers. The city determined the price and volume of bread products and doled out licenses to butchers, thus exerting considerable control over their ability to work and their job location. In 1819, according to an official return, there were only twenty-two licensed butchers in the city, each paying one dollar for his license. Sometimes these food artisans railed against the constraints placed on them by the city. In 1801 for example, New York City's bakers called for a work stoppage to protest price and profit controls enacted by the Common Council.[5] Despite their frequent complaints that rules and fees hindered their profits, marketeers were also protected by such controls. Hucksters and retailers were prohibited from purchasing market goods until after noon, two hours after most marketing was

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[4] Nan A. Rothschild, *New York City Neighborhoods: The Eighteenth Century* (San Diego: Academic Press, Inc., 1990), 137-8; Esther Singleton, *Social New York Under the Georges* (1902: Reprint, Port Washington, N.Y.: Ira J. Friedman, Inc., 1969), 357; Charles H. Haswell, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), 60.

[5] Singleton, *Social New York*, 358; Haswell, *Reminiscences*, 101, 114; Rothschild, *New York City Neighborhoods*, 120, 132; Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 185-6, 206-10.

completed. And the former were forbidden from selling these items outside of the public markets.[6]

During the early nineteenth century, New York's immediate hinterlands provided ample food for its markets. Farmers, cattlemen, fishermen, and hunters from Long Island, Westchester, New Jersey, Staten Island, and Connecticut brought produce, livestock, poultry, fish and wild game in season to the crowded markets of Manhattan. Farmers who lived at a distance from New York City had little incentive to produce goods for its markets. The Atlantic coastline and the rivers that fed into it were the main sources of transportation for goods as well as people during this period. Food producers who did not live near those waters had no reliable means of transporting their goods to markets. Roads in the early republic were extremely rudimentary and overland transportation was prohibitively expensive. In 1816, a United States Senate Committee Report noted that transporting a ton of goods from Europe to the United States cost the same as carrying the same load a mere thirty miles overland within the United States. Travel over long distances was not only dangerous and costly, but also prohibitive for transporting fresh produce, which would spoil by the time it reached its destination. Some eighteenth-century farms were geared toward commercial production. Those large farms and plantations that lay near navigable rivers sent bulky products by sailing ship to port cities such as New Orleans, Philadelphia, and New York, and from there these goods were exported

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[6] Jackson, *Encyclopedia of New York City*, s.v. "Markets"; "Markets in Large Cities"; Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Book: A History of the Public Markets of the City of New York* (1862; reprint ed., New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1970), 203-4.

to Europe and the West Indies. But the domestic markets, such as the public markets of New York, were, as noted, supplied by nearby farms.[7]

Local farmers took advantage of a ferry system that had been established as early as the seventeenth century to transport farm produce and animals from rural Brooklyn and Long Island over the East River. A similar service operated across the Hudson, allowing the Dutch farmers of New Jersey and Staten Island to bring dairy and other products to the markets of Manhattan. By the 1820s, New York claimed fourteen steamboat services on the Hudson River and eight regular ferry services across the Hudson and East Rivers. They included Robert Fulton's New York and Brooklyn Steam Ferry Boat Company, established in 1814. The latter traveled back and forth from Manhattan to Brooklyn forty times a day, carrying agricultural products as well as people.[8]

While small boats and ferries provided a means for local farmers to bring their goods to New York's markets, they were hardly efficient or even dependable. The following notice in the December 22, 1795 edition of *The New York Journal and Public Recorder* was not unusual: "On Friday last, one of the Brooklyn ferry-boats was overset in passing the East River; one man and seven fat oxen were drowned." Even if the boat arrived safely on the shores of Manhattan, the journey was not a pleasant one for the commuters and travelers who were packed into the ferries alongside market carts, cattle, chickens, and sheep. Fulton's steam ferry alleviated

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[7] George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 5, 16, 132-3.

[8] *Niles' Weekly Register*, 30 May 1826; De Voe, *Market Book*, 186-7; 195-8; 322; 341; Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port* (1939; reprint Hamden CT: Archon Books, 1961), 125; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 36, 449.

some of the dangers of the crossing, the time it took (a mere four to five minutes), and the price of transporting market wagons across the East River. The early decades of the nineteenth century saw a significant increase in the volume of farm goods entering New York from its eastern hinterlands.[9]

Butchers were the kings of New York's public markets, bringing freshly slaughtered livestock from the city's slaughterhouses and abbatoirs to the market stalls they leased or bought from the city. The butchers' stalls were the mainstays of the public market system and most markethouses were set up with these stalls in the center, surrounded by fruit and vegetable stands, operated by "country people," or by their agents. The origins of farm produce varied from market to market. For example, the Bear Market (also known as the Hudson Market), located on lower Greenwich Street on the west side of Manhattan, was dominated by Dutch farmers from New Jersey, many of them women. Grant Thorburn, a chronicler of New York in the 1790s, wrote that this market "was supplied principally from Haverstraw, Hackensack, Bergen, and Communipaw; and unless you could talk a good portion of Dutch, it was little use to go there to traffic." The stalls of Oswego Market, on Broadway and Maiden Lane, were also stocked by New Jersey farmers. Meanwhile, vegetable farmers from Long Island supplied the markets on the east side of the island, in particular Catharine Market, where they shared stall space with their counterparts from Westchester County. Washington Market which would replace the Fly Market in 1812 as New York's preeminent public market, was supplied by farmers from Long Island, "rustics chiefly of Dutch descent whose chief occupation is . . . raising vegetables for the supply of the market of New York." Farmers from

[9] De Voe, *Market Book*, 187-195; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 449.

Westchester joined their Long Island counterparts in Washington Market, as did the "'Jersey Dutch' women," who "came in great numbers with their butter, pot-cheese, curds, and buttermilk."[10]

Through the nineteenth century, the markets continued to operate every day except for Sunday. Those few farmers who lived on Manhattan Island could transport their goods to market in the early morning hours. For example, Mrs. Frances Banta – familiarly known as Aunt Frankey – was a fixture in Oswego Market. Each evening, Aunt Frankey would load up her market cart at her farm at present-day Bowery and Third Street. "Before daylight . . . she was on her way down the Bowery Road and into [Oswego] market, ready to serve the then early risers, who were anxious to get the choice." Most farmers who supplied New York's markets were not as fortunate as Aunt Frankey. Living across one of the rivers that surrounded Manhattan Island, and thus dependent on the ferries which ran only during daylight hours, these "country people" had to stay overnight at the markets so that they could be ready to sell their goods at daybreak. This situation led to complaints from both the residents of market areas, disturbed by the noise of the country people and their carts, and from the vendors themselves, who demanded covered stalls. When the new Fulton Market was built in 1821 to replace the Fly Market, Long Island farmers petitioned the Common Council to provide them with a suitable market house. "Many of us bring our truck to market in boats," they wrote, "and are obliged, on account of the tides to come in the evening; . . . on this account we are obliged to remain out all morning,

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[10] De Voe, *Market Book*, 322, 335, 341, 408; Marc Linder & Lawrence S. Zacharias, *Of Cabbages and Kings County: Agriculture and the Formation of Modern Brooklyn* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 19, 31, 53. Quotations are from De Voe, *Market Book*, 322, 408; Linder & Zacharias, 19.

without covering or shelter. . . . We hope . . . . you will give particular consideration to our want of shelter and other comforts in the present Fly Market, and erect a new and spacious market at Fulton Slip."[11]

Even without the constraints placed on country people by the ferry schedule, farmers and their agents still had to be the first to arrive at the markets because country stalls were limited and were available on a first-come, first-served basis. The same was true for the fish sellers who came in boats straight from the waters that supplied their daily offerings. Butchers, on the other hand, leased their stalls on a long-term basis. These artisans, accompanied by their apprentices, arrived at the markets a few hours before daybreak and set to cutting up their day's worth of meats. By sunrise they – along with their counterparts in the fish cars and country stalls -- would be ready to service the householders and their servants who came to do their daily marketing. By 10:00 a.m., the choice marketing was completed.[12]

The markets were not officially closed however until 1:00 p.m. from May to November, and 2:00 p.m. during the rest of the year. After ten in the morning, bargain-seekers and poor folk would come "to pick up the remnants," which vendors sold at reduced prices since the fresh market produce would otherwise spoil. Hucksters also took advantage of the bargains available after prime market hours. After noon, they were a market fixture, purchasing second-rate produce that they then sold outside of the markets.[13] The city passed a law regulating hucksters in 1796, in

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[11] De Voe, *Market Book*, 331-2, 489.
[12] Ibid., 345-6; Singleton, *Social New York*, 355-57; Rothschild, *New York City Neighborhoods*, 42; Samuel Mitchill, *The Picture of New York, or the Travellers' Guide Through the Commercial Metropolis of the United States* (New York: I. Riley & Co., 1807), 128.
[13] De Voe, *Market Book*, 319-20; Singleton, *Social New York*, 355-57.

response to complaints that these peddlers acted as forestallers, buying up and hording market goods and selling them at an increased price. In subsequent years, hucksters filed frequent petitions requesting the Common Council to overturn these regulations. Without exception, these petitions were signed exclusively by women, suggesting that huckstering was "women's work." Indeed, huckstering served as a recourse for some of New York's poorest women, twenty of whom appealed to city authorities in 1796 that "the support of our needy, destitute families depends in a great measure upon the privilege of exposing for sale fruit in the public markets."[14]

Female peddlers were a presence not only in the city's public markets but in the streets, by the docks, in the commercial districts, and in residential neighborhoods where they sold their wares door to door to those householders who preferred to remain at home rather than brave the raucous atmosphere of the public markets. Some laboring women kept gardens near their homes and sold their own produce in the streets of New York. Most female hucksters, however, resorted to buying market produce at cut rates or to scavenging the goods that they vended. Working-class women and their children were familiar sights on the wharves, beaches, and streets of the city, foraging for "roots, berries, herbs. . . . fish [and] clams," and whatever other items might produce a bit of income and keep them from the poorhouse.[15]

Chroniclers of New York life never failed to mention the ubiquitous female and child peddlers, who filled the streets with their legendary cries, a staple of New York city lore. "Here's your beauties of Onions: here's your nice, large Onions!"

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[14] De Voe, *Market Book*, 204.

[15] For a brief discussion of the importance of huckstering to the livelihood of many of New York's working-class women, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 14-15.

was but one of the thirty-two "Cries of New-York" featured in an illustrated children's book of that name published in 1808. Among the other food items that were sold accompanied by a hawker's cry were: strawberries, cherries, oranges, pineapples, potatoes, sweet pototoes, baked pears, rusk, butter-milk, radishes, muffins, ginger bread, oysters, milk, clams and of course, corn. This last item was attached to perhaps the most famous street cry of New York: "'Here's your nice Hot Corn! Smoking hot! O what beauties I have got!' Here's smoking Hot Corn With salt that is nigh, Only two pence an ear – O pass me not by!"[16] In personal reminiscences of early nineteenth-century New York, hot corn vendors and their counterparts were a quaint and colorful reminder of days gone by. But in fact, street peddling was among the most degraded occupations and a symbol of female poverty in the early national city. "Street peddling," writes historian Christine Stansell, "was work for black women, the very poor and women too frail to work at service." The desperation attendant to such work is perhaps most vividly expressed in a variation on the hot corn cry: "'You who have money, (alas! I have none,) Come buy my lilly white corn, and let me go home."[17]

Whether seen as a nuisance, a colorful feature of city life, or a symbol of female dependency and financial desperation, female hucksters were a fixture of New

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[16] Samuel Wood, *Street Cries of New York* (1808; reprint, with five extra cries from the 1814 edition, New York: The Harbor Press, 1931), quotation on p. 29.

[17] Mahlon Day, *New York Street Cries in Rhyme* (1825; reprint, with a new introduction by Leonard S. Marcus, New York: Dover Publications), 18; Stansell, *City of Women*, 13. While he presents a romanticized view of street vendors and their cries, Alvin Harlow too notes the degrading aspects of such work. "Among the most pathetic figures of the ante-bellum period," he writes, "were the white girls who vended hot corn. Married or single, they were always poor, dwellers in the slums." Harlow, *Old Bowery Days: The Chronicles of a Famous Street* (New York and London: D. Appleton & Co., 1931), 175. For a romanticized recollection of New York street vendors, see: Haswell, *Reminiscences*, 35.

York street life and public market culture. Despite regulations against hucksters selling their wares around the public markets, complaints registered by market proprietors attest to the persistence of the practice.[18] Indeed, the city authorities seem to have looked the other way, perhaps recognizing both the market for hucksters' goods and the economic necessity of huckstering for so many of the city's female poor. In 1801, Elizabeth Kline successfully petitioned for the "privilege of selling coffee and chocolate in the Catharine Market," justified by the fact that "nothing of this kind is at present sold by any person."[19]

According to early nineteenth-century descriptions, New York's public markets were characterized mainly by abundance and congestion. In viewing the Fly Market, an 1807 visitor from Philadelphia commented: "There is not found here that regularity or convenience which distinguish the 'markets' of my native city. The fruits and vegetables, &c., with the owners, are exposed to all the injuries of the weather; they are ranged on the side of the market-house in the street, on the pavement, so that there is no more empty space than is barely sufficient to accommodate the foot-passengers."[20] Other chroniclers remarked on the plethora of foods available in the markets. Moreau de St. Mery, a Frenchman who visited New York at the turn of the nineteenth century, agreed that in the Fly Market the meat "is inferior to that of Philadelphia," and "the vegetable dealers[']. . . surroundings are not as clean as they might be." But he was astounded by the range of foods he found in New York City's markets. "Of the fish," he wrote, "they are excellent, of all sorts,

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[18] See, for example, a petition filed by victuallers against hot corn and muffin vendors taking away their business, cited in De Voe, *Market Book*, 325.
[19] De Voe, *Market Book*, 347.
[20] Ibid., 223.

in great quantities, and at extremely reasonable prices." St. Mery counted sixty-three varieties of fish, "as well as oysters, lobsters, sea and fresh-water crabs, crawfish, fresh- and salt-water prawns, other sorts of shellfish," and turtles. In addition, he found fifty-two kinds of "animals, game, kid, bear, opposum, hare, rabbit, etc." An 1807 guidebook to New York City likewise described fifty-two kinds of fish found in the markets of the city, as well as eight types of "quadrupeds," five kinds of "amphibious creatures," fourteen types of shellfish, and fifty-one different birds.[21] Cookbooks published at this time offered recipes for up to forty varieties of fruits and vegetables all of which, they claimed, could be found "in the public markets of our cities."[22]

While these accounts of the crowdedness and variety of foods available in New York's markets present a snapshot of possibilities, in reality both fluctuated considerably according to season, economic conditions, transportation difficulties, and demographic factors. Before the era of refrigeration and efficient transportation, market availability was determined by the season. Fruits and vegetables, which overflowed the market in the summer and fall months, were virtually nonexistent in the spring and winter, with the exception of root vegetables. The slim pickings that were available were of poor quality and extremely high in price. Fresh meat and

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[21] *Moreau de St. Mery's American Journey, 1793-1798*, eds. Kenneth and Anna M. Roberts (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1947), 155; Mitchill, *Picture of New York*, 129.
[22] See for example, Amelia Simmons, *American Cookery, or the Art of Dressing Viands, Fish, Poultry, and Vegetables, and the Best Modes of Making Pastes, Puffs, Pies, Tarts, Puddings, Custards and Preserves, and All Kinds of Cakes, from the Imperial Plumb to Plain Cake. Adapted to this Country, and All Grades of Life. By Amelia Simmons, an American Orphan.* (Albany: Charles R. and George Webster, 1796); *New American Cookery or Female Companion, Containing Full and Ample Directions. . . . by an American Lady* (New York: D.D. Smith, 1805); *A New System of Domestic Cookery Formed Upon Principles of Economy, and Adapted to the Use of Private Families. By a Lady.* (Boston: William Andrews, 1807).

dairy products were abundant in the spring but hard to find in the hot summer months. A New York resident complained of the poor quality and scarcity of food in the Exchange Market in the summer of 1795: "Meats spoiled in the market-place uncommonly quick, and those which were brought home, apparently fresh and good in the morning, were often found unfit to be eaten when cooked and brought upon table. Esculent vegetables in general, and especially fruits, were usually poor, tough, and tasteless."[23]

At times of economic scarcity such as the 1790s, during and after the War of 1812, and the early 1820s, food shortages were rampant and prices were extremely high. The markets suffered accordingly. During the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, for example, few food purveyors were willing to brave the health hazards of exposing themselves and their goods for sale in the public markets. Butchers gained permission to sell meats from their homes, but country people simply stopped transacting business in the city. The prices of market goods soared. So too during the 1810s, meat prices were as high as two shillings per pound, milk sold for a shilling per quart, and even "rough-fat" was available only at the astronomical price of eighteen pence per pound.[24] Even when the season was right and the economy stable, food shortages occurred, the result of unfavorable weather patterns, difficulties of

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[23] Richard J. Hooker, *Food and Drink in America: A History* (Indianapolis & NY: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1981), 101; De Voe, *Market Book*, 217, 373.

[24] De Voe, *Market Book*, 234, 373-4, 379. The summer of 1826 saw a scarcity of vegetables in New York's markets, driving up the prices of these goods. A New York newspaper provided the following description of prices in the markets: "Potatoes, 15 to 25 cents per half peck; peas 25 to 37 ½ cents per do.; turnips, 12 to 20 cents per bunch of about 6; onions, equal to 12 ½ cents per pound; cabbages, containing 3 or 4 leaves, without any head, 10 to 15 cents each; beets, radishes, cucumbers, &c., none; lettuce 4 to 5 cents per head; cherries and strawberries scarce, dear, and of poor quality. At these exorbitant rates, the market is not half supplied, and every green thing it contains is brought up at an early hour in the morning," De Voe, *Market Book*, 502.

transporting goods by ferry across the rivers that delineated Manhattan, and on occasion, work stoppages by butchers, bakers, fishermen, and country people protesting against city regulations. Furthermore, as the early decades of the nineteenth century unfolded, the markets failed to keep pace with the tremendous expansion of New York City's population. Although the number of New Yorkers doubled from 1800 to 1820, the total number of markets in New York increased only by three.[25]

Population pressures also accounted for the vitality of individual markets. As the city spread and as residential patterns changed, new markets were built and older ones closed. Indeed, filing a petition for a market was a sign that a neighborhood had reached a critical mass of citizens. And conversely, the city shut down many markets when the neighborhoods around them became too commercial to sustain these fixtures of residential areas.[26] While overcrowding in the markets irked market vendors and customers alike, this factor was an important indicator of a market's success. Thus in 1801, when the butchers of the Fly Market complained that their market was so narrow and crowded that "they are impeded in the prosecution of their

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[25] De Voe, *Market Book*, 217; *A Summary Historical, Geographical and Statistical View of the City of New York* (New York: J.H. Colton & Co., 1836), 17; Haswell, *Reminiscences*, 27

[26] For example, in a petition signed by almost 200 individuals that eventually led to the establishment of Duane Street Market, the complainants wrote: "That the Corporation of Trinity Church, having some years ceded to your Honorable Board certain lots of ground, with a view that a public market should be erected at the lower end of Duane Street; that when it should cease to be used for that purpose, it should revert to the donors. The petitioners have for some time past been in the expectation of seeing some measures adopted towards the accomplishment of that object, but have been disappointed. That the population of this part of the city having of late years greatly increased and still continuing to increase with great rapidity, your Honorable Board must no doubt see the propriety of extending to the inhabitants of this district an equal facility of procuring the necessaries of life as their fellow-citizens enjoy in other wards. They beg leave to state that this vacant space remains entirely unoccupied, and they can conceive no purpose to which it can be applied with equal propriety as to that of a public market," De Voe, *Market Book*, 391.

business, and the citizens frequenting the said market greatly incommoded," they were illustrating the health of the market. A mere fifteen years later, as the neighborhood around the Fly Market changed, its butchers complained that "but little business is done in . . . the market," and petitioned to be removed to a new markethouse. The country people from Long Island similarly complained that they could not find enough customers for their goods in the Fly Market. The Market Council denied these petitions, arguing that, "if this market were removed, the inhabitants of the southwesterly part of the city would immediately require a new market to be erected for their accommodation." But by 1822, the business of the Fly Market was so diminished that the city closed it down, replacing it with Fulton Market, located several blocks north in a more residential area of Manhattan.[27]

Scarcity and abundance were, of course, important determinants of food prices and, as noted, during times of food shortage prices were astronomical. But even during more stable periods many New Yorkers could not afford to partake of the majority of foods available for sale in the public markets. In the 1790s, skilled workers such as carpenters or masons earned about four shillings (fifty cents) per day, or three dollars per week. Their unskilled counterparts, such as ditch diggers, or carters, earned half that amount. Meanwhile, a pound of beef cost up to six-and-a-half cents, a pound of butter seven or eight cents, and wild fowls could consume a skilled worker's entire daily income. Twenty years later, wages for skilled workers had doubled, to an average of about six to ten dollars per week, or a dollar to a dollar-fifty per day. Food prices had risen in turn: beef was sold in Fly Market for up to twelve cents per pound, a whole turkey cost seventy-five cents, ducks and fowls

[27] De Voe, *Market Book*, 210, 235-7.

twenty-five cents apiece. Most fruits and vegetables were also beyond the means of laboring New Yorkers. Watermelons went for up to a quarter each, the same price as the exotic pineapple. The price of strawberries ranged from six cents at the height of the season to forty cents at its beginning, and an individual orange could cost as much as twelve cents.[28] Despite observers' pronouncements that food in New York's markets was plentiful and inexpensive, most of these items were out of the range even of New York's best-paid workers. And even those of middling means could not afford these prices on a daily basis. Middle-class New Yorkers may have been able to take advantage of the varied offerings in the city's markets, but probably only on special occasions. It is not surprising then that during the early nineteenth century, all but affluent New Yorkers subsisted primarily on a diet of salt pork and potatoes. A whole bushel of white potatoes, for example, could be procured for the price of a single watermelon.[29]

Great changes were on the way, however. While New York's markets underwent little change between 1790 and 1820, in terms of availability, variety, price (accounting, of course, for price increases over time), and administration, subsequent decades saw revolutionary shifts in the way food was produced, procured, marketed, and prepared.

These shifts were rooted in the related revolutions – transportation, market, and communications – that culminated in the nineteenth century. Construction of roads,

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[28] Frank Moneghan and Marvin Lowenthal, *This was New York: The Nation's Capital in 1789* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1943), 77, 97-98; De Voe, *Market Book*, 222; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 50; Wood, *Street Cries of New York*, 5, 9, 11, 13.

[29] Wood, *Street Cries of New York*, 18.

turnpikes, canals, and railroads, and inventions such as the steam engine eased the carriage of goods over long distances and significantly cheapened the cost of carriage. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the cost of transporting products over land and water had declined by over ninety-five percent and the time it took to move those goods from their source to their destination had decreased similarly.[30]

Long Island farmers worried that the Erie Canal would put them out of business. Since upstate lands were far cheaper than those surrounding the metropolis, grains could be produced at far lower costs in those areas. The artificial waterway reduced the cost of transporting bulky items to such an extent that it was now cheaper to import grains from upstate New York than it was to buy them from local producers. The Erie Canal did have an impact on farming practices in New York's immediate hinterlands but it did not spell the doom of commercial farming in these areas. Rather, the production and supply of food underwent regional specialization.[31]

Western farmers, the willing beneficiaries of the transportation possibilities provided by canals and eventually railroads, turned their farms to intensive commercial production. Meanwhile, farmers in the vicinity of Manhattan stopped growing grain and raising livestock and concentrated exclusively on perishable items, especially fruits and vegetables. Farmers in both regions, motivated by commercial opportunities and the attendant cash incentives, took advantage of novel farming

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[30] On transportation developments, see Taylor, *Transportation Revolution*, 14-149. Taylor discusses the impact of transportation improvements on prices and speed of carriage on 134-149. See also Stuart Bruchey, *The Roots of American Economic Growth, 1607-1861: An Essay in Social Causation* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 153-56; Thomas C. Cochran, *Frontiers of Change: Early Industrialism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 45-8.

[31] Linder and Zacaharias, *Cabbages and Kings County*, 25-35.

techniques and technological developments in agricultural tools and machinery to make their farms far more efficient and prolific.[32]

The Erie Canal and other new forms of transportation such as railroads and steamboats allowed for the carriage not only of grains and livestock, but also wild game, fish, and some fruits and vegetables that had never been seen before in the markets of New York. One canal booster remarked hopefully in 1820: "The fish-markets of the cities on the Hudson will be greatly improved by the canal. New species will be brought down in ice, in a perfect state of preservation, and the epicure of the South will be treated with new and untried dishes of the highest flavor." Indeed, the Canal did serve as a conveyance for both fresh and salted fish from far-flung regions of the West. In 1826, only a year after its opening, a New York newspaper announced a shipment of "about five hundred weight of fresh salmon from lake Ontario . . . exhibited for sale in Fulton Market this morning . . . conveyed to this city via the Erie Canal." In the 1860s, market chronicler Thomas De Voe noted that in recent years, "a regular business has been established by which the many excellent varieties [of fish] from the large Western lakes, rivers, etc., have . . . been found on the tables of the citizens of . . . New York."[33]

De Voe remarked not only on the increased quantities of fish but also on the availability of varieties unobtainable prior to these transportation improvements. Salmon, for example, was virtually impossible to find in the markets of New York

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Quotations are from Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Assistant: Containing a Brief Description of Every Article of Human Food Sold in the Public Markets of the Cities of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Brooklyn; Including the Various Domestic and Wild Animals, Poultry, Game, Fish, Vegetables, Fruits, &c., &c.: With Many Curious Incidents and Anecdotes* (New York: Author, 1867), 186.

before the advent of steam transport. Other kinds of fish brought to Gotham had been available to earlier generations of New Yorkers but, due to overfishing, had become scarce. Shad, for example, "at a very early period were . . . so plentiful, that large quantities were used to manure the ground." Through the eighteenth century, the waters of New York City provided ample quantities of this fish for the markets of Manhattan and beyond. But by the 1830s, Peter Cortelyou, the head of a Long Island fishery lamented: "All the fisheries in New York harbor are nearly destroyed, and the fish which now supply the markets of that city are brought from the distance of 60, 80, and even 100 miles."[34]

By midcentury, canals, railroads and steamboats carried fish, species of game, and fresh and preserved produce from much longer distances. Antebellum New Yorkers could enjoy salmon imported from Maine and Scotland, shad from the Carolinas, black bass from the western rivers and lakes, and prawns from Charleston, South Carolina. "Before steamboats and railroads came into existence," wrote De Voe, "some species of game were scarce, or only found in our markets during the winter season. . . . Since that period, the employment of steam facilities have been greatly increased, both on land and water, by which the most distant uncultivated States and Territories have been reached, which tended not only to increase the variety of game, but also to enable the importation of large numbers into our numerous towns and cities."[35] New York's markets were thus graced with turkeys from Vermont, geese from Ohio, duck from Virginia, and quail from the western states of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa. Fresh poultry, game, and fish were carried

[34] Ibid., 203-4.
[35] Ibid., 110-11.

from the Ohio Valley to New York in refrigerated rail cars, essentially "ice boxes on wheels." "The variety, quantity, and quality of wild-fowl and birds . . . received in the public markets, especially of the city of New York," De Voe giddily exclaimed, "is not surpassed in any other city in the world. The prairies of the West, the forest-regions of the North, the gulf coasts of the Northern and Southern States, and even European cities, all contribute to keep well supplied the wants of our citizen epicures, in every month or season of the year."[36]

Steamers and railroads brought fresh produce to New York City as well. Long Island farmers continued to supply the markets of New York with vegetables and fruits. In 1852, the president of the Queens County Agricultural Society reassured his constituents that "Queens County cannot be interfered with in its prosperity as long as there are in [New York City] hundreds of thousands of mouths to be daily supplied, and hundreds of thousands of dollars to be expended for . . . fruits and vegetables."[37] Indeed, local farmers could not keep up with the urban demand and so farmers from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Western New York shipped produce to Manhattan, as did the Southern states and Caribbean islands. Steam transportation allowed these producers to move their items to market more quickly. Produce which would have rotted on wagons, canal boats, and sailing ships could be delivered to New York unspoiled. "From Charleston, Norfolk, Savannah, and the Bermudas," De Voe explained, "tomatoes, potatoes, peas, cabbage,

[36] Ibid., 145; Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 61.
[37] Quotation from Linder and Zacharias, *Cabbages and Kings County*, 32.

onions, strawberries, cherries, are brought at least twice a week during their season. Some of these articles are brought by hundreds of barrels at a time."[38]

Shipments of produce from warmer climates served to extend the season for these items, sometimes by several months on either end. Apples, for example, entered New York from the South in May or June. By July, local producers supplied the markets with varieties of this fruit. In the fall months, when the orchards of New York were depleted, apples came into its markets from areas farther north and west. Virtually all fruits and vegetables were available for longer periods of time than before the transportation revolution. Thus New Yorkers could enjoy asparagus, string beans, cucumbers, tomatoes, grapes, peaches, and strawberries as early as April and cabbage, onions, and cherries in May. The season for fresh produce extended later as well, thanks to the availability of these items from warmer climates. So New Yorkers could expect to find tomatoes into November, and grapes as late as December. New forms of technology also contributed to the extension of seasons. Grapes and figs, for example, were cultivated in hothouses; tomatoes were preserved in sealed packages; and many varieties of fresh produce, as well as fish and game, were prevented from spoilage by being packed and shipped on ice.[39]

The plethora of foods in the markets of mid-century New York and the variety of their origins astounded visitors and observers. One remarked:

> Nothing is lacking [in the markets] to gratify the palate, -- to delight the most jaded appetite. The best beef, mutton, veal and lamb the country affords are displayed upon the stalls. Those roasts and steaks, those hind-quarters, those cutlets, those breasts with luscious sweetbreads, would make an Englishman hungry as he rose from the table. Those delicate bits, so suggestive of soups, would moisten the mouth of a Frenchman. Those piles of rich and juicy meats

[38] Linder and Zacharias, *Cabbages and Kings County*, 32; De Voe, *Market Assistant*, 321.
[39] De Voe, *Market Assistant*, 325-391; Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 57-9.

> would render an Irishman jubilant over the memory of his determination to emigrate to a land where potatoes were not the chief articles of food. What an exhibition of shell-fish too! Crabs and lobsters, and oysters in pyramids, yet dripping with sea-water, and the memories of their ocean-bowers fresh about them. And vegetables of every kind, and fruits, foreign and domestic, from the largest to the smallest, from the rarest to the commonest, from the melon to the strawberry, from the pineapple to the plum. Fish from the river and mountain stream, from the sea and the lake. Fowls and game of all varieties, from the barnyard and marsh, forest and prairie, everything that can appeal to and gratify the epicurean sense.[40]

Those who had been amazed in 1800 at the extent and variety of Manhattan's markets would quite simply have been bowled over by the growth of those same markets and the variety of food within them by the middle of the century.

As New York became the central hub of the export and re-export trades, and as more and more goods made their way across the country to the terminus of New York, its markets – which numbered forty-one by 1861 – began to shift toward a more wholesale function. Individuals still bought fresh foods at the public markets, which were still regulated by city authorities. But the bulk of market business was conducted between midnight and 7:00 a.m. By the 1860s, De Voe explained: "The producer is often hundreds of miles in one direction, while the consumer may be as many hundred in another, from the *mart* at which the productions were sold and purchased. Through the course of the year, the products of the North, South, East, and West, are to be found in our large public market-places; from which great quantities are disposed of, to be consumed in other cities, towns, or villages, or in the many ocean or river steamers or other vessels, as well as in foreign countries."[41]

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[40] Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (1869; Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 408-9.
[41] *Encyclopedia of New York City*, s.v. "Markets"; De Voe, *Market Assistant*, 9.

While the markets were more numerous by midcentury than they had been in earlier decades, and the goods more plentiful, the chaotic nature and sometimes downright filthiness of the market houses still adhered. Journalist Junius Henri Browne, for example, writing in the 1860s, complained: "The domestic markets of New-York are the best, and the market-houses the worst, in the country. The two are antipodes. They remind one of delicate and delicious viands served on broken and unwashed dishes and soiled table-cloths. Who can enter any one of our dozen market-houses, see their profusion and excellence and variety of supply, and contrast them with their surrounding dinginess and squalor, without a feeling of disappointment approaching disgust?" Like earlier visitors, Browne found that New York's markets compared unfavorably with those of Philadelphia. "The City of Brotherly Love," he noted, "may be an overgrown village; but its market-houses are what they should be."[42]

Browne, like many of his contemporaries, failed to see the delights of marketing forwarded by market boosters such as De Voe. "There may be those," Browne explained, "who relish kissing an eternal farewell to delightful dreams, leaping from their cosy beds at early dawn, and trudging off to a confusion of buyers and sellers, to the inspection and purchase of roasts and birds, of sirloins and sidepieces, of carrots and cauliflowers, of lettuce and lobsters. But I am not of them."[43] Fortunately for Browne and other like-minded folk, shoppers did not have to visit the markets in order to fill their kitchens, cellars, and tables. Householders might brave the markets early in the morning but it was more common, especially

[42] Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 182, 189.
[43] Ibid., 186.

among New Yorkers of means, to send a servant to do the marketing. Or they would take advantage of the new delivery services provided by butchers, fruit vendors, and other marketeers, beginning in the 1820s. "The modern 'marketer,'" De Voe lamented, "will still occasionally observe some 'relics of the past,' who cling to the old custom taught them in their youth, perhaps, by an honored *sire*, who was not too proud to carry home a well-filled market basket, containing his morning purchase, which his purse or taste prompted him to select. These old fashioned ideas, alas! are all *lived down.*"[44]

Many mid-century New Yorkers embraced the option of sending an emissary to do the marketing. Others chose to purchase foods at the specialty stores which dotted the city during the 1840s and beyond. These "private markets," meat shops, fruit stores, confectioneries, and specialty grocers grew up in the early nineteenth century alongside the public markets but took off as city authorities relaxed regulations regarding the exclusive rights of public markets to carry certain items.

Fancy grocers, fruit stores, and confectioneries had been part of the landscape of the city from the eighteenth century onward. The ships that crowded New York's harbors during the colonial and early Republican periods carried foodstuffs, and grocers stocked their stores with foreign as well as locally manufactured food items. Daily advertisements in the city's commercial newspapers indicated what was available, and from whence it came. Richard Yates, a Prince Street grocer, announced on December 10, 1790 that he had "just Imported in the latest vessels from Jamaica. . . . Two hundred bags Pimento. . . . One hundred & fifty barrels Limes & Oranges." William Seton, and Co. announced a winter arrival from Europe of

[44] De Voe, *Market Assistant*, 21.

"Smyrna Raisins, Parmesan Cheese, Almonds out of the shell," and a spring arrival of "Smyrna and Lipari raisins, Florence oil. . . . Zant currants . . . Large filberts . . . Corsica sweet wine . . . and a variety of other articles." Other foreign goods advertised in New York's groceries included ginger and sugar from Jamaica; black pepper and orange juice from Holland; numerous varieties of teas, coffee, chocolate, cocoa and cocoa nuts; figs and almonds; preserved fruits and "1 case Italian Vermecille."[45]

Inventories varied, in terms of quantity and quality of foreign foodstuffs, as grocers depended on shippers' supply. But as long as the ships were full and frequent, the groceries of New York were well-stocked with a variety of goods. The range of items in a typical grocery of the late eighteenth century might include, as it did for grocer James Stuart, "Hyson, Souchong, Sequin and Bohea Teas. . . . Double, single, refined and Muscovado Sugars, Jar and Cask Raisins. Citron. Currants, soft shell Almonds. Cinnamon, Nutmegs, Mace and Cloves. Allspice, Cayenne, black Pepper. Fresh Florence Oil, Olives, Anchovies, Capers, Mustard. White Wine Vinegar. . . . Fresh Split Peas and Oatmeal. . . . Coffee, Chocolate, Barley and Rice. Excellent sorts of Fruit, preserved in Brandy."[46] New York's grocers advertised domestic imports as well as foreign. Grocer Arnold Henry Dohrman, for example, proudly announced that he had in stock white wheat imported from Maryland. And Theodorus Hamilton carried "American Cheese" from Connecticut.[47]

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[45] *New York Daily Gazette*, 1 January 1790, 2 January 1790, 15 March 1790, 29 March 1790, 12 April 1790, 10 May 1790; 17 May 1790; 21 June 1790, 2 August 1790.
[46] *New York Daily Gazette*, 29 December 1788.
[47] *New York Daily Gazette*, 22 March 1790, 2 August 1790.

In 1789, upscale fruiterers such as Peter Deschant and Cato Railmore catered to the well-heeled from their shops on Broadway. In 1816, one New Yorker recounts, there were two grocers who served a wealthy clientele: Richard Buloid, whose shop was located at 129 Broadway, and James Geerey, at 119 Mulberry Street. A few years later, in 1825, Richard Williamson joined this class of grocers, opening a shop at 85 Maiden Lane.[48] Confectioners too could be found amid the homes of the wealthiest New Yorkers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The number of New York City's confectioners increased after the French Revolution when hordes of Frenchmen, many former pastry cooks and chefs for members of the deposed aristocracy, fled to the United States. The New York City Directory, which listed no confectioners in 1786, listed five men of that profession just four years later.[49]

Increasingly throughout the second half of the eighteenth century, elite hosts and hostesses could purchase cakes and pastries from a confectioner's shop for evening entertainments such as dinner and tea parties. During this period, only the wealthier segments of New York society frequented these stores. The goods sold by confectioners were neither affordable to nor needed by the middle classes or the poor of New York during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hosting formal parties was the province of the elite. Only they had the service, equipment, and the money to be able to entertain on such a scale. Thus, only they were likely to engage the catering services of a confectioner such as Joseph Delacroix who, in 1796,

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[48] Moneghan and Lowenthal, *This was New York*, 98; Haswell, *Reminiscences*, 61.
[49] David Franks, comp., *New York City Directory*, (New York: Franks, 1786); David Franks, comp., *New York City Directory, 1790* (New York: Franks, 1790).

advertised the availability of "all kinds of sweet meats, sugar work, sugar plums, cordials and a variety of other articles in the confectionary business."[50]

As the nineteenth century progressed however, the number of fancy grocers, fruiterers, and confectioners grew exponentially, outpacing the growth of New York's population. The City Directory of 1790 listed a mere eight fruit sellers and five confectioners for a population of just over 33,000. By 1820, New York's 123,000 residents could choose from eighty-four fruiterers and forty confectioners. This reflects a population increase of 3.73 times over the period, but a ten-fold growth in the number of fruit sellers and a nine-fold increase in the number of confectioners.[51] This expansion was merely the beginning of a trend. By 1860, hundreds of fruit sellers and confectioners sold their goods in New York City. These numbers are particularly impressive when one considers that the public markets were still a major source of purchase for fruits and vegetables throughout the nineteenth century.

Certainly New Yorkers could obtain greater quantities and varieties of fresh produce. Improved methods of transportation increased the volume of goods transported from foreign climes, drove down their prices, and made them less luxury items and more common choices for the tables of Manhattan. Not only were fruits and vegetables more widely available and less expensive, but per capita consumption of sugar, both in its natural state and in confectionery items increased tremendously, from about four pounds in 1815 to twenty-one pounds in 1860. New York's middle classes could now frequent confectioners' shops and fruit stores that would have been

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[50] Rita Susswein Gottesman, ed., *The Arts and Crafts of New York, 1800-1804: Advertisements and News Items from New York City Newspapers* (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1965), 310.
[51] Franks, *New York City Directory*, 1790; *Longman's New York City Directory* (New York: Longman's, 1820).

beyond the means of their parents and grandparents. Those of lesser means, however, either had to pick at the market remnants or buy from the peddlers and hucksters who were still a central part of New York's street life at midcentury.

The explosion in the number of confectioners and fruit shops over the course of the nineteenth century was not reflective of changing laws; one was always permitted in New York to purchase such items at private shops. The same was not true of meats, which, as noted, were to be sold exclusively in the public markets of Manhattan in the early nineteenth century. Despite such regulations, illegal "shirk" or "shark" butchers had long been the bane of the licensed butchers who paid fees to rent market stalls. Illegal purveyors of meats risked fines and even jail time to hawk their cuts to willing purchasers. Some of the shark butchers were merely profiteers who bought cuts of meat from country vendors and sold them at increased prices on the streets or outside of the public markets. Others were butchers who had served a full apprenticeship (a requirement for receiving a license) but could not obtain a stall in one of the markets. It was common, during many periods, for the number of New York's butchers to exceed the number of available stalls and since the stalls were meted out by a lottery system, many unfortunate artisans were unable to practice their trade legally.[52] Further, as populations shifted and outlying areas became part of the city, many butchers who had stalls in the waning markets petitioned unsuccessfully for stands in new, more popular markets. When a market was closed altogether, the butchers who held stalls there were forced to compete on the open market, at much higher prices, for stalls in new markets. For example, when the city shut down the Spring Street market in 1829 and replaced it with Clinton Market, the Spring Street

[52] Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 207-16.

butchers petitioned the Common Council to be assigned stands in the new market. "If you want stands in the new market," the Council responded, "you must buy in competition with the others." Butcher Henry Cornell, unable to afford the price of the new stalls, opened a private meat shop. "He was supported by many of the citizens," De Voe explained, "who thought the Corporation had deprived him of his just rights, encouraged him in his then unlawful acts; and although often convicted, yet his friends assisted him to baffle the Corporation, and, in fact, to make it appear that our 'public markets,' as then conducted, were a monopoly."[53]

Cornell started a trend and the number of New York City's meat shops grew substantially in subsequent years. In some cases, the law against these illegal shops was enforced but for the most part the city turned a blind eye to this practice, much to the chagrin of the licensed butchers. Year after year the latter group filed petitions to the Common Council asserting, as they did in 1837, that the law that "forbids the sale of butchers' meat at any place or places in the city except the public markets," assured the quality of meat and therefore was central to the public good. They protested too that by complying with this law they were forced to pay large fees to the city for their stands while unlicensed butchers paid none. "This salutary law," they decried, "has been permitted to be evaded from year to year, with so little attention on the part of the constituted authorities of the city, notwithstanding the repeated remonstrances of your petitioners, that it is at length openly violated and disregarded, and meat-shops are now established in almost every part of the city with perfect impunity." They demanded that the Council close down the meat shops and force their proprietors to buy stalls in the public markets which, they claimed, were

[53] De Voe, *Market Book*, 382.

numerous. The Council ignored this and the several other complaints lodged by the city's licensed butchers and, in 1843, overturned the law requiring that meats be sold only in the public markets.[54]

As a result, the number of meat shops in the city exploded, in some cases serving the death-blow to the butchers' trade in the public markets. Many householders found it far more convenient and palatable to purchase their meats in the private shops rather than to wake early and brave the chaos of the public markets. Others, however, agreed with the market butchers such as Thomas De Voe (himself a licensed butcher), who claimed that the meats available in the private shops were inferior to those available in Jefferson, Tompkins, and other markets. The demand for fresh meats was high enough that, as long as the public market system persisted in New York, the butchers who rented stalls in them maintained a base of customers. But they increasingly competed with their counterparts in private establishments.

The example of private food vendors shows an expansion in options for food purveyance and purchase among New York's householders, as well as a change in the ways that New Yorkers obtained the items that stocked their kitchens and graced their tables. The public market system which had held sway throughout the first century-and-a-half of New York's existence simply could not keep pace with population increase, city growth, and the transportation and technological shifts that allowed for an unimaginable volume and variety of goods to enter the city. City authorities began to take a laissez faire attitude toward the public market system, allowing unlicensed vendors to sell outside of the markets, private meat shops to conduct business unmolested, and peddlers to hawk their wares throughout the city streets. Indeed, the

[54] Ibid., 382, 532-4.

city increasingly allowed public markets to deteriorate and stopped building markets as residential areas spread uptown. Their lax attitude opened the door not only for private food shops but also for an explosion in the number of street vendors who manned pushcarts or sold food items door-to-door in residential neighborhoods.[55] Public markets would continue to serve an important role in New York and other cities throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. But the trend toward private shops, an increase in street peddlers, and more choice in terms of food purveyors reflected a real and lasting shift in the way that New Yorkers acquired their foodstuffs.

The proliferation of private food shops also changed the structure of marketing. The public markets, as noted, increasingly served a wholesale function and acted as a mart for markets outside of New York. Shoppers who enjoyed the atmosphere of the public markets would arrive at the markets at dawn to ensure that they could fill their baskets with the choicest of the market offerings. More likely, they would send a servant or steward to do their marketing. At these early hours, market prices were too high for individuals below middling means. As Junius Henri Browne explained: "Rates decline with the hours. You can buy at 9 [a.m.] thirty per cent less than you could at 5 [a.m.] but not so excellently; for the market is now stripped of its choicest and best. The ordinary rule is reversed in market-going. They who are prosperous are the earliest customers, and the poor are the latest. It is the fashion of the fashionable to purchase when the sun is low and the price is high. They send their stewards, housekeepers, and caterers before the humble in

[55] Burrows & Wallace, *Gotham*, 739-40.

circumstances dare invade the sanctity of elevated figures."[56] Other "elevated figures" who found their way to the market during the wee hours of the morning included fastidious restaurateurs and hoteliers "on the alert for the choicest beef, the fattest mutton, the freshest cutlets, the earliest fruits and vegetables." These shoppers bought up the choicest articles even before sunset so that "after 7 or 8 o'clock, the delicacies and desirables are not to be had. . . . eggs are suspicious; butter potent; vegetables wilted; meats irresponsible; fish uncertain; fruits deceptive." Those of middling means still had much to choose from at the markets if they arrived early enough but the poor simply could not afford early market prices and so "they go when prices have fallen; when the best articles have disappeared; when prospects of bargains have brightened."[57]

Many New Yorkers simply abandoned the public markets altogether, opting for the flexibility and convenience afforded by private food shops, street peddlers, and hucksters. The latter two groups, always a fixture on the streets of New York, increased in droves in the 1840s and 1850s. Working-class children who might have entered an apprenticeship in the earlier part of the century now found huckstering to be one of the few sources of income available to them. Many of the immigrants who entered the city in the first wave of immigration of the 1830s and 1840s also turned to street peddling, seeing opportunity in the void created by the city's laxity in building markets in new neighborhoods and enforcing market laws where they existed. De Voe complained that the "fish, fruit, vegetables, etc., which are usually peddled about the streets in carts and wagons, are seldom found so good as those offered for sale in

[56] Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 192.
[57] Ibid., 193, 197, 196.

the public markets" since they were "either the refuse of the markets, unfit to be offered by the respectable dealer, or it happens to be a glut." But many New Yorkers saw otherwise. In commercial districts, they heard and responded to the street cries of apple, corn, sweet potato, ginger cake, and baked pear vendors. In residential areas, they purchased food from the door-to-door peddlers who spared them the need to travel to the public markets or even the private food shops.[58]

Whether they obtained their food from public markets, private food shops, or from street peddlers and hucksters, antebellum New Yorkers of middling and better means had far more options in terms of food storage and preparation than ever before. The technological and industrial developments that allowed for easier and cheaper carriage of foodstuffs to market also significantly improved their means of preparation. By the 1830s, the kitchens of most middling and elite New York homes were stocked with technological innovations such as refrigerators, cookstoves, and various gadgets aimed at making the cook's job more efficient such as apple corers, eggbeaters, and mechanized butter churns.[59]

A refrigerator was patented as early as 1803. This device consisted of a wood box, containing an internal wood tub. The space between the two vessels was filled with charcoal or ashes for insulation and a tin ice holder was attached to the internal container. But until developments in the production of ice made that commodity cheaper, most Americans did without refrigeration. In 1827 Nathaniel Wyatt, the employee of a Massachusetts ice merchant, invented an ice-cutter which contributed

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[58] Burrows & Wallace, *Gotham*, 739-40; Stansell, *City of Women*, 203-4; De Voe, *Market Assistant*, 25.

[59] Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 44.

to the cheapening of ice supplies and to the increased use of refrigeration within the home as well as in rail cars and market stalls. Wyatt's device replaced the inefficient process of hacking pieces of ice by hand off of large blocks. The new ice-cutter was a plow-like device, drawn by a horse across a frozen pond, eventually making a checker-board pattern of deep grooves over the whole pond. Bars were set in the grooves, dislodging large blocks of ice that were then floated to shore. Wyatt's invention made the harvesting of ice more efficient and less expensive. By 1833, the cost of filling an ice house had dropped by sixty percent.[60]

Ice houses themselves were improved as well. Wyatt's boss, Frederick Tudor, invented an above-ground ice house which was far more efficient than the underground models that were in use before the 1830s. The owner of an underground ice house could expect to lose up to sixty percent of his ice over the course of a season. The waste in an above-ground ice house, on the other hand, averaged only eight percent per season. Large ice companies formed in the Northeast, taking care of harvesting and distributing ice to consumers around the country. Ice remained a rather expensive commodity in the South, due to high costs of transporting it. But in the North ice -- and the refrigerators it stocked -- became a far less luxurious commodity.[61]

Indeed, by the late 1830s, the *New York Mirror* claimed that the refrigerator, although a recent invention, had become an "article of necessity" in any proper home. Cookbook author Eliza Leslie agreed, writing in 1840 that refrigerators were "conveniences which no family should be without." Indeed, Leslie believed that

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[60] Cummings, *American and His Food*, 36-9.
[61] Ibid.

families should have not one but two of these conveniences – one for dairy products, and one for meats. Even those who could not afford manufactured refrigerators should, Catharine Beecher argued, have some sort of refrigerator device in their homes. She provided instructions for how to convert an empty barrel to this use.[62]

Beecher also saw the cook stove as a crucial component of a proper kitchen. While stoves had existed since the mid-eighteenth century – Benjamin Franklin's stove being the best-known – it was not until the nineteenth century that enclosed stoves for cooking were developed for the home. Following innovations in the iron industry, and improvements in stove design, cook stoves became fixtures in many American homes. By the 1830s, all but the poorest New Yorkers had some sort of cast-iron stove. These appliances ranged from simple small stoves, used for both heating and cooking, to the giant American cooking stove, complete with four to eight burners, separate chambers for warming and baking, and hot water taps. By mid-century, wealthier home-owners had separate stoves for cooking and heating.[63]

The elaboration of the cook stove changed the way that meals were prepared in American homes. Cooking over an open hearth was quite different from using a stove. While open-hearth cooking lent itself to one-dish meals, the cook stove allowed for different kinds of cooking – boiling, roasting, and baking, for example – with the same fire. With the cook stove at her disposal (and much labor expended) the American cook could, by the 1830s, provide her family with a variety of dishes at one meal. With one instrument, she could prepare a roasted entrée, boiled vegetables,

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[62] Ibid., 39.
[63] Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 53-62.

and a sweet *and* savory pie. And the entire meal could come out of the oven at once.[64]

To help her in this endeavor, the American cook could consult any of a plethora of cookbooks that were published in the early nineteenth century. While cookbooks had been imported from Europe throughout the colonial period, and produced in the United States from 1796 forward, the production and demand for these texts exploded during the first half of the nineteenth century, when 160 new titles were released.[65] The growth of cookbooks was part of a larger popularization of printed material that occurred during this period. Technological innovations in printing, such as the invention of the steam press, and improvements in typesetting, bookbinding, and papermaking combined with better methods of distribution to produce an amazing volume of literature aimed at a popular audience, particularly after the 1830s.[66] Advice books of all kinds made their way onto the popular scene and cookbooks and other household manuals led the pack. Cookbooks became a crucial component of middle-class libraries not only because they were so abundant during the nineteenth century but also because technological innovations such as the cook stove made them necessary. Whereas in earlier periods, women learned simple, one-pot preparations from their mothers and other female relatives, the more

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[64] Ibid.

[65] E.R. Fordyce, "Cookbooks of the 1800s," in *Dining in America, 1850-1900,* ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 85-113.

[66] Along with mechanical improvements in print, the rise of large, centralized publishing houses, with elaborate mechanisms of merchandising, selling, and distribution, led to the availability of a far greater variety of titles at considerably lower prices. For information on the growth of publishing, see Carl S. Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 34-47.

complicated, composed dishes made possible by the cook stove – and desirable by the prescriptive literature – required detailed instruction that, initially, only cookbooks could provide.

When mid-century New Yorkers of the middle classes sat down to a home-cooked meal, they could be assured that it would be more varied, sophisticated, and probably tastier than anything their grandparents had experienced. As a result of the technological shifts of the early nineteenth century, middling New Yorkers were enjoying foods and food preparations that would have been found on the tables only of the elite in prior periods. The eating patterns of New York's laborers, on the other hand, were little changed in 1860 from a half century before. The transportation, market, and consumer revolutions had a tremendous impact not only on the content of some New Yorkers' shopping lists, but also on the social divisions drawn in New York society. By the 1830s members of the middle classes could distinguish themselves from the working classes by what they ate. From there, it was a short leap to distinguish themselves by *how* and *where* they ate as well.

CHAPTER THREE

"TO SEE AND BE SEEN"
NEW YORK CITY'S PUBLIC DINING ESTABLISHMENTS

Evaluating the public dining options available to mid-century New Yorkers, journalist Junius Henri Browne was amazed. "To a stranger," he wrote, "New York must seem to be perpetually engaged in eating. Go where you will between the hours of 8 in the morning and 6 in the evening, and you are reminded that man is a cooking animal. Tables are always spread; knives and forks are always rattling against dishes; the odors of the kitchen are always rising. . . . One wonders how even this great City can support so many eating houses." [1]

Browne's 1869 estimate of "five or six thousand restaurants . . . of different kinds" reflected a new phenomenon.[2] The map of New York dining looked very different just fifty years before, when taverns and pleasure gardens were the only venues available to New Yorkers seeking meals outside of their homes. The explosion of public dining choices during the antebellum period contributed to a marked shift in the social habits of New Yorkers. But it was not really a cause for wonder.

The proliferation of restaurants and other public, commercial dining venues in New York in the first half of the nineteenth century resulted, in part, from the city's

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[1] Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (1869; Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 213, 261.
[2] Ibid., 261.

rapid growth. Reflecting its position as the nation's commercial center, Gotham became a magnet for entrepreneurs, white-collar workers, and laborers from abroad as well as surrounding states. The hundreds of ships that filled New York's harbors brought people as well as goods. Thousands of immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and other European countries joined American migrants in the young metropolis. By 1835, New York's population neared 270,000, more than one-and-a-half times its number from a decade before, and representing an eight-fold increase from 1790. That number would continue to grow over subsequent decades, reaching over 800,000 by 1860; over half of these residents were foreign-born. In addition to the new permanent residents, the spring and fall brought merchants, traders, storekeepers, and itinerant laborers to New York for extended periods of time. Furthermore, the city played host to thousands of travelers and curiosity seekers annually. A "Stranger's List" of hotel guests in New York over a period of 207 days, published in 1835, showed 59,700 visitors to New York, each staying for an average of three days.[3]

New institutions emerged to deal with the growing population of transient New Yorkers. Taverns, which provided accommodations and meals to colonial visitors, continued to offer these services in the early Republic. They were joined,

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[3] According to *A Summary Historical, Geographical and Statistical View of the City of New York* (New York: J.H. Colton & Co., 1836) 17, New York's population was 33,131 in 1790, 166,086 in 1825, and 269,873 in 1830. New York's population in 1860 was 813,669, Eric Homberger, *The Historical Atlas of New York City: A Visual Celebration of Nearly 400 Years of New York City's History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994), 71. On New York's population growth, see also: George J. Lankevich, *American Metropolis: A History of New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 69-71. On travelers to New York City, see: Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 334-337; Meryle R. Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels and Restaurants, 1800-1850," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly* 36 (1952): 377.

beginning in the 1830s, by luxury hotels. These commercial palaces competed with each other for the trade of wealthy visitors, business travelers, and permanent residents by providing outstanding and opulent accommodations, including richly furnished dining rooms where fabulous meals were served. The 1830s also witnessed a boom in free-standing restaurants of various kinds. These establishments proliferated in response to the demand of tourists, business travelers, permanent residents of hotels and boarding houses, businessmen who lived too far from home to travel there for the midday meal, middle-class and elite women who sought a respite during their forays into the city's commercial districts, families wishing to dine outside of their homes, and other city residents seeking entertainment, including working-class men and women, and participants in New York's burgeoning world of commercial entertainments.

Public dining establishments, though virtually unheard of in the first decade of the nineteenth century, were so central to the social life of New York by mid-century that many could not imagine the city without them. Indeed, these institutions were among the most attractive of Gotham's draws. As one contemporary proclaimed in 1844: "The going to the Astor and dining with two hundred well-dressed people, and sitting in full dress in a splendid drawing-room with plenty of company – is the charm of going to the city! The theatres are nothing to that! Broadway, the shopping and the sights, are all subordinate – poor accessories to the main object of the visit."[4] As this comment reveals, dining out became an event unto itself in antebellum New York. Eating was no longer a private act but one to be shared and, according to some observers, the more public the experience, the better. "The great peculiarity of

[4] "New Kind of Hotel Up Town," *The New York Weekly Mirror*, 7 December 1844.

America," the editor of the *New York Weekly Mirror* noted in 1844, "[is] our gregariousness, as shown in our populous Hotels." European travelers, newspaper editors, prescriptive writers, and other observers of American society also remarked frequently on the pleasure Americans found in the company of others.[5]

Just as antebellum New Yorkers were introduced to an ever-expanding number and range of food items in the public markets and private food shops of the city, so too did they confront new institutions built around these items. Antebellum New York's residents and visitors rubbed shoulders with each other in a novel world of public, commercial entertainments. In these locales, they cultivated the "gregariousness" that, according to one comment, was becoming a "national peculiarity."[6] In the city's public eateries, New Yorkers learned how to eat away from home, in commercial establishments, among hundreds of strangers. For many, the places in which they ate and the rituals they observed while eating became more important than the food itself in determining status and gentility.[7] In the city's commercial, public dining venues, the settings and rituals observed around food

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[5] "Change in New-York Habits," *The New York Weekly Mirror*, 12 October 1844.
[6] Ibid.
[7] This had not always been the case. With the exception of the elite, post-Revolutionary New Yorkers, and those who observed them, paid far more attention to the food they consumed than to the setting in which they consumed it. For example, Maria Trumbull, a Connecticut teenager who spent six months in New York in 1800, makes frequent mention of her meals in her letters to her parents. She describes the various foods she tasted in New York, but never the spaces in which she ate them. Likewise, those who stayed in the city's taverns often marveled at the abundance of the food served, but never at the appointments. See: *A Season in New York, 1801: Letters of Harriet and Maria Trumbull* ed. Helen M. Morgan (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1969). Visitors to New York frequently described the meals served in taverns. See for example: John Bernard, *Retrospections of America, 1797-1811*, ed. Mrs. Bayle Bernard (New York and London: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 51-2. For descriptions of tavern meals, see: Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: The Landmark History of Eating, Drinking, and Entertainments from the American Revolution to the Food Revolution* (1973; Revised ed., New York: Routledge, 1999); Richard Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 13-19.

became imbued with great social significance. As the number and range of restaurants increased, and as all but the poorest New Yorkers gained access to public dining options, space and performance became crucial markers of gentility and public dining establishments helped to determine where one fit along the social and economic spectrum.

The very notion of "dining out" was new to most antebellum New Yorkers. During the colonial period, taverns provided the only public dining options in New York and other American cities, a trend that continued into the 1790s. Taverns served as places of sociability in colonial cities and male residents of various stripes might visit them for drinking, socializing, and transacting business. But with few exceptions, only travelers ate their meals in these establishments. City residents tended to take all of their meals at home, then located near or in the same structures as their places of work.[8] Eating at taverns was undesirable as well as unnecessary for residents of New York. Although some taverns, such as the City Tavern, the Tontine Coffee House, and Fraunces' Tavern distinguished themselves by their culinary offerings and varied fare, by and large, tavern dining was not an experience to be relished. Tavern food was notoriously mediocre and the setting was sparse. The lack of attention to both the dining environment and the quality of food in colonial taverns highlights their utilitarian purpose. The goal of the tavern proprietor was not to present his customers with a dining experience but simply to feed them the meals that were included in the price of lodgings.

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[8] Sidney Pomerantz, *New York: An American City* (Port Washington, NY: Ira. J. Friedman, Inc., 1938), 466; Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 18; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 338-9.

Colonial taverns were conducted on the "American Plan," by which guests paid a fixed rate that included lodging and three or four meals. Those meals were served in the "English way," or family-style, at set times. Tavern meals were notable for their abundance if not their good taste. The better New York taverns served up to sixteen dishes at a single meal, including: various cuts of beef as well as venison, bear, wild turkey, ducks, pigeons, oysters, lobsters, terrapin, soups, puddings, and desserts. Diners were offered a wide variety of items, but were not presented with a menu of choices. At set hours, guests were summoned to the table, which was laden with the entire meal from soup to dessert. Lodgers' meals were included in the price of their rooms and they could partake of as much food as they wished. Those who missed the appointed meal times would go without. While travelers marveled at the prodigality of tavern meals, they were less enthusiastic about the quality of the cuisine. "The dinner," one tavern guest remarked, "was more excellent in its material than for its cookery and arrangement."[9]

Establishments along the lines of City Tavern catered to a specific clientele, drawn from the wealthiest travelers to the city. At seven to eight dollars per week for room and board, they were well out of the reach of the average unskilled laborer, who earned about twenty-five cents a day, or even skilled artisans whose wages were roughly twice that.[10] Those of lesser means might frequent taverns in the shabbier

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[9] Frank Moneghan and Marvin Lowenthal, *This Was New York: The Nation's Capital in 1789* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1943), 16; Richard J. Hooker, *Food and Drink in America: A History* (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1981), 74, 141; Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 15; Thomas Hamilton, quoted in Jefferson Williams, *The American Hotel: An Anecdotal History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), 186.

[10] Moneghan and Lowenthal, *This Was New York*, 77; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 16.

areas of the city west of Broadway. Montagne's, Bardin's, and Dower's Tavern were among the most notorious. Taverns along the East River waterfront also tended to be seedier, and there, patrons could find prostitutes in addition to ale and porter.[11]

Though New York residents did not generally eat their meals in taverns, they did go there to drink. This may explain the rather high number of taverns – one for every 100 residents in 1790. Women concerned about their reputations avoided establishments that served liquor, which of course included taverns. Indeed, respectable taverns refused admission to women. This rule had one exception: the better taverns had common rooms for private parties; a woman who was invited and escorted by a gentleman could enter in this way but she would invariably be excluded from the public taproom, a bastion of masculinity.[12] Thus, by and large, women did not frequent the few public dining options available in colonial New York.

Early Republican taverns struggled to keep pace with the city's burgeoning population of temporary and permanent residents. But even the largest of New York's taverns had only thirty rooms. By the 1790s, it was clear that larger accommodations were needed to deal with the swelling numbers. With that in mind, a group of prominent New Yorkers formed a tontine with the purpose of erecting a hotel. The City Hotel, opened in 1794, was the fruit of their efforts. Unlike the taverns that preceded it, the City Hotel was not converted from a house. Rather, it was "the first building erected expressly for hotel purposes in America." Its five stories containing 137 rooms also made it by far the largest hostelry in New York or

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[11] Carl Abbott, "The Neighborhoods of New York, 1760-1775," *New York History* 55 (1974): 49-50; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 42.

[12] Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 16; *New York Directory and Register for the Year 1790* (New York: Hodge, Allen, and Campbell, 1790); Batterberry *On the Town in New York*, 11.

any other city. In the tradition of colonial taverns, the City Hotel housed multi-purpose public rooms for meetings, balls, and meal service for travelers and guests. While by the standards of its day "an immense establishment," the City Hotel was, according to one historian, "merely an overgrown inn, clinging to ancient traditions and practices." In other words, the City Hotel was simply a large tavern, calling itself a hotel as was the trend in the 1790s, following the French model.[13]

The era of the modern hotel in New York began on July 4, 1834, when the cornerstone was laid for the Astor House. John Jacob Astor's "magnificent pile" of granite signaled a shift from the rustic taverns of the colonial period to the luxury hotels of the nineteenth century.[14] The latter distinguished themselves not only by their size – the Astor House filled a city block and boasted six stories, 396 guest rooms, eighteen retail stores, and several public rooms – but by their services and technological innovations. The Astor, for example, provided individual room keys, a full floor of retail stores, a coat check, laundry service, billiard-rooms, barber shops, bathing rooms, dining rooms, bar-rooms, a reading-room, and public parlors. It claimed such technological innovations as a guest-to-management intercom, gas illumination, a plumbing system, and a steam engine that powered the laundry and kitchen, and even pumped hot water to the upper floors.[15]

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[13] Williamson, *The American Hotel*, 10; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 340; Doris Elizabeth King, introduction to *Never Let People be Kept Waiting: A Textbook on Hotel Management*, by Tunis G. Campbell (Raleigh, NC, 1973), viii.

[14] The Astor House was not, however, the first modern hotel in the United States. That honor goes to Boston's Tremont House, which opened its doors in 1829.

[15] Molly W. Berger, "A House Divided: The Culture of the American Luxury Hotel, 1825-1860," in *His and Hers: Gender, Consumption, and Technology*, eds. Roger Horowitz and Arwen Mohun (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 46; Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels and Restaurants," 389; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 41.

The Astor was the first of New York's luxury hotels but it did not stand alone for long. In 1836, the year the Astor opened, New York City guidebooks listed twenty-eight hotels. Ten years later, the city's hotels numbered over one hundred. And the building of new deluxe accommodations continued unabated. Between 1850 and 1854, nineteen hotels were constructed on Broadway alone. By 1869, Junius Henri Browne estimated that there could not be "less than seven or eight hundred hotels, all told, in the Metropolis." Each hotel surpassed its predecessors in point of opulence and accommodations. The St. Nicholas Hotel, one of the many luxury hotels built in the 1850s, had over a thousand guest rooms, multiple dining rooms, public parlours, bars. barber shops, a laundry that could handle 5000 items per day, fifteen miles of gas pipe built into the walls, and kitchens "capable of serving four meals a day for a thousand people." As newer hotels were built, they were larger, more lavish, more expensive, and boasted more amenities and technological marvels than those built in previous decades.[16]

Modern opinion erroneously assumes that antebellum luxury hotels were imitations of European models. But in fact, these were novel and peculiar institutions. European travelers were astonished by the grandeur of American hotels, by the services they provided, and by the technological innovations they boasted.

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[16] Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 340, 671; Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 378; Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 391; Dr. Thomas L. Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, vol. 2 (1864; Reprint ed., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 10; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 41, 62; Berger, "A House Divided," 46. New hotels did not, however, vary much from their forerunners in terms of structure, layout, or even services provided. The hotel ideal was essentially born full-blown in Boston's Tremont House. The Tremont's successors built upon its example, taking advantage of new technologies but adhering to the basic structure and purpose of this first modern hotel. See Berger, "A House Divided." See also Berger's dissertation, "The Modern Hotel in America, 1829-1929" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1997).

William Chambers, an English visitor to the Astor House, was typical in proclaiming that "there is, generally speaking, nothing at all to compare with this in Europe." Reminiscing in 1884 about the heyday of American hotels, the editor of *The Nation* recalled: "Fifty years ago the art of hotel-keeping shot far ahead in the United States of anything of the kind known in Europe . . . and for about half that period American hotels were the wonders of the Old World, and forged a prominent feature in the tales of all travellers who had crossed the Atlantic. Their size, the perfection of their organization, the luxury of their furniture, the lavishness and excellence of their tables were constant subjects of admiration in the European newspapers. . . . There was nothing in England which could at all approach them, or in France or Switzerland either."[17]

The luxury hotels of New York and other antebellum American cities were reflections of their time, a period that New York diarist Philip Hone referred to as the "go-ahead age." Commercial expansion, increased national wealth, an unprecedented level of technological development, and a heightened concern with luxury and refinement among the country's elite and middle classes all found concrete manifestation in modern luxury hotels. The Astor House, the Metropolitan, and the St. Nicholas provided room and board for their guests, just as taverns and coffee houses had done during the colonial and immediate post-Revolutionary periods. But the hotels served a far larger purpose than their predecessors – they became important sites of civic pride as cities competed with each other through their public palaces. Hotels served as civic centers, where politicians, dignitaries and other famous visitors gave speeches, attended receptions, and met the public. They contributed further to

[17] "The Summer Hotels," *The Nation*, 11 September 1884, 217.

civic life by hosting political rallies, balls, club meetings, and public dinners. They also became living expositions, displaying technological innovations, architectural trends, opulent furnishings, and culinary advances.[18]

Among the many factors that distinguished New York's luxury hotels, the presence of a sizable population of permanent residents was at the forefront. Before the Astor House had even opened for business, the *New Yorker* remarked: "We hear that half the rooms are already engaged by families who give up housekeeping on account of the present enormous rents in the city." *The Nation* claimed "that at least the belief was spread in England . . . that all Americans lived in hotels, and that home life in a house was almost unknown on this side of the Atlantic." Hotel architects included in their plans whole wings geared toward permanent residents. And some hostelries billed themselves not as temporary lodgings but as family hotels. The result was that between 1830 and 1860, permanent residents occupied half of the hotel rooms in New York. One English visitor noted: "At some of the principal hotels you will find the apartments of the lodgers so permanently taken that the plate with their name engraved on it is fixed on the door."[19]

The phenomenon of permanent residency in New York's hotels grew out of both necessity and choice. New York experienced a severe housing crunch in the

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[18] This discussion of hotels as civic monuments, and as symbols of the "go-ahead age" relies on Molly Berger's analysis in "The Modern Hotel in America." Daniel Boorstin provides a similar discussion in *The Americans, The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965), 135-47. See also: Barbara Carson, "Early American Tourists and the Commercialization of Leisure," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1994), 389.

[19] *New Yorker*, 27 February 1836; "The Summer Hotels"; Williamson, *The American Hotel*, 117; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 66; Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America with Remarks on its Institutions*, ed. Sydney Jackman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 390.

nineteenth century as the city's housing stock failed miserably to keep pace with its population. The pages of newspapers, diaries, and letter books were filled with complaints about the near impossibility of finding a private home. The early nineteenth century saw an intense speculative building boom in New York. But speculative builders, whose business was by definition risky, preferred to build housing for the most reliable market – the wealthiest of New York's residents. The few private housing options that were available were thus enormously expensive. Commenting on the rising real estate prices in New York during the rebuilding of the city following the Great Fire of 1835, Philip Hone remarked: "Everything in the city is at an exorbitant price. Rents have risen fifty percent for the next year." And English visitor Richard Gooch complained that "an apartment in New York lets for nearly 6 times as much as one may be procured for in almost any part of London." Gooch lamented that "the buildings recently erected in New York have the great inconvenience of being too expensive for the means of the people. . . . [R]espectable families are obliged to content themselves with two small rooms. . . and the real tenant . . . is driven to the necessity of letting off so much, to be able to raise the enormous rents . . . that they generally occupy the cellars. . . . In fact, nearly half of the population of New York live in cellars."[20]

While Gooch exaggerated the prevalence of cellar living, he did not overstate New York's housing shortage. As noted in Chapter One, the early nineteenth century

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[20] Hone, quoted in Homberger, *Historical Atlas of New York*, 78; *America and the Americans – In 1833-4. By an Emigrant, Richard Gooch*, ed. Richard Toby Widdicombe (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994), 17- 18. "The rent of a small house is 500 dollars a year," Gooch writes, "whilst the larger sort in the best part of the city, are charged at the rate of 2000 dollars per annum, and 145 dollars a year is commonly paid for two small unfurnished rooms in the business part of the city, where a house of 4 or 5 rooms lists for about 300 dollars a year."

saw the rise of a tenant class in New York. Laborers, who had formerly lived in the homes of their employers, now were forced into tenancy as were many middle-class New Yorkers. Both groups resorted to leasing apartments or rooms in tenements, subdivided residences, boarding houses, private homes and hotels.[21]

"In America," English novelist Frederick Marryat asserted, "it is cheaper to live in a large hotel than to keep a house of your own." The hotels were built on economies of scale. Even if families could afford to rent or buy a house, they could not even approach the level of opulence, convenience, and service that the hotels provided. Nor, observers explained, could they find suitable servants to run a private household. "In consequence of the great difficulty which private families experience in procuring cooks and housemaids," English visitor Charles Mackay wrote, "the mistresses of families keeping house on their own account lead but an uncomfortable life." Whereas in England, "the newly married couple take a house, furnish it, and live quietly at home," in American cities, "they too commonly take apartments at the hotel, and live in public, glad to take advantage of the ready means which it affords of escape from the nuisances attendant upon inefficient, incomplete, and insolent service." Among the "strong inducements to take rooms at a hotel," *Putnam's Monthly* listed: "the dearness of rents, the scarcity of servants, and the thousand nameless inconveniences and expenses of single households, which every housekeeper can enumerate." In the hotels, they marveled, "all the cares of house-

[21] Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 183-85.

keeping are avoided, and a thousand luxuries may be enjoyed that families of moderate incomes must deny themselves, in . . . the 'isolated household.'"[22]

Hotel life provided ample opportunities for display and conspicuous consumption, a feature that made them attractive homes and destinations for many. In his description of the United States, published in 1864, Dr. Thomas Nichols compared his compatriots to their British cousins. Unlike the Englishman, who is "shy and private, [building] a high wall around his house and garden to keep out the eyes of the public" explained Nichols, the American "builds a fine house and lays out a handsome garden, that others may see and enjoy them as well as himself. Shut in and hidden, they would lose half their value." While "the Englishman likes to eat and drink in private – shut up in his room or a close little box[,] the American prefers a large, gay dining-room and the presence of many guests. . . . He wishes to see and be seen. . . . The larger the hotel. . . the more people eating and drinking about him, the greater his enjoyment."[23] Hotels thus provided space for guests to rub shoulders and show off among hundreds of others and indeed, this aspect of hotel life acted as one of its major draws.

The legion of servants the hotels employed shored up the luxurious style of living and opportunities for display that they enabled. Unlike the taverns, where the proprietor and his family provided all services, the hotels had huge staffs to cater to the whims of the guests. In the 1830s, the Astor House employed more than 160 individuals; in 1844, its staff included sixty waiters, twenty-one washerwomen,

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[22] Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 390-91; Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America: Or, Sketches of a Tour in the United States and Canada, in 1857-8.* 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859), 43; "New-York Daguerrotyped," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, May 1853, 357-8.

[23] Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, 13-14.

twenty bellhops, twelve cooks, and five clerks. By 1860, the ratio of employees to guests in luxury hotels was one to two. Indeed, while the hotels served as vast sites of consumption, the production arm was equally important. The supply side of the hotels necessitated an army of workers to run the desk and the various services, clean and prepare the rooms, launder the linens, wash the dishes, cook and serve the meals, and otherwise address the needs and desires of the patrons. A whole wing of the hotel, unseen by the guests, was given over to production. In the Astor, this "kind of accessary house" held the kitchen, which took up the entire ground floor, the laundry, and the lodgings of the "numerous domestics," located on the top floor.[24]

Like the industrial factories and retail establishments emerging in the antebellum period, the luxury hotels were characterized by a hierarchy of management and service. At the top stood the hotel keeper (sometimes the owner, sometimes an employee), a vaunted character in the descriptions of American hotels. Unlike the tavern keeper who simply "knows how to get to market and how to feed so many people at a public table. . . . [a] hotel keeper," explained the manager of the Astor House, "is a gentleman who stands on a level with his guests." A notice in the New York *Weekly Mirror* concurred, explaining: "The American Hotel-Keeper has charge, not of twenty or thirty people *living wholly in their own private rooms,* but of two or three hundred, whose habits are all so gregarious, *and to almost every one of them he, (the landlord), is a personal and familiar friend.*" The hotel manager,

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[24] Williamson, *The American Hotel*, 197; Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 389; Charles Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown: An Illustrated History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 156-7; Vaughn L. Glasgow, "The Hotels of New York City Prior to the American Civil War," (M.A. thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1970), 74; Berger, "A House Divided," 56-8; "A French Visitor's Idea of the Astor House," *The New Mirror*, 9 August 1843.

according to *The Mirror*, was distinctly different not only from a tavern keeper but from the staff of servants he directed as well. Serving as a confidante, moderator of disputes among guests, dispenser of advice, and social director, the hotel keeper "is necessarily, a person of high moral character, superior judgment, discretion, and information – *without all which public opinion would not tolerate him in his place* – and *with which*, while in the full exercise of his vocation, he naturally holds a high station of republican social rank." The barkeepers and the chefs also held elevated positions in the hotel hierarchy and, along with the various storekeepers whose shops were located in the hotels, experienced a significant degree of autonomy in their work practices. Another level of management included the bookkeepers, clerks, and head waiters. The servants – the waiters, runners, chamber maids, and laundresses – composed mainly of Irish and African-American men and women, completed the chain of command.[25]

If one adds the guests and patrons of the hotel to the various individuals and services involved in the production side, it becomes clear why a visitor to the Astor echoed the view of many his contemporaries in describing it as "a city in the midst of a great city."[26] Like the metropolis that housed it, the antebellum luxury hotel presented a microcosm of urban society.[27] While hotels catered mainly to members of the elite and upper middle classes, they were also homes and workplaces for middle- and working-class New Yorkers of a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds. And the presence of the hotel workers was central to the conspicuous

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[25] Mr. Stetson, manager of the Astor House quoted in Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 389; "Change in New-York Habits," *The Weekly Mirror*, 12 October 1844; Molly Berger, "A House Divided," 56-8.
[26] "A Frenchman's Idea of the Astor House."
[27] Molly Berger makes a similar point in "A House Divided," 58.

level of display and the performance in which guests engaged in acting out their claims to status and gentility. The very aspects of the hotels that made them the models of luxury, refinement, and gentility – the fine appointments, the conveniences, the technological marvels, and the high level of service – depended upon the labors of a servant class from which the hotel patrons were trying their hardest to distinguish themselves.

In addition to providing them with luxurious accommodations and staffs to cater to their every whim, larger luxury hotels appealed to families (or at least to contemporary gender conventions) by creating separate spaces for families and ladies. The ladies' wings included parlors, drawing rooms, bedrooms, and a ladies' dining room. Here, men could dine with their families but men traveling without female escort were confined to the male areas of the hotel. Women, in turn, were prohibited from the men's drawing room, bar, and reading room, as well as the main dining room, all in the male section of the hotel. In terms of the opulence of the spaces appointed them, ladies did not suffer from gender segregation. "The ladies' drawing-room," read a description of the Astor House in the *Weekly Mirror* "is a perfect *bijoux*. It has an exquisitely rich black walnut wainscoting all around the walls . . . and above this a rich pink Silesia tapestry, arranged in tasteful folds. The ceiling is elegantly adorned with fresco paintings. The furniture is rich and massive, but perfectly simple. The whole is in pure and admirable taste." Likewise, William Chambers described the "lady department" as "a kind of elysium of princely drawing-rooms and boudoirs, in which velvet, lace, satin, gilding, rich carpets and mirrors, contribute to form a scene of indescribable luxury." Some men coveted the luxury,

comfort, and sociability of the ladies' section. Englishman Charles Murray complained that traveling without female escort meant being "shut out from many privileges, deprived of the most agreeable society, and compelled to mourn your lone estate in company with fellows as wretched as yourself."[28]

Despite the planners' best intentions, hotel guests and residents refused to segregate themselves by gender. In fact, according to some European observers, the opportunity for male-female socialization was a major feature of hotel life. Notwithstanding the fact that the Astor's ladies' section occupied a separate wing from the men's, anyone could stroll its corridors. Chambers found it "rather remarkable" that "the doors of [the] various sitting-apartments" along these hallways "are generally wide open." The corridors themselves, explained Chambers, were well known as "'flirtation galleries,' on account of their qualities as places of general resort and conversation." Flirting could continue, a French visitor to the Astor noted, at the balls "terminating in a brilliant supper," sponsored "nearly every week" by the hotels "for the amusement of the ladies." As a result of the opportunities for socializing, this Frenchman was moved to proclaim that "the great hotels in America produce alone more marriages than any private society." As New York hotels evolved, they came to relax the gender segregation that their guests seemed to reject. In the 1850s, the St. Nicholas and Fifth Avenue Hotels welcomed escorted women in their main dining rooms.[29] This shift may have been linked as well to the competition

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[28] "The Astor House, New York," *The Weekly Mirror*, 9 November 1844; William Chambers, *Things as They Are in America* (1854; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1986), 182; Charles Murray, quoted in Berger, "A House Divided," 51.

[29] Chambers, *Things as They Are in America*, 182; "A Frenchman's Idea of the Astor House"; Berger, "A House Divided," 572.

provided by the many free-standing restaurants in New York, many of which catered to ladies with proper escort.

New York's luxury hotels thus served a larger purpose than providing room and board to their guests. For those patrons who could afford them, they served as centers for sociability and the cultivation of gregarious behavior. And perhaps the greatest opportunities for socializing occurred in the hotel ordinaries. "Above all," proclaimed one visitor, "it is the organization of the culinary establishment which is the glory of the Astor House, as of all the new American hotels." Another European traveler described American hotels simply as "giant feeding places," ignoring the range of other services the hotels provided, including lodging.[30]

The very notion of a room set aside exclusively for dining was a new one. Colonial taverns, as noted, had a multipurpose room for meals and other activities. Even in wealthy colonial homes, the dining room was used for activities other than dining. But in the hotels, specialized dining rooms were de rigueur and often the most important and opulent spaces in these grand hostelries. William Havard Eliot, the developer of Boston's Tremont House, the template for antebellum hotels, explained: "As the largest and most public apartment of the house, [the dining room] was considered deserving of the most elaborate decoration; and though the use to which it is devoted be not of a dignified or elevated cast, there seems at least no impropriety in surrounding its occupants with cheerful and tasteful objects." Other hotels followed the Tremont's lead. Black walnut tables and velvet-covered chairs filled the dining room at the St. Nicholas Hotel. Gilded mirrors hung on its walls.

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[30] "A Frenchman's Idea of the Astor House"; Capt. Oldmixon, R.N., *Transatlantic Wanderings: or, A Last Look at the United States* (London: Geo. Routledge & Co., 1855), 26.

And twenty-four marble pilasters supported the frescoed, twenty-foot-high ceiling. This immense 50 by 100 foot room was, *Putnam's Monthly* reported "an exquisitely beautiful example of a banqueting room, and shows to what a high condition the fine art of dining well has already been carried in this city." Indeed, according to *Putnam's* the space in which one dined was as important as the food since "we cannot but think that a lively and cheerful aspect to a hotel must impart a flavor to the dinner, and be an essential aid to digestion."[31]

Early hotels continued the tradition established in colonial taverns of the "ordinary," where meals were included in the price of lodging and served at a set time to guests seated at a large public table. But in the hotels, dining involved a level of formality and ritual that was absent in taverns. Patrons of the hotel ordinary engaged in far more than simply eating. They participated in a highly ritualized dining performance, replete with props, dress and prescribed roles. Diners at New York's hotels did not sit down to a table laden with the entire meal. They did not serve themselves, carve their own meats, or fill their own glasses. Such activities were remnants of the past, of the quaint English style of service embraced by eighteenth-century tavern keepers. The hotels followed the more modern "French style" of service. The French style was also known as "dining à la Russe," for it was in fact the Russian ambassador to France who introduced the custom to Parisians of serving individual dishes, one at a time, to guests, rather than laying out the entire meal on the

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[31] Eliot, quoted in Berger, "A House Divided," 50; Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown*, 154-6. Quotations from "New-York Daguerrotyped." For travelers' descriptions of New York hotels, see: Chambers, *Things as They Are in America*, 177-90; William Ferguson, *America by River and Rail: or Notes by the Way on the New World and Its Peoples* (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1856), 51-3; Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America*, 37-46; Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 373-9.

public table before the guests' arrival. By 1815, dining à la Russe was all the rage in fashionable Paris and by the 1830s, New York as well. The table d'hôte still prevailed, where various dishes were pre-cooked and delivered to the dining room en masse but patrons chose individual meals, which servers carved, dressed, garnished, and plated at the sideboard. The maintenance of the public table, even after the shift to the French style of service, contributed to the social aspects of the dinner.[32]

Serving meals in the French style required a far greater number of actors and props than the English style. Whereas before, one person could set the food out on the table and clear it at the end of the meal, conducting a meal according to the French style required one waiter per five or six people. And the large number of waiters also contributed to the ritualized aspects of the hotel meal, which was more akin to a stage performance than a tavern visit.

The dining performance began at the sounding of a bell, described by Charles Dickens as "that awful gong which shakes the very window frames as it reverberates throughout the house and horribly disturbs nervous foreigners." Guests, who were simultaneously actors and audience, ranged themselves outside of the dining room, and awaited the dramatic raising of the curtain, or throwing open of the doors to the immense dining rooms. Waiters acted as ushers, escorting diners to their seats at long tables that seated hundreds of guests, covered with the finest linen, cut glass, porcelain, and silver. Each place also contained a menu card, itself a new prop necessitated by the shift to the French style of service. The Astor House had its own printing press for the exclusive purpose of producing these daily menus.[33]

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[32] Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 63-4.
[33] Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 379-81, 390. Charles Dickens quotation on p. 379.

The bills of fare were extensive. "An idea of the dinner," a guest at the St. Nicholas wrote, "may be gathered from the fact, that we had our choice of two soups, two kinds of fish, ten boiled dishes, nine roast dishes, six relishes, seventeen entrées, three cold dishes, five varieties of game, thirteen varieties of vegetables, seven kinds of pastry, and seven fruits, with ice-cream and coffee." While dinner was the most extravagant meal served at the hotels, other repasts were similarly prodigious. Breakfast at the St. Nicholas consisted of: "coffee, tea, chocolate, all kinds of bread, toast, rolls, biscuit; buckwheat, Indian corn, rice, flour, griddle-cakes, beefsteak, pork-steak, ham, eggs, mutton-chop, sausages, fish, broiled chicken, oysters stewed, fried, broiled; potatoes, and so on. . . . you may eat of every dish, or one, or none."[34]

The theatricality of hotel dinners owed largely to the waiters' military-style drill, described in awed detail in various travel accounts. "For every six persons at table there is a servant," explained a diner at the Astor, "who is forbidden to leave his place under any pretext. In this manner the dinner is conducted with the regularity of manoeuvres on board a frigate." Following the signal of the headwaiter, given by whistle, bell, or voice command, the corps of Irish and African American waiters went through their paces. "The waiters in every hotel," wrote one traveler, "are marshalled into the saloon, each carrying a plated dish in his hand, the procession reminding one of the theatrical march in *Aladin;* and in the setting down, and uncovering these dishes, and walking off with the lids – the whole corps moving off in line – they obey a fugleman with that military precision, which . . . could scarcely fail to excite a certain degree of merriment." Another hotel visitor marveled: "It is one of the most novel sights for a stranger to see in one of these immense dining

[34] Ferguson, *America by River and Rail*, 52; Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life,* 11.

halls, a whole regiment . . . waiting for the signal to uncover such of the dishes as are placed on the table before the guests. . . . At a given signal, each one reaches over his arm and takes hold of the handle of a dish. . . . There they all hold for a second or two, when, at another signal, they all at the same moment lift the cover. . . with as great exactness as soldiers expected to 'shoulder arms.'" The drill continued through the seven courses that were typical of a hotel meal. Each course involved a new table setting, making the hotel kitchens major repositories of flatware, dishes, glassware, and table linens.[35]

Meanwhile the hundreds of diners, sitting at two or three large public tables, enjoyed the height of cuisine. In 1843, the Astor employed "three chief cooks, a Frenchman for the side dishes, an Englishman for the roast meats, and an Italian for the *patisseries.*" Guests could thus partake of "delicacies of which Brillat Savarin himself had no idea when he wrote his immortal work on the physiology of taste." But, of course, they enjoyed far more than fine food. A guest at the public table sat among hundreds of others who like him wished to "sun [themselves] in the public gaze." As he did so, he participated in a performance of gentility. Despite the description of hotels as "giant feeding places," suggesting the image of pigs at a trough, many Europeans noted that the manners of Americans at the hotel table would make the myriad etiquette writers proud. And their attention to their own appearance was equally impressive. Some of the female patrons, Astor House guest William Chambers marveled, "appear in a different dress at every meal, and in point of elegance and costliness of attire, they went beyond anything in my poor experience."

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[35] "A Frenchman's Idea of the Astor House"; Chambers, *Things as They Are in America*, 189; Williamson, *The American Hotel*, 196-99, quotation on p. 199; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 63-4.

"The distinguished, the fashionable, the dressy and handsome," the New York *Weekly Mirror* proclaimed, "all dine . . . *at the public table.*"[36]

Hence, the hotel restaurant – a segregated, lavishly decorated dining space with an expected set of rituals and an unprecedented level of performance around food – took the act of eating to new heights. The abundant and delicious food, the splendid appointments, the waiters' dance -- the combination of these factors defined the hotel meal as a completely new social form in antebellum America – an event unto itself. The hotels provided a space for wealthy antebellum New Yorkers to cultivate the dining performance, to rub shoulders with strangers at the public table, and to partake of commercial, public dining patterns. In their emphasis on space and performance, as well as culinary excellence, the hotel ordinaries defined luxury dining, and hotel dining was among the most refined activities available to antebellum New Yorkers. "The days have gone by," the New York *Tribune* noted, "when quiet comfort, mere neatness, and a good table were sufficient." "The Astor House," read an article in the New York *Weekly Mirror*, "could it but be preserved entire as it is at this moment, its guests petrified at the dinner table and its operatives at their various employments. . . . would be a perfect mirror of the fashions in costume, the luxuries, conveniences, comforts, manners, refinements, beauty, and elegancies of the 19th century."[37]

As we have seen, the consumer revolution led to increased access to food items that formerly connoted gentility – fancy fruits, ice cream, chocolate, wild game.

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[36] "A Frenchman's Idea of the Astor House"; Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, 14; Chambers, *Things as They Are in America*, 182; "New Kind of Hotel Up Town," *The Weekly Mirror*, 7 December 1844.

[37] *Tribune* quoted in Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 394; "The Astor House, New York."

Rather than denoting the bearer of those items as genteel, expanded access led to the raising of the stakes of gentility to include the behaviors one engaged in around consumer items, and the space in which one consumed them. The hotel dining rooms, and the dining ritual honed in them, provide a marked illustration of this shift. While many New Yorkers had access to the new and expanded food items the markets provided, a select few could take their meals in the sumptuous dining rooms of the Astor or the St. Nicholas. In the dining rooms of New York's luxury hotels, space and performance became paramount, even more important, according to some accounts, than the food. As food items ceased to serve as sufficient markers of gentility, the formerly mundane act of eating was elevated to the refined act of dining. As long as the luxury hotels were the only sites in New York that provided public dining accommodations, the act of eating out was itself a refined one. But that situation would change as free-standing restaurants emerged beginning in the 1830s to cater to the needs of New Yorkers.

According to legend, the first New York restaurant opened its doors in 1831, when the Swiss-born Delmonico brothers expanded their William Street pastry shop, which they had established in 1827, into a full-scale restaurant. Giovanni and Pietro Delmonico (now calling themselves John and Peter) hired a French chef and a staff of waiters who prepared and served a wide selection of hot meals to the city's business community. Delmonico's followed the model of Parisian restaurants, which had been serving food to that city's residents and visitors since the late eighteenth century. Because of Delmonico's renown and longevity, the Delmonico brothers have received credit for introducing the restaurant model to the United States. But theirs

was not in fact the first. French expatriate Jean Baptiste Gilbert Payplat, for example, opened "Julien's Restorator," a full-scale French-style restaurant in Boston in 1794. And the 1810 New York City Directory listed five free-standing "victualling houses."[38]

While the number of "victualling houses," "eating houses," and "cookshops" continued to grow slowly throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, it was in the 1830s, the decade that Delmonico's gained fame in New York and elsewhere, that the restaurant explosion took off in New York City. By the 1830s, New York's population and size was significant enough to support numerous restaurants, catering to the needs of a variety of patrons. The growing bachelor population included clerks and other white-collar workers who frequently lived in boarding houses and had some disposable income. They increasingly opted to dine out, rather than carry their meals or return home for dinner – the midday meal. Their more established counterparts – elite and middle-class men who owned homes in outlying residential neighborhoods – added to the demand for public dining options in the city's commercial district.

Hotel guests also began to seek dining options outside of their hostelries. European travelers especially, accustomed to the European hotel garni, in which meals were served to order and not included in the price of lodgings, sought a similar model in the United States. Indeed, after 1850 many hotels began to conduct themselves on the European, rather than the American Plan. Under the new plan,

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[38] John Mariani, *America Eats Out: An Illustrated History of Restaurants, Taverns, Coffee Shops, Speakeasies, and Other Establishments That Have Fed Us for 350 Years* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 23-6; Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 22-4; *Longworth's New York City Directory for 1810* (New York: Longworth, 1810).

guests paid for meals separate from their lodging and so could opt to take all or none of their meals in the hotel dining rooms and pay accordingly. Many hotels still adhered to the older American Plan, whereby meals were included in the price of the room, whether one chose to eat them or not. But enough hotels had switched to the European Plan by the 1830s to further fuel the explosion of free-standing public dining options in New York City.[39] In the 1820s, business directories and guidebooks rarely listed eating houses. Thirty years later, New Yorkers had hundreds, even thousands of public dining options, described in detail in various city guides.

The first restaurants, like Delmonico's, emerged to serve the needs of the business community. And while Delmonico's distinguished itself by its elegant furnishings and fine cuisine, most of the other restaurants in New York's commercial district emphasized convenience over quality. The many short-order houses that began to dot the downtown districts in the late 1820s aimed to provide quick, if not delicious, meals to the merchants, clerks, and other white-collar workers from nearby offices and stores. And the demand was quite high. In the 1850s, George Foster remarked that "not less than thirty thousand persons engaged in mercantile or financial affairs, dine at eating-houses every day."[40]

These restaurants were a far cry from the hotel ordinaries, where guests could expect delicious food and a high level of luxury and service. The downtown eating houses were crowded, chaotic, fast, and loud, as indicated by English captain Basil Hall who described his visit to the Plate House:

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[39] Of course, these two processes reinforced each other. The proliferation of restaurants after 1830 provided options for those hotel guests who wished to dine outside of the hotel ordinaries.

[40] George Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches*, ed. Stuart Blumin (Berkeley and Los Angles, University of California Press, 1990), 215-16.

> There was an amazing clatter of knives and forks; but not a word audible to us was spoken by any of the guests. This silence, however, on the part of the company, was amply made up for by the rapid vociferations of the attendants. . . who were gliding up and down, and across the passage, inclining their heads for an instant first to one box, then to another, and receiving the whispered wishes of the company, which they straightway bawled out in a loud voice, to give notice of what fare was wanted. . . . Within a few seconds after our wishes had been communicated to one of the aforesaid urchins, imps, gnomes, or whatever name they deserve, the things we asked for were placed piping hot before us. . . . The multiplicity and rapidity of these orders and movements made me giddy. Had there been one set to receive and forward the orders, and another to put them in execution, we might have seen better through the confusion; but all hands, little and big together, were screaming out with equal loudness and quickness. . . . There could not be, I should think, fewer than a dozen boxes, with four people in each; and as every one seemed to be eating as fast as he could, the extraordinary bustle may be conceived. We were not in the house above twenty minutes, but we sat out two sets of company at least.[41]

The food at these establishments, Foster noted, "is generally bad enough. . . . It is really wonderful how men of refined tastes and pampered habits, who at home are as fastidious as luxury and a delicate appetite can make them, find it in their hearts – or stomachs either – to gorge such disgusting masses of stringy meat and tepid vegetables, and to go about their business again under the fond delusion that they have dined." Of course, the patrons of these eating houses were not hoping for a fine dining experience. Their goal was to eat quickly and cheaply and then return to work. "The sole object of the company," Captain Hall wrote, "evidently was to get through a certain quantum of victuals with as much dispatch as possible."[42] Conversation, socializing, even chewing, might get in the way of such dispatch.

The downtown eating houses catered to a variety of male New Yorkers. George Foster described Sweeney's, one of the most famous short-order houses in

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[41] Captain Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the Years 1827 and 1828* (Edinburgh: Cadell and Co., 1829), 32-4.
[42] Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light*, 215-16; Hall, *Travels in North America*, 32.

antebellum New York, as "emphatically a six-penny eating house." At this price, "the editor, the author, the young lawyer . . . the ice-cream man round the corner . . . the young student of divinity learning humility at six shillings a week; the journeyman printer on a batter, and afraid to go home to his wife before he gets sober; in short, all classes who go to make up the great middle stripe of the population," could all afford to "concentrate and commingle at Sweeney's." Other middle-range restaurants, such as Clark and Brown's, an English-style chophouse, offered meals at about twice the price, still within the means of middling New Yorkers, but out of reach for most laborers, who earned on average $11 per week in the 1850s. Nonetheless, the model at both Sweeney's and Clark and Brown's was essentially the same, "the chief difference," according to Foster, being "that while at Brown's the waiters *actually do* pass by you within hail now and then, at Sweeney's no such phenomenon ever by any possibility occurs."[43]

While short-order houses dominated the downtown districts, Gotham contained a variety of restaurants including chop houses, oyster cellars, saloons, beer gardens, ice cream parlors, and all-night coffee shops such as Butter-Cake Dick's, the most popular eating house for the city's volunteer firemen and newsboys. In addition, New Yorkers on the run could purchase food-to-go from the numerous street vendors who sold such items as hot corn, roast pork, clams, oysters, and ice cream. "The perplexity as to where you shall dine in New York," explained one

[43] Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light*, 216-17.

young clerk, "is not because you cannot find a place, but from the choice and variety of places."[44]

While most New Yorkers could afford at least some of the new public dining options, a class hierarchy emerged in the restaurants of antebellum New York. The price of dining at Delmonico's, or even at Clark and Brown's made them prohibitive for New York's laboring classes. Butter-Cake Dick's and similar establishments were often located in areas of the city that the genteel refused to enter, such as the Bowery. Even if their location was acceptable, not all restaurants were equal, nor acceptable to those of genteel aspirations. Choice and variety in terms of restaurants led to a far greater emphasis on space and performance as the option to dine out in and of itself ceased to connote gentility. For many New Yorkers, the dining space and behaviors adhered to within it, rather than the quality of food served or even the price, determined the acceptability of a restaurant.

Space and performance became particularly important in determining the acceptability of a restaurant as women began to take advantage of New York's public dining options. As members of the elite and middle classes increasingly chose to live on the outskirts of the city, a true business district emerged, spreading from the southern tip of Manhattan to City Hall Park. The daily activities of middle-class and elite women included shopping, which took them into the commercial areas as well. Thus, many female New Yorkers of the middle and upper classes found that they, like

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[44] Ibid., 73-4, 214-19; *Letters from America, 1853-1860*, ed. T. Barry Davies (Upton-upon-Severn, Worcs, Great Britain: The Self Publishing Association, Ltd., 1991), 30-31.

their husbands and fathers, were often too far from home to return there for the midday meal.[45]

The downtown eating houses were off limits to women, and based on the dining behavior of men in these spaces, those of the gentler sex probably did not lament their exclusion. Men dining abroad without their wives, in hotels, on travel conveyances, and in the downtown eating houses of New York City disgusted myriad observers with their deplorable table manners. Describing male guests in a steamboat dining room, Frances Trollope complained:

> The total want of all the usual courtesies of the table, the voracious rapidity with which the viands were seized and devoured . . . the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives, till the whole blade seemed to enter into the mouth; and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife, soon forced us to feel that we were not surrounded by the generals, colonels, and majors of the old world; and that the dinner hour was to be any thing rather than an hour of enjoyment.[46]

Likewise, Junius Browne derided the men of a downtown eating house, "standing elbow to elbow, or perched on stools, using knives, and forks, and spoons; talking with their mouths full; gesticulating with their heads, and arms, and bodies; eating as

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[45] The expansion of restaurants, along with new residential configurations, led to shifts in meal times as well as social dining patterns. In the early part of the century, elite and middling men returned home for dinner – the midday meal and the most substantial of the day. At the end of the workday, families would eat a small supper of cold meats, soup, cheese, and bread. By the 1840s, this was an impossibility for many. Thus, men of the middle and upper classes took their dinner at the public dining houses while their wives and children had a small meal of breakfast leftovers at home – an early form of lunch. The dinner hour was pushed back to the early evening and supper was either taken at 9 or 10 o'clock or done away with altogether.

[46] Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, ed. Donald Smalley (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), 18-19.

if they were on the eve of a journey round the World, and never expected to obtain another meal."[47]

Ladies did not have to worry about viewing such disgusting behaviors on the part of their male relations. And their husbands, brothers, and sons could bolt their food, spit tobacco on the floor, and talk with their mouths full in the downtown eating houses without fear of reprimand from their mothers, sisters, and wives, who were not welcome in these spaces. Women's presence in public was strictly regulated. As noted, until the 1850s, the luxury hotels created separate public spaces for ladies; male sections of the hotel were off limits to them. And the male-dominated downtown eating houses prohibited women as well. As a demand arose for free-standing restaurant options for women, entrepreneurs, happy to take advantage of this new market, began to open establishments specially earmarked as "ladies eateries." This description was used interchangeably with ice creameries, or ice cream parlors since the ladies' eateries served the frozen treat, along with pastry and light meals.

Although gender segregation in public dining spaces was relaxed by the 1850s (as evidenced by the acceptance of women in the main dining rooms of the city's luxury hotels), the stigma against ladies dining among men without escort did not wane until the turn of the twentieth century. Thus, when restaurants began to open their doors to unescorted women, they catered almost exclusively to that group. Carroll's 1859 *New York City Directory to the Hotels of Note, Places of Amusement, Public Buildings . . . Etc.* listed five "Saloons Suitable for Ladies," including: Maillard's, Goslin's, Thompson's, Weller's, and Taylor's. By 1850, Taylor's, the premiere ladies' restaurant in mid-century New York, served 3000 patrons per day,

[47] Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 252.

many of them ladies who needed a rest after hours of shopping at A.T. Stewart's Department Store, located directly across the street. "This extensive restaurant," *Putnam's Weekly* remarked in 1853 of Taylor's, "is intended for ladies and, like Thompson's, the other great dining-room for ladies in Broadway, has gradually grown up with the population of the city from an humble ice-creamery and confectionary to its present magnificent dimensions."[48]

The ladies' eateries were not entirely off limits to men. Like the ladies' sections of the hotels, ladies' restaurants welcomed male patrons, provided they were escorted by a female relative. By admitting only ladies and their guests, these restaurants ensured that their patrons would feel comfortable dining in public without compromising their reputations. They also ensured that their establishments would be respectable ones since ladies were the icons of respectability. According to antebellum bourgeois gender conventions, women were the arbiters of refinement and gentility. Men, busy with matters of commerce and politics, needed the civilizing hand of the lady to ensure proper social behavior. "No civilized man is so helpless and dependent in certain respects as an American gentlemen," read an 1856 article in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. "The reason is obvious," it continued, "our wives do our thinking in these matters, and we are perfectly content to follow their lead. A large part of our social system is under their control, and they legislate for our dress, etiquette, and manners without the fear of a veto."[49]

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[48] Charles H. Haswell, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1896), 53; *Carroll's New York City Directory to the Hotels of Note, Places of Amusement, Public Buildings . . . Etc.* (New York: Carroll & Company, 1859), 15; Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 798; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 91; "New-York Daguerrotyped."

[49] "Domestic Society in Our Country," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1856.

Thus, the participation of women in public dining rituals added the question of respectability to the act of eating in public, commercial establishments. Gentility, respectability, and gender were inextricably linked in the social conventions of antebellum New York. A gentleman could remove himself from a respectable situation and still remain genteel. Ladies did not enjoy the same flexibility. For them, respectability and gentility were one and the same and their gender identification depended on it. To be a lady was to be respectable and genteel. If one ceased to be any of the three, one ceased to be all three. As public dining options became available to all but the poorest New Yorkers, dining out ceased to be a refined activity. Henceforth, the dining site became the marker of gentility. And the presence of ladies within that site became indispensable.

When female New Yorkers began to partake of public, commercial amusements, the atmosphere of those amusements grew particularly important. One way that ladies' eateries attracted female customers was through space, distinguishing themselves by design. Both Taylor's and Thompson's were huge with over 100 tables at the former and seventy-six at the latter. Fitted up with marble floors, gilded walls, and plush draperies, these restaurants astonished visitors to New York. Taylor's was so richly furnished that William Chambers wondered if "some will think [it] much too fine for the uses to which it is put." The *Daily Tribune* described it as "a perfect blaze of decoration . . . a complete maze of frescoes, mirrors, carving, gilding, and marble." A wall of mirrors on one side reflected a wall of windows on the other. The back wall featured a stained-glass window, flanked by fountains. Crimson-painted and gold-trimmed Corinthian columns stretched to the twenty-two-

foot high, frescoed and gilt ceiling. Classical bronze statues kept watch as waiters rushed orders of oysters, omelettes, sandwiches, eggs, coffee, hot chocolate, and ice cream to the black walnut tables that filled the room. Taylor's served gentlemen as well in a separate dining room.[50]

While visitors to Taylor's and Thompson's marveled at their décor, they were not as impressed with the food. Unlike Delmonico's, at which one could enjoy "a dinner which is not merely a quantity of food deposited in the stomach, but is in every sense and to all the senses a great work of art," at Taylor's, one foreign patron complained, the food "rank[ed] between a fifth-rate Palais Royal restaurant and a second-rate Vienna cream shop."[51] If the food was substandard, it clearly did not matter to the thousands of patrons who frequented Taylor's on an average weekday. Food was not their primary concern. The atmosphere of this vaunted space was the central criterion in defining it as a place of enjoyment and refinement.

Atmosphere, however, was only one factor that made a restaurant acceptable to ladies, and thus genteel. The behaviors displayed in restaurants were equally important. The conduct of diners in the downtown eating houses was not in evidence in the ladies' lunch rooms. Taylor's, Thompson's, and similar establishments were the opposite of Sweeney's with its cacophonous din and rushed pace. "The room is darkened – ladies love such subdued atmospheres," George Foster began his description of "the fashionable lunch for upper tendom," in a ladies' eatery. "We have an extensive bill of fare here," Foster continued, including "ice cream – oysters,

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[50] Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 92; Ferguson, *America by River and Rail*, 49-50; Alfred Pairpoint, quoted in I.M. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1489-1909, vol. 5* (New York, 1815), 1855; Chambers, *Things as They Are in America*, 177; Lockwood, *Manhattan Moves Uptown*, 138-40.
[51] Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light*, 219.

stewed, fried and broiled; -- broiled chickens, omelettes, sandwiches; boiled and poached eggs; boiled ham; beef-steak, coffee, chocolate, toast and butter." In place of the "continuous stream of . . . sounds . . . about the size of the Croton river, flowing through the banks of clattering plates and clashing knives and forks," that characterized Sweeney's, in the ladies' eatery "low-voiced orders [were] entrusted confidentially to the waiters." Of the clientele, Foster noted, "nearly all of them are ladies."[52]

Certain social conventions made some restaurants off limits to ladies as well. George Foster noted that entering a certain ice creamery required climbing a flight of steps. Since doing so meant lifting one's skirts above the ankles, this means of entry, "except in cases of a millinery establishment or a shawl loft [is] of course, not to be tolerated in good society." Nor, for the same reason, did respectable ladies descend into restaurants. Thus, the hundreds of oyster cellars that dotted the city were not an option for them. Another sure way to guarantee that genteel women would not frequent a restaurant was to serve liquor. The line between a restaurant and a drinking saloon was a fine one, and no lady who cared about her reputation could risk entering the latter. Restaurants that courted the ladies' trade would forego hard drinks for delicate patrons.[53]

Liquor may have served as a delineator in defining an establishment as respectable in part because commercial venues that served liquor (such as saloons, oyster cellars, and some restaurants) were associated with commercial sex as well. Indeed, many of the new entertainments that emerged in antebellum New York City

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[52] Ibid., 133-4.
[53] Ibid., 133; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 91-2.

were linked to prostitution. The notorious "third tiers" of the city's theaters – semiprivate balconies reserved for sex-seeking men and their female consorts that served essentially as a way station between the theater and the brothel – are well documented. Prostitutes prowled the balcony in search of customers, as did men in search of willing partners. Such activities prevailed at all of New York's hundreds of theaters. Even the Park, the most elite and respectable among them, had an active third tier. Once a match was made, prostitutes could take their customers back to their nearby brothels. A house of assignation directly behind the Park Theater, and linked to it by a rear alley, catered exclusively to actors. Other brothels were conveniently located adjacent or near to theaters.[54]

Some of the less reputable theaters allowed sexual activity under their roofs, cutting out the need to exit the theater for sexual satisfaction. At the Bowery Theater, for example, "nationally known," according to historian Timothy Gilfoyle, "for its sexual excursions from propriety," sexual activity was blatant. One could find, according to one account, "males and females in strange and indecent positions in the lobbies, and sometimes in the boxes." Small theaters, known as "sub-theaters," which began to proliferate in New York City after 1830, did not even bother with a third tier. Prostitutes sought customers in the main gallery, leading George Foster to describe the sub-theater as "little better than a brothel turned inside out." Not

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[54] In his study of New York's commercial sex trade, Timothy Gilfoyle notes: "Brothels and theaters enjoyed close spatial ties. The six major theaters operating from 1820 to 1829, for example, were located within two blocks of a house of prostitution. During the ensuing two decades, theaters like the Bowery, Broadway, Chatham, Lafayette, National, and Park shared their blocks with similar prurient establishments. . . . By the Civil War, six of fourteen Broadway theaters were sharing the same block as a house of prostitution, often in the rear of the theater, along Mercer or Crosby Street. Other theatrical establishments were never more than a block from a brothel." Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1820* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1992), 112.

surprisingly then, theaters were inappropriate venues for women concerned about their reputations. As English visitor Francis Grund remarked: "[F]ew ladies . . . are ever seen at the theater; and the frequenting of them, even by gentlemen, is not considered a recommendation to their character."[55]

New York's theaters did not have a lock on salacious activity. Other places of commercial entertainment associated with food were associated with sex as well. Dance halls and saloons, for example – sometimes indistinguishable in nineteenth-century New York since dance halls served liquor, and saloons often housed special areas for dancing – were venues for commercial sex, as well as food and drink. Some New York saloons divided set-aside areas into cubicles for prostitutes. Even expensive restaurants might provide their customers with "private supper rooms," or boxes so that male diners could make assignations while eating their meals.[56]

The city's oyster cellars, dining places by day, satisfied other appetites at night. George Foster describes a late-night oyster-cellar on Broadway, paying particular attention to the more sordid side of this locale. He notes: "In the rear . . . is a range of larger apartments called 'private rooms,' where men and women enter promiscuously, eat, drink and make merry and disturb the whole neighborhood with their obscene and disgusting revels, prolonged far beyond midnight." One might assume that these men and women were not respectable but, for Foster, that is not the case. The men represented a spectrum, from "reverend judges" to "undisguised libertines and debauchees." Even a "grave functionary of the city" might be found

[55] Both Foster and Grund are quoted in Ibid., 110, 112.
[56] Ibid., 112.

amidst the male clientele. But the women, he explains, "are of course all of one kind."[57]

Thus, when the site became the marker of gentility, the presence of a lady was indispensable for the maintenance of an establishment's genteel status. And, conversely, the presence of unrespectable women signified a location as ungenteel. When the stakes of gentility were raised, they came to rest upon the fragile shoulders of the lady. If a lady would not patronize a venue, it could not be genteel, no matter how well-mannered or well-dressed the clientele appeared, or how seemingly refined the entertainments.

In her study of mid-nineteenth century middle-class culture, Karen Halttunen has argued persuasively that the parlor became the third realm, between the public and private, where one could make a sure evaluation of another's right to genteel status. Adherence to the genteel performance, as Halttunen terms it, was a crucial component of that evaluation. Only those who were truly genteel could act the part.[58] The parlor, of course, was situated in the home and so not part of the public world of amusements. But, as virtually all New Yorkers came to take part in commercial amusements, a site emerged in the public sphere where women could judge the genteel performance and where the ungenteel could be kept at bay. Women who had to leave their parlors at home could find a corollary in public with similar furnishings and the same name: the ice cream parlor. If ladies had to eat in public, at least they could do so in a place that replicated their home environments. And, furthermore, it

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[57] Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light*, 73-4.

[58] For Halttunen's discussion of the uses of the parlor and the genteel performance, see *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 56-124.

was a place where they could be sure that they were surrounded by gentility because the parlor was the very site of gentility. The same ways to ensure gentility in the private parlor – dress, etiquette, and social ritual – applied to the public parlor where ice cream and other refreshments were served.

Ladies made their entry into the world of commercial leisure through establishments earmarked specifically for them. Eventually, other restaurants attracted ladies as well by eliminating liquor, and replicating the luxurious accommodations of the parlor, hotel ordinary, and ladies' lunchrooms. By mid-century, refined women who had the proper escort had a number of public dining choices. In addition to the ladies' eateries, elite and middle-class women could dine at fine restaurants, such as Delmonico's, Curet's, and the Café de l'Université. Delmonico's had four locations by 1861, all serving French cuisine in vast quantities. The menu, printed in French and English, included 346 entrees, eleven soups, twenty-four liqueurs, fifty-eight wines, and an extensive list of side dishes and desserts. The downtown branches served elaborate dinners to the business elite while the uptown location catered to the evening crowd. Here, for the first time in New York City's history, families began to dine out for the social pleasure of the event, rather than for convenience or necessity. Still, until the 1890s, ladies were not welcome in these restaurants without a suitable male escort.[59]

By the 1860s, New Yorkers of various class backgrounds were eating similar foods to each other, but they ate them in very different locales. New York's

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[59] Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 73; Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 398-9; Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 265; Henry Collins Brown, *Delmonico's: A Story of Old New York* (New York: Valentine's Manual, 1928), 15-18, 48-51; Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 30-1.

ubiquitous oyster houses demonstrate this point quite clearly. The oyster cellars of antebellum New York seem to have been that era's counterpart to today's pizza parlors. Oyster cellars could be found all around New York but the highest concentration of these establishments was on Canal Street, near the Bowery. They were identified by a red and white striped balloon hung outside, illuminated during open hours, which lasted well into the night. Most oyster cellars offered what was known as the "Canal Street Plan." For a few cents, one could eat all the oysters he could stomach. Proprietors frequently punished overly greedy eaters by slipping a bad oyster into what would surely be their final order of the evening.[60]

The clientele of the oyster cellars varied according to the hour. During the day, businessmen and laborers could find a quick, inexpensive lunch in these subterranean establishments. At night, the oyster cellars took on a seedy reputation. George Foster commented on the oyster cellars on Broadway: "every instant sees them swallow up at one entrance a party of rowdy and half-drunken young men, on their way to the theater, the gambling-house, the bowling-saloon, or the brothel – or most likely to all in turn."[61] As noted, the basement setting of these establishments – and the location of many of them in working-class neighborhoods -- made them off limits to any woman who cared about her reputation, and many men of refinement as well.

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[60] Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 26-8; Evans, "Knickerbocker Hotels," 400; Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 98-9. For contemporary descriptions of New York's oyster houses, see: Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light*, 73-6; Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (1842; Reprint, New York: The Modern Library, 1996), 27-8; Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 202-4; Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, 51-4; MacKay, *Life and Liberty*, 24-8; Oldmixon, *Transatlantic Wanderings*, 28.

[61] Foster, *New-York by Gas-Light*, 73.

And thus, genteel folk frequented different establishments, which served similar menus to the oyster cellars but carried far finer reputations. Perhaps the most famous of these was the oyster house owned by Thomas Downing, one of the many African-American caterers in antebellum New York. No red-striped balloon, no steps to descend, Downing ran a restaurant which rivaled Delmonico's in its appointments and its clientele. While the specialty of the house was oysters, the menu had varied offerings. And Downing did not serve the popular shellfish on the Canal Street Plan. One paid for a set amount of oysters prepared in a variety of ways. They included: raw, fried, or stewed, like in the oyster cellars. But a diner at Downing's could also order scalloped oysters, oyster pie, fish with oyster sauce, and even poached turkey stuffed with oysters. In addition to the politicians, bankers, and merchants who listed Downing's as their favorite New York restaurant, properly escorted women were welcome there as well. The city's laborers were not.[62]

By the 1860s, New York housed thousands of restaurants of various kinds. "They vary as greatly in their appearance and prices," Browne wrote, "as in the character of their patrons. They range from the elegance and costliness of Delmonico's and Taylor's to the subterranean sites where men are fed like swine, and dirt is served gratis in unhomoeopathic doses. There, are silver and porcelain, and crystal, and fine linen, and dainty service. Here, are broken earthen-ware, soiled table-cloths, and coarse dishes. In Fourteenth street, you pay for a single meal what would keep you for a week below Chambers Street, and give you dyspepsia withal

[62] John H. Hewitt, "Mr. Downing and His Oyster House: The Life and Good Works of an African-American Entrepreneur," *New York History* 74:3 (July 1993): 229-233; Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 27. Another oyster house which served New York's elite and middle classes was Dorlan's, located in Fulton Market. For a description, see Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 202-4.

unless you have the stomach of an ostrich."[63] The up-town restaurants, Browne explained, "furnish quite a contrast to those in the lower quarter of the City. They have no confusion, no bustle, no jostling, no door-slamming. Ladies elegantly and elaborately dressed go with their escorts to upper Broadway and Fourteenth street; go in handsome equipages, amid flower and toilette odors, and with all the suggestive poetry that night lends to a fine woman, intoxicated with her own sweetness, and the consciousness that she is lovable to every sense."[64]

Thus, by the 1860s, one seeking to dine out in New York could avail himself of a multitude of dining options. But without the proper credentials, he was not welcome at all of them. Respectable New Yorkers carried over the dining performance honed in the city's hotel ordinaries into the genteel restaurants that dotted the city landscape. Location, space, and performance determined the quality of these restaurants as the option to dine out alone ceased to connote gentility.

[63] Browne, *The Great Metropolis*, 261.
[64] Ibid., 265.

CHAPTER FOUR

"THE IMPORTANCE OF A HOME" DINING AND DOMESTICITY

In 1854, shortly after her marriage to Gordon Ford, a New York businessman and lawyer, Emily Fowler Ford wrote to her sister-in-law: "Our home is very delightful to us and we will try to make it so to our relatives."[1] The editor of *Harper's Weekly* would have approved. "The institution of the Household," read a notice in *Harper's*, "is necessary before the lives of the three persons constituting it can be considered perfectly fulfilled. The Husband, the Wife, the Child, must have learned those duties which can alone be learned in the Household ere their moral natures are completed. People who do not live under their own roof are ignorant of the most beautiful side of life."[2]

This most beautiful side of life – the domestic side – received a great deal of attention in the nineteenth century. Paeans to the home were everywhere: in novels, ministers' sermons, newspapers and magazines, and books of all kinds. More then merely a shelter or dwelling place, the ideal home, as represented in volumes of antebellum writing, was a place of refuge, of comfort, and of hospitality. As the world – particularly the urban world – came to be represented as unsafe and

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[1] Emily Fowler Ford to Marcia Ford, New York, 13 January 1854, Ford Family Papers, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, New York Public Library.
[2] "The Man About Town, Hotel Morals," *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, 5 September 1857, 563.

untrustworthy, the home was idealized as a moral haven. The "romantic revival" movement, which gained adherents during the early nineteenth century, focused on the symbolic aspects of houses, its members arguing that one's living environment strongly shaped individual and national character. "Nothing has more to do with the morals, the civilization, and refinement of a nation, than its prevailing Architecture," wrote one romantic revivalist. "The moral and refined seek a home where the virtuous influences that are reflected from Beauty and Order, are congenial to their cultivated minds and moral constitutions."[3]

Advocates of romantic revivalism included ministers like Horace Bushnell, domestic reformers like Catharine Beecher, and architects such as Calvert Vaux and Andrew Jackson Downing. The mid-nineteenth century saw a flood of literature from these and other writers and cultural arbiters that formed an ongoing discussion about the proper uses of the home, both symbolic and actual. Myriad architectural plan books were published, instructing builders and prospective home owners on the optimal uses of homes. The boom in the plan book industry began in the first decades of the century, when twenty new plan books were published, but it exploded by the 1850s, with 93 new books. Novels, travelers' observations, domestic tracts, sermons, and articles and stories in the periodical literature kept pace with and added to the architects' advice and celebration of domesticity.[4]

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[3] Oliver P. Smith, *The Domestic Architect* (Buffalo, 1852), iii. On the romantic revival movement, see Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Domestic Architecture as an Index to Social History: The Romantic Revival and the Cult of Domesticity in America, 1840-1870," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, ed. Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern Press, 1988), 535-549.

[4] Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 243; Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "The Vision of the Dining Room: Plan

Domestic ideology dichotomized the public and private realms, generally along the lines of gender. While the public sphere of commerce and politics – the province of men – was brutal and cold, the private, domestic sphere – the province of women – was comforting and warm. Explicit in this ideology was the notion that woman was the moral guardian of the domestic sphere and the family circle. "For she, with harmonizing will," wrote Lydia Sigourney, one of the most popular writers of the early nineteenth century,

> Her pleasures in her duties found,
> And strove, with still advancing skill
> To make her home's secluded bound
> An Eden refuge, sweet and blest,
> When weary, he returned for rest.[5]

Only a woman could create within the home the proper environment of refuge, nurturing, and moral guidance for her husband and children. [6]

Book Dreams and Middle Class Realities," in *Dining in America, 1850-1900,* ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 146.

[5] Lydia Sigourney, *The Western Home and Other Poems* (Philadelphia: Parry & MacMillan, 1854), 31.

[6] For examples of domestic ideology in architectural planbooks, see Andrew Jackson Downing, *Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (New York and London: Wiley & Putnam, 1841), *Cottage Residences; or A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas* (New York and London: Wiley & Putnam, 1842), and *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1850); Vaux, *Villas and Cottages: A Series of Designs Prepared for Execution in the United States* (1857; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1968); Samuel Sloan, *The Model Architect* (Philadelphia: E.G. Jones and Co., 1852). For an example of the idealized home in literature, see Catharine Sedgwick, *Home* (New York: George Dearborn & Co., 1837). Antebellum periodicals, such as *Harper's Weekly, Harper's Monthly, Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine, Ballou's Pictorial,* and especially *Godey's Lady's Book* celebrated the home in their pages, in poems, stories, articles, and house plans. The extensive nineteenth-century advice literature in personal conduct and household management also forwarded this ideal. See, for example, Eliza Ware Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend* (Boston: American Stationer's Co., 1836); Miss Catherine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and at School* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1845); Sarah Josepha Hale, *The Good Housekeeper: Or the Way to Live Well, and to Be Well While We Live* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, & Co., 1839).

The nineteenth-century notion of separate spheres – of the division of the world into public and private realms – became, in the twentieth century, a historiographic paradigm.[7] A generation of historians has used this model to understand nineteenth-century American culture and particularly (though not exclusively) the lives of women, the supposed guardians of the private sphere. They have engaged in a lively debate over the impact of separate spheres and the ideology of domesticity on the antebellum middle-class home, family, and gender roles. Students of working-class culture have held that, for their subjects, the ideal of separate spheres simply did not apply. In recent years, scholars have also argued that even middle-class and elite women were not confined to the home, nor to the private sphere. They highlight these women's activities in reform movements, church affairs, renumerative work, political activism, and even childrearing to show that they were frequently involved in quite public activities.[8]

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[7] The "separate spheres argument" has held sway in women's history for nearly half a century. The argument goes as follows: Immediately following the American Revolution, industrialism began to take hold in the United States. Transportation networks were laid, communications became easier and more efficient, and American cities experienced a period of unprecedented growth. Work was removed from the home, in favor of workshops and factories. Relationships between employers and their workers became less familial as apprentices, journeymen, and laborers lived in working-class neighborhoods instead of in their employers' homes. Meanwhile, the middle-class home became a private space, separated from the harsh world of work. Prescriptive advisers urged middle-class women to participate in a cult of domesticity, to create a safe, morally protected haven from the treacherous, morally ambiguous public sphere. Increasingly, historians have argued, the private and public spheres diverged. Men alone inhabited the public world while women (middle-class women, at any rate) settled exclusively into the domestic realm. Respectable women's mobility in public was quite restricted. Whole areas of the city – for example the commercial districts – were off limits to them. The home became the center of socialization for middle-class Americans.

[8] For a historiographical treatment of the debates over separate spheres, see Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988), 9-39. A collection of articles in a recent volume of the *Journal of the Early Republic* contributes further to this debate and shows its continued salience. See "Redefining Womanly Behavior in the Early Republic: Essays from

Recent studies have indicated that the domestic sphere itself was not nearly as self-contained and isolated from the public world as the ideal would suggest. Middle-class men still transacted business in their homes as they greeted and entertained business associates. Their wives engaged in a world of work inside the home that bolstered their commercial interests as well as their domestic ones. And the home was a workspace for the domestic servants who increasingly were relied upon to ensure that it was indeed a comfortable and refined environment for those who dwelled within.[9] Students of antebellum urban culture have further identified certain spaces within the home as semi-public in function. Karen Halttunen, for example, argues that the middle-class parlor served as a third realm between the public and private spheres. Thus, there was a space set aside inside the home for public uses.[10]

While the debate over separate spheres has evolved and been enriched over the years, its central tenet – that the homes of the middle and elite classes were separate from the public world and that women were the guardians of the domestic realm – still adheres. Even scholars who argue against the idea that women were

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a SHEAR Symposium," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21:1 (Spring 2001): 71-123. Christine Stansell argues against applying separate spheres to working-class women in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York 1789-1860* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987). On women's activities in the public sphere, see Lori Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

[9] On servants and the home as a place of work, see Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Jeanne Boydston, *Home & Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 109-148.

[10] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). See also Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: People, Parlors, and Upholstery, 1850-1930* (Rochester, NY: Strong Museum, 1988).

confined to the private sphere do not challenge the notion that such a sphere existed and that women were, for all intents and purposes, in charge of it. However, an examination into the uses of the home, and even the prescriptive literature focusing on it, calls this paradigm into question. By detailing the rituals of the parlor, Halttunen showed that in urban, middle-class homes, this one room was geared toward public purposes. But another room in these houses – the dining room – was simultaneously a public *and* private space. Families received guests in this room frequently, and often spontaneously. And even when guests were not present, the dining room served public purposes; indeed it was a staging ground for the outside world. Character was formed around the dining table and there, children were prepared for entry into society. And every day, a dress rehearsal of sorts took place at the dining room table, its audience the domestic servants who lived and worked in these middle-class and elite homes. An exploration of the discussions of the antebellum dining room complicates both the notion of separate spheres, and the idea that women embraced their role as the protectors of domesticity. The outcry against furnishing the home for social purposes, and against permanent hotel residency with its dangerous consequences for family life, suggest an impulse, among many antebellum women, toward sacrificing family stability for public sociability.

The dining room was a new entity in the homes of antebellum New York. Gotham's eighteenth-century dwellings tended toward a multi-purpose use of space. These older homes generally contained a "hall" where the family worked, ate, slept, and sometimes cooked. Upstairs rooms were used for storage and sleeping. Families

sometimes added a parlor or two but these rooms were not specialized, as they would become in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Rather, they were used as sitting, eating, and sleeping rooms. Even in the so-called "dining rooms" of elite homes, other activities took place. These rooms, for example, might contain a desk or a sitting area.[11] "It is no uncommon occurrence," wrote one early nineteenth-century observer, "for temporary beds to be laid out in dining rooms. . . being of course, removed sufficiently early in the morning to prevent inconvenience."[12]

The setting aside of a specialized space for dining in many of New York's antebellum homes reflected a general shift in the structure and uses of the homes of New Yorkers above middling means. Houses in colonial New York had contained work as well as domestic spaces. Craftsmen's workshops, merchants' countinghouses, and lawyers' and brokers' offices were located in their houses. Grocers and dry goods vendors lived in the same structures as their shops, and bakers, blacksmiths, and potters were likely to have ovens, forges, and kilns in the yards behind their homes. Workers – including journeymen, laborers, apprentices, and slaves – lived with their employers, contributing to the household system of labor that held sway until the nineteenth century. Women of the house participated in this system of labor through the skills of housewifery handed down through generations.

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[11] On construction and layout of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century homes, see Charles Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1929* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972); Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 103-27; Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 47-8; Russell Lynes, *The Domesticated Americans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).

[12] Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orne, and Brown, 1818), 40.

Along with slaves and servants, they contributed to the household economy through cooking, washing, weaving, sewing, spinning, and housekeeping.[13]

The nineteenth century marked the beginnings of a move away from the household system of labor to a separation of work and domestic activities. A number of factors contributed to this development including: the abolition of slavery in New York, the expansion of the market economy, the structural changes in craft production due to industrial advances, and the rejection of the traditional patriarchal system on the part of many laborers and journeymen. The division of domestic and workspace proceeded unevenly in New York City, where it was still ongoing into the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, a steady movement toward this end is evident in city directories of the first half of the nineteenth century. While only two percent of the city's proprietors maintained a separate home in 1790, seventy-five percent could claim ownership of a home *and* shop by 1840.[14]

The removal of commercial activities from these homes meant that more room could be given over to dedicated uses, and respectable nineteenth-century homes embraced a far more specialized use of space than their earlier counterparts. New York rowhouses built during the first few decades of the century were larger, contained more rooms, and were more lavishly furnished than their predecessors. The rooms within these homes had specified functions – formal parlors for

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[13] Boydston, *Home & Work*, 1-29; Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 51-60.

[14] Diana DiZerega Wall, *The Archaeology of Gender: Separating the Spheres in Urban America* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1994), 34. The separation of work and domestic functions within the home was a major aspect of nineteenth-century industrialization. For a treatment of the factors which brought about this shift, see Richard D. Brown, *Modernization: The Transformation of American Life, 1800-1865* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

entertaining company, kitchens devoted solely to food preparation, and dining rooms which, by 1850, were de rigueur even in rural middling homes. Architect Calvert Vaux smiled upon those rural folk who followed the dictates of refinement and set aside a proper space for dining in their homes. And he singled out for derision "some farmers" who "make a constant practice of taking all meals in the kitchen." This custom, Vaux concluded, "marks a low state of civilization."[15]

The separation of commercial and domestic space was particularly plausible in New York City since so many new dwellings were built there during the first half of the century. The growing prosperity of the city, extraordinary increase in population, and disastrous fires that repeatedly destroyed large swathes of Manhattan led to periodic reconstructions. New York's residents and visitors alike commented frequently upon the constant building and moving going on in the city. In 1825, a year that according to Stokes *Iconography* saw 3000 homes under construction in New York, a visitor wrote to his sons in Boston:

> This city is a little world; a world, at this time in an uproar. People here are in the habit of moving, the most of them, once a year. This is done, or rather begun, on the first day of May. . . . It is at this time also that they begin to pull down old houses and build anew. More of this is doing this season than at any former time. There is not a street in the compact part of the city where they are not pulling down houses. Many of these are very good. Hundreds of them have been built in ten, fifteen or twenty years. They must come down to give place to others more convenient or better.[16]

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[15] Descriptions of nineteenth-century New York homes may be found in Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, 7-86, and Lynes, *The Domesticated Americans*. On the dining room, see Clark, "The Vision of the Dining Room." Quotation is from Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, 145.
[16] Seth Chapin to Joshua B. and Moses T. Chapin, New York City, May 26, 1825, Manuscripts Collection, American Antiquarian Society.

Gotham's face was constantly changing, prompting a mid-century journalist to write: "New York is notoriously the largest and least loved of any of our great cities. Why should it be loved as a city? It is never the same city for a dozen years altogether."[17]

The federal-style buildings of the turn of the nineteenth century established the general layout of New York row homes. Houses were three or four stories high, and built on average lot sizes of 100 feet deep and twenty-five feet wide. The grid plan, which informed the street pattern of New York from 1811 forward, constrained the structure of these homes, making them remarkably similar to one another.[18] The need for rapid construction of homes as the city's housing stock failed to keep pace with its growing population also contributed to the uniformity of the houses and streetscape.

Travelers and other observers remarked on the regularity of middling and better homes of New York City. "The same description," one observer wrote in 1835, "will apply to five hundred [private houses] . . . the same plan being almost invariably adhered to and varying little throughout the whole city, save in the dimensions of the rooms, and perhaps a few inches in the height of the stories." Similarly, Frances Trollope wrote: "The great defect in the houses is their extreme uniformity – when you have seen one, you have seen all."[19] The interior layout of these homes followed a regular plan as well. The basement contained the kitchen and

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[17] *Harpers' Monthly Magazine*, June 1856.
[18] Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, 14.
[19] William Ross, Esq., Architect, "Street Houses of the City of New York," *The Architectural Record* (July 9, 1899), 55. First published in *The Architectural Magazine and Journal of Improvement in Architecture, Building and Furnishing and the Various Arts and Trades Connected Therewith* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green & Longman, 1835). Mrs. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, vol. 2, 2[d] ed. (London: Whittaker, Trencher, and Co., 1832), 193.

family dining room, front and back parlors constituted the first floor, and bedrooms took up the upper floors. Strikingly absent from these homes were the commercial workspaces which were found in most eighteenth-century homes.

While rooted in economic factors, the separation of commercial and domestic space had strong social ramifications. For the city's laborers, living separately from their employers and among those of similar economic circumstances contributed to the development of a working-class consciousness and culture, distinct from that of the middle classes. Meanwhile, as real estate prices in New York soared, home ownership -- out of the reach of laboring New Yorkers -- became a crucial marker of independence and middle-class status.[20] The symbolic ideal of "the home" also played an important role in middle-class identity. Prescriptive literature focusing on domesticity, and its central proposition that the home should be a haven for the family, was geared toward a middle-class audience. Women were urged to furnish their homes for the comfort of their families, rather than for the approbation of guests. As a new entity in many homes, the dining room claimed special attention in this body of literature. Discussions of the dining room and its uses were part of larger

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[20] The best work on shifts in property and home ownership in New York and the rise of a rentier class is Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*. Blackmar makes clear that even many middling New Yorkers could not afford the rising costs of home ownership. On the development of New York's working class, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & The Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979). On working-class women, see Stansell, *City of Women*. On working-class and middle-class formation as linked to property relations in Rochester, NY, see Paul Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 37-61. On middle-class formation, see Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle-Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. pp. 138-191 for a treatment of middle-class housing and property relations. See also Blumin's "The Hypothesis of Middle-Class Formation in Antebellum America: A Critique and Some Proposals," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985): 299-338.

debates about domesticity and the ideal of the antebellum home, along with familiar questions of character formation, the lures and snares of the city, the ever-present "servant problem," gender roles, and even the stability of national institutions.

The dining room played a particularly important symbolic role for advocates of domesticity because meal times increasingly were the sole, or at least most regular, opportunities for family socialization. Families had of course dined together long before the 1800s, but it was in the early part of that century that they increasingly spent large portions of the day apart from each other. As commercial and domestic space became stratified, husbands left the home for work, children spent the day at school, and mothers made calls, shopped, and ran errands. The family meal and particularly dinner became an extremely important ritual, a time for the family to gather, converse, and instruct. It was in the dining room, Calvert Vaux explained in 1857:

> [T]hat the different members of the family are sure to assemble several times a day, though they may be almost completely separated at other times by circumstances, or the various pursuits that occupy their attention, and it is highly desirable that such a room should fitly and cheerfully express its purpose, and be one of the most agreeable in the house, so as to heighten the value of this constant and familiar reunion as much as possible.[21]

Likewise, in her *Letters to Persons Engaged in Domestic Service*, Catharine Beecher asserted that servants should not expect to eat with their employers. "[T]he master of a family," she wrote, "is often so engaged in business that the only time he can see his wife and children together is at meals."[22]

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[21] Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, 145.
[22] Catharine Beecher, *Letters to Persons Who Are Engaged in Domestic Service* (New York: Leavitt & Trow, 1842), 89.

"The first great defect," James Fenimore Cooper complained, "in the ordering of American domestic economy [is that] the eating, or dining-room, is almost invariably one of the best in the house. The first great improvement to be made in the household of these people," he continued, "is to substitute taste for prodigality in their tables; and the second . . . will be to choose an apartment for their meals that shall be . . . suited to the habits of the family, plain in its ornaments, and removed from the ordinary occupations of those who are to enjoy it."[23] Cooper touched on many of the tensions reflected in antebellum writings on the dining room. Prescriptive writers recoiled in horror at the idea that homemakers might design their dining rooms to impress guests rather than to provide comfort and convenience to the family. "Cramping the conveniences and comfort of a family, in order to secure elegant rooms, to show company," Catharine Beecher warned, "is a weakness and folly, which it is hoped will every year become less common."[24] At the same time, domestic advisers wrung their hands over the perceived propensity of their contemporaries to assign the dining room to a lowly position in the house, again at the expense of the family's comfort. And they shunned the prospect of families using the dining room for varied purposes, arguing, as Calvert Vaux did, that "the art of eating and drinking wisely and well is so important to our social happiness" that it merited a space devoted solely to it. [25]

Scholars who have focused on the development of the dining room have argued that during its formative years in the early nineteenth century, this room was

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[23] James Fenimore Cooper, *Notions of the Americans as Picked up by a Travelling Bachelor* (1825; reprint, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1963), 147.
[24] Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 261.
[25] Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, 18.

set aside exclusively for the use of the family. "The middle-class dining room . . . was intended to be used largely for the family rather than for entertaining guests," writes historian Clifford Clark. Archaeologist Diana DiZerega Wall goes beyond intention to action in stating that throughout the antebellum period, "dinner continued to be primarily a private, family meal" among New York's middle class. Wall argues, further, that women, "unless they were traveling, rarely dined out at the homes of those who were not family members."[26]

These scholars have drawn their conclusions based both on prescriptive writings and examinations of the layout of antebellum urban homes. In New York, as noted, the arrangement of middle-class and elite homes differed little from one to the next. English architect William Ross described them as follows, beginning with the basement, which contained:

> [T]he entrance, passage . . . staircase, kitchen, oven, and in the front . . . the large room . . . the windows of which look into the front area, and where the family live, except when they have company. . . . On the principal floor the arrangement is much more simple than on the basement, there being only two rooms, communicating by folding or sliding doors, and the hall or passage, which likewise contains the staircase. These rooms, called the dining and drawing rooms, are generally speaking, only used for company, the family usually living in the basement, as before observed.[27]

The prevalence of both a basement area "where the family live," and a formal dining room on the first floor has caused some confusion for both contemporaneous and contemporary observers. The existence of a formal dining room set aside exclusively for company has led them to argue that homeowners only had company for dinner in a formal setting, reserving the basement area exclusively for their own use. In the face of little evidence that any but elite persons hosted and attended formal dinner

[26] Clark, "The Vision of the Dining Room," 154; Wall, *The Archaeology of Gender*, 115.
[27] Ross, "Street Houses," 54-5.

parties during the first half of the nineteenth century, historians have concluded that dinner was strictly a family affair.

This circumstance of course begs the question: why have a formal dining room at all if not to use it? But in fact, it appears that what Ross saw as a dining room for company was, in fact, a parlor that some families turned into a dining room when hosting a formal dinner party. Ross' compatriot Joseph Gurney described a similar floor plan but with different terminology, writing that the basement floor in New York "generally contains the dining room," while "the drawing room . . . usually occupies the whole of the first story, being divided in two by large folding doors."[28] It is also telling that Frances Trollope, a guest at many dinner parties in New York's homes commented: "In nearly all the houses the dining and drawing-rooms are on the same floor, with ample folding doors between them."[29] Trollope made no mention of the basement or upper floors of the homes she visited.

Homemakers who hosted dinner parties (affairs of up to thirty people, where strict codes of conduct and formality applied) likely did use one of their first-floor "parlors" or "drawing-rooms" for these entertainments. But using this room for meals on a daily basis was simply impractical in the first half of the nineteenth century. The kitchen was located in the basement, the dumbwaiter was just emerging on the scene, and formal dining furniture was simply too heavy and cumbersome to arrange on a regular basis. Those, like Trollope, who visited the homes of New York strictly for formal affairs surmised that the room in which they dined was the family's

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[28] Joseph Gurney, quoted in Lockwood, *Bricks and Brownstones*, 14.
[29] Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 193.

dining room. But the actual dining room, used by the family on a daily basis, was generally a basement room in New York homes.[30]

Despite the informal nature of a basement dining room, many New Yorkers did entertain guests in that space. Diaries and letters of middle-class antebellum women make constant mention of family members, friends and acquaintances who came to dine, often unexpectedly, and sometimes every day. For example, Mrs. William W. Todd, the wife of a New York businessman, wrote in her diary in 1851: "My son William James and Angeline dined here. Wednesday sister Sally Todd and Mrs. Winfield dined with us. Friday Mrs. Brigham and daughter dined here. Sunday Theodore and Mary were here. How pleasant it is," she concluded, "when friend meets friend." And Caroline Dunstan, who kept a diary from her home in New York for many years, makes note of guests coming to dinner multiple times a week, as well as frequent meals at the homes of friends and family members. Dunstan often mentions guests arriving for dinner spontaneously. For example, on February 14, 1856, she returned home after making a call and "found Mrs. Megary at our house, she dined with us." A week later, "Miss Mary Purdy called and staid to dinner." And on another day, "Mrs. Blackwell & Mrs. C. Jones, came as we sat at an early dinner. dined with us." Eliza Leslie suggested that her readers "have on the side-table some

[30] Historians agree that dinner parties were hosted exclusively by the elite in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was not until after the Civil War, when technological advances allowed for entertaining with fewer servants and on a less expensive scale, that dinner parties became a custom of the middle classes. See Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 80-90; Clark, "The Vision of the Dining Room," 155-6. On elite dinner parties, see Barbara G. Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, D.C.: The American Institute of Architects Press, 1990), 103-36; Louise Conway Belden, *The Festive Tradition: Table Decorations and Desserts in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983).

extra plates, knives, glasses, &c., in case of a friend coming in unexpectedly, and consenting to sit down and take dinner."[31]

When she relates in her diary the renovation of her house to lay underground pipes, Caroline Dunstan opens a window into her home and its uses. When the basement floor is unusable, she notes, "All our meals [were taken] up stairs." When a friend visits during this same period, she finds it worthy of recording: "Miss Hyslop dined on pot pie in 2nd story," suggesting that under normal circumstances, this meal would have been conducted in the basement dining room. After the construction is finished, Dunstan reports that, once again, they have resumed their practice of dining downstairs. It appears that when she received social calls that did not include dinner, Dunstan greeted guests in the parlor. But she is not dissuaded from receiving guests simply because her parlor is indisposed. During that time, she "received company in the back bedroom."[32]

Thus, despite contentions on the part of antebellum advisers and modern scholars that the dining room was reserved for family use, it seems that a number of middle-class women in New York received acquaintances, friends, and family alike in their dining rooms. And those guests frequently reciprocated, inviting their friends to dine at their homes as well. On these occasions, hostesses entertained their guests in the space where they took their daily meals and turned their "family" room to public purposes. It is a firmly-held contention in the historiography of the antebellum

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[31] Mrs. William W. Todd diary, 1 October 1 1851, Diaries Collection, New-York Historical Society; Caroline Dunstan diary, 14 February 1856, 20 February 1856, 24 October 1856, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, New York Public Library. Dunstan records visitors dining at her home several times a week in the diary she kept during the years 1856-7, 1859-63, and 1865-70; Miss [Eliza] Leslie, *The House Book: Or, a Manual of Domestic Economy. For Town and Country* (Philadelphia: Carey & Hart, 1844), 259.

[32] Dunstan diary, 25 April 1856, 3 May 1856, 5 May 1856.

period that during the nineteenth century, the home *became* a private space as public affairs such as commerce were removed from the domestic realm. But the constant receiving of friends and acquaintances in the space that domestic advisers hoped would be the most private of all indicates that, in fact, the home was far from a cloistered realm.[33]

Indeed, if one juxtaposes the daily record kept by middle-class women in New York with the prescriptive literature regarding the uses of the dining room, it becomes even clearer that women ignored the advice of cultural arbiters on the proper use of these spaces. Champions of domestic ideology were appalled at the practice, particularly common in New York homes, of placing the dining room in the basement. Visitors to Gotham frequently commented on this peculiarity and wondered why New York homes should be constructed in so odd a fashion. The likely explanation is that builders of New York houses in the nineteenth century followed the style, carried over from Dutch influences, of constructing a stoop entrance to the first floor. This created a basement-level floor above the cellar complete with a separate entrance. The basement floor housed the kitchen for obvious and practical reasons – it was close to the cellar where foodstuffs were stored, and adjacent to the backyard where kitchen gardens and exterior workspaces were located. Since it would have been impractical to carry food upstairs for thrice-daily meals, the dining room was placed on the same floor as the kitchen.

Despite these functional considerations, domestic advisers lamented the fact that the room the family used most frequently – the dining room – should be the least

[33] Elizabeth Blackmar notes the multiple public uses of the home in her chapter on "The Social Meanings of Housing." See Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 109-48.

attractive and inviting room in the house while the best chambers were laid aside exclusively for company. Calvert Vaux complained:

> It has been, and is too much the custom, both in town and country houses, to consider the dining-room as a part of the house to be used solely for eating and drinking purposes, and to give it but little attention for that reason. It is, indeed, quite common to find, even in comparatively large houses, a meagrely-furnished apartment in the basement set apart as the scene of whatever daily festivity is carried on in the house.

Vaux, who considered dining central to physical and spiritual well-being, concluded that "it deserves to be developed under somewhat more favorable circumstances than is possible in a basement dining-room."[34]

Implicit in such complaints was the conviction that the location, comfort, and décor of the dining room was sacrificed while families focused all of their money and attention on creating opulent, yet uncomfortable and uninviting spaces for receiving guests. In 1862, a hopeful editorial in the *Atlantic Monthly* read:

> Formerly (and the view is not wholly obsolete) the whole house was a reception-hall; the domestic life of the inmates being a secondary matter, swept into some corner. . . . But the austere aspect of the shut-up "best parlor" of our grandfathers, with its closed blinds and chilly chintz covers, showed that the tables were beginning to turn, and the household to assert its rights and civilly to pay off the guest for his usurpations. Henceforth he is welcome, but he is secondary; it was not for him that the house was built; and if it comes to choosing, he can be dispensed with.[35]

This writer was correct in one assessment: that the idea of sacrificing family comfort for the approbation of strangers was not obsolete. As the nineteenth century wore on, prescriptive writers at least began to champion rather than chastise those who decorated their homes in lavish style. But in the earlier decades of the century, domestic advisers still warned of the misfortunes that could befall those who

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[34] Vaux, *Villas and Cottages*, 18.
[35] "House-Building," *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1862, 428.

sacrificed domestic comfort in favor of other priorities. And if the shrillness and frequency of their complaints is any indication, they felt they were fighting a losing battle.

In fact, some of the writings on the subject seem to be more proscriptive than prescriptive. One example is "Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge: A Story of Domestic Life," written by domestic adviser Eliza Leslie and serialized in Godey's *Lady's Book* in 1841.[36] As the story opens, Charlotte, a young woman from New York City is newly wed to Harvey Woodbridge of Philadelphia. Upon her first view of her new home in the Quaker City, Charlotte is shocked to find that the house is laid out so differently from the home she grew up in. "'Ah!" – exclaimed Charlotte," upon entering. "The basement, back and front, is entirely filled up with cellars. How very ridiculous!" Her husband replies that this is the custom in Philadelphia, to which she responds: "Now in New York nothing is more usual than to have a nice sitting-room down in the basement-story, just in front of the kitchen. . . . In ma's family, as in hundreds of others all over New York, it is the place where we sit when we have no company, and where we always eat." Mr. Woodbridge is perplexed for, when courting this woman, he was never escorted to a basement room, but rather to a formal parlor. But his wife explains: "To be sure you did not. I do not say that it is the fashion for young ladies to receive their beaux in the basement room. But beaux and husbands are different things."[37]

While Charlotte is disappointed in the lack of a basement dining room, she nonetheless sets aside one "vile little room" for the exclusive use of herself and her

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[36] "Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge," parts 1-4, *The Lady's Book*, 1841: 2-6, 74-8, 109-14, 168-74
[37] Ibid., 3.

husband. Harvey had hoped to use this room as a library but Charlotte convinces him (begrudgingly) that this apartment should serve no other purpose than as an "eating-room, or a dining-room, or a sitting-room, or whatever you please to call it – to take our meals in without danger of being caught at them, and to stay in when I am not drest and do not wish to be seen." Charlotte recognizes the importance of decorating herself with the most fashionable clothing available, and of furnishing their new home's parlors in the finest, and most fragile of materials. But she drives her husband close to madness by insisting that these rooms are off limits, lest they be soiled. To each of Harvey's complaints and protestations, she replies that she is following the example of her mother who, despite her father's opposition, decorated their home for company and reserved the basement dining room for the family's use. "To be sure I've heard ma' say she had some trouble in breaking pa' into it," she explains, "but he had to give up."[38]

Harvey Woodbridge spends months cajoling his wife to make their home a comfortable space for themselves and their guests, to no avail. Charlotte drives away all of her servants for they cannot bear to work in so ungracious a home. When her brothers visit Philadelphia, they choose to stay in a hotel rather than suffer in her inhospitable home. Harvey himself is forced to dine at a hotel, so repelled is he by the stingy, unpalatable meals his wife provides. And yet Mrs. Woodbridge continues to choose fashion over comfort and hospitality. Finally, a visit from Charlotte's father serves to reform his daughter. When she sees how unhappy and bitter her father has become as a result of her mother's failure to create a proper, inviting home (replete with a suitable dining room), she converts the vile little room into a library

[38] Ibid., 3-5

and henceforth serves inviting meals in their beautiful *and* welcoming ground-floor dining room.

The rash of published admonitions against furnishing the home for the entertainment of guests instead of for the comfort of the family attests to the likelihood that homemakers invited, rather than avoided, the encroachment of the public sphere upon the domestic realm. An 1857 article in *Putnam's Magazine* railed against excessive decoration of the dining room, encouraged by people who "seek to induce a fashion which has no root in our instincts and relations."[39] And "Mr. and Mrs. Woodbridge" was but one of the stories in *The Lady's Book* that focused on the bastardization of domestic life caused by women focusing too much attention on the entertainment aspects of their homes. Interestingly, in all of these stories, it is the women – the alleged protectors of the home and celebrants of the domestic sphere – who insist on turning it to public and frivolous purposes.

Critiques of permanent hotel living also expressed the fear of women rejecting their ideal role as protectors of domesticity. While most middle-class New Yorkers set up private residences, a significant number, as noted in Chapter Three, opted for the convenience and luxury of permanent residency in hotels. Hotels were commercial endeavors, and public institutions. They did not afford the privacy that was central to proper domestic arrangements. A fictional resident of New York City's "St. Thunder Hotel," complained about his noisy and visible neighbors: "Opposite us, across the court-yard, lived a bachelor . . . a person much given to ablutions, and therefore commendable, but negligent in respect of the trifling matter of closing his shutters." Next door, resided a lady "who made funny jokes after she

[39] "Home Building in America," *Putnam's Magazine*, July 1857, 109.

had gone to bed," and her husband "whose appreciation thereof" disturbed their exhausted neighbors nightly.[40]

Hotels' "legitimate sphere" was "as receptacles for the traveling public [or] resident bachelors," but certainly not for women and families.[41] Indeed, the consequences of this group living in hotels were dire. *Harper's Weekly,* whose pages were filled with attacks on the system of hotel living complained that, as a result of hotel life, American women were incapable of caring for their children, and counseling and comforting their husbands. They "can neither work, nor talk, nor cook, nor make a bed, nor form a rational judgment on passing events, nor interchange sensible ideas." This "decline of great-heartedness, and mental sobriety, and habits of usefulness among our women," the writer concluded, was a greater danger to the republic than "the Slavery Question. . . State enmities . . . the Mormons, or the Secessionists, or any other political entity."[42]

The concern that hotel living was creating a generation of idle, vapid women, and unruly, undisciplined children, was foremost in the minds of many European visitors as well. "I could almost tell whether a lady in America kept her own establishment or lived at a hotel, the difference of manners was so marked; and, what is worse, it is chiefly the young married couples who are to be found there," sniffed Englishman Frederick Marryat. And his compatriot William Chambers complained that "children in such establishments . . . . are a sore trial of temper to the guests generally. Flying up and down the passages with hoops, yelling, crying, and tumbling about in everybody's way, they are clearly out of place, and constitute an

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[40] "American Homes in New York Hotels," *Harper's Weekly*, 26 December 1857, 824.
[41] "Decline and Fall of Hotel Life," *Harper's Weekly*, 2 May 1857, 274.
[42] Ibid.

unhappy and outré feature in American hotel-life." Yet another English visitor worried that "the young children, who play about the corridors and hall of such mansions . . . become prematurely old for want of fresh air and exercise, and overknowing from the experiences they acquire and the acquaintances they contract."[43]

Despite this widespread hand-wringing, it appears that many women were choosing to live in hotels rather than setting up private homes. Indeed, the very aspect of hotel living that commentators attacked as most "demoralizing to the women" – the failure to adhere to the private, domestic ideal – was the primary reason they gave for families choosing hotel life. Marryat blamed "the unwillingness of the women to have the fatigue and annoyance which is really occasioned by an establishment" in the United States for the high prevalence of families living in hotels. And William Brown, our fictional hotel dweller, wrote that he "wanted to keep house, having an eye to my own comfort," but his wife "declared that her health was not equal to the task, and her mother asked me, in a fierce manner, if I wished to be the means of making her childless."[44] Living in hotels, with their legion of servants, relieved women of the difficult duties of running a house – the very functions, according to *Harper's* "for which they were sent into the world."[45]

These editorials reflected both the writers' dissatisfaction with families living in hotels, and the seeming satisfaction that the female members of these families

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[43] Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America with Remarks on its Institutions*, ed. Sidney Jackman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 391; William Chambers, *Things as They are in America* (1854; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1986), 183; Charles Mackay, *Life and Liberty in America: Or, Sketches of a Tour in the United States and Canada, in 1857-8.* 2 vols. (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1859), 44.
[44] Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 391; "American Homes in New York Hotels."
[45] "Decline and Fall of Hotel Life."

gleaned from their domestic arrangements. Part of the problem with hotel living, as its critics expressed it, was that women were enjoying themselves *too much.* "The young wife," an English visitor noted, "finds herself relieved from the miseries and responsibilities of housekeeping, and has nothing to think of but dress, visiting, reading, and amusement." *Harper's*, not surprisingly, weighed in as well: "Women with one or two children, living in this or that great hotel . . . spen[d] their whole life in gossiping with people of both sexes who [are] as idle as themselves." They saw the "utter freedom from care – the excitement of the *table d'hôte* and the drawing-room" and the attendant "contact with persons of undesirable antecedents" as the most dangerous aspects of hotel living.[46]

There seems to have been an ongoing battle between women's actual behavior and the rhetoric of prescriptive advisers and observers. In a piece on "hotel morals," *Harpers'* "Man About Town" lamented that all members of the family suffered from hotel life. "The husband is but half a husband, the wife but half a wife, the child but half a child, when all three reside in some huge caravansera in common with some hundreds of other persons, separated from them by different tastes, feelings, opinions -- yet congregated with them by a self-imposed necessity."[47] Nonetheless, the women participating in these activities saw them as the greatest attraction of such environments. Hotel life provided them with opportunities for sociability and companionship denied them by living in private homes, and by the cult of domesticity that prescriptive advisers celebrated. In the public rooms of the hotels, women could partake of the company of others while their husbands were at work all day.

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[46] MacKay, *Life and Liberty*, 43; "Decline and Fall of Hotel Life."
[47] "The Man About Town, Hotel Morals," *Harper's Weekly*, 5 September 1857, 563.

This last feature of hotel living formed some of the most alarmed attacks on hotel life. Women's participation in the social aspects of the hotels, which took place primarily in the dining rooms but spilled out to other areas as well, was calculated, many feared, to the downfall of their character and the integrity of domesticity. "To eat in public now and then may be desirable," wrote Charles Mackay, "but for ladies to take all their meals every day, and all the year round, in the full glare of publicity; to be always fully dressed; to associate daily – almost hourly – with strangers from every part of America and of the world; to be, if young and handsome, the cynosure of all idle and vagrant eyes, either at the *table d'hôte* or in the public drawing-room; – these are certainly not the conditions which . . . are conducive to the true happiness and charm of wedded life."[48]

The constant interaction with obnoxious women made the hotels perilous breeding grounds for the decay of female morals. Women residing in hotels, free during the day from the controlling hand of their husbands, engaged in a free-for-all of gossip, backbiting, and other unseemly behaviors. "In the hotels," Frederick Marryat explained, "the private apartments of the boarders seldom consist of more than a large bed-room, and although company are admitted into it, still it is natural that the major portion of the women's time should be passed . . . in the general receiving room." There, "scandal rages – everyone is busy watching her neighbour's affairs; those who have boarded there longest take the lead, and every newcomer or stranger is canvassed with the most severe scrutiny; their histories are ascertained, and they are very often sent to Coventry, for little better reason than the will of those who, as residents, lay down the law." The law was fierce and arbitrary. "I never

[48] Mackay, *Life and Liberty*, 44.

witnessed a more ridiculous compound of pretended modesty, and real want of delicacy, than is to be found with this class of sojourners," Marryat indignantly asserted. "Should any of their own sex arrive, of whom some little scandal has been afloat, they are up in arms and down they plump in their rocking-chairs." The capricious mob " will not go down to dinner, or eat another meal in the hotel, until the obnoxious parties 'clear out.' The proprietors are summoned, husbands are bullied, and, rather than indignant virtue should starve in her rocking-chair, a committee is formed, and the libelled parties, guilty or not, are requested to leave the hotel. As soon as this purification is announced, virtue, appeased, recovers her appetite, and they all eat, drink, talk scandal, flirt, and sing without invitation as before."[49]

The bonds of womanhood, according to such critiques were neither pleasant nor nurturing. Rather, they were dangerous to both the unwitting lady and the very canon of domesticity. William Brown, *Harper's* fictional hotel resident, complained that the female circle his new bride Letty joined at the Saint Thunder Hotel was damaging her character and compromising their domestic bliss. "My wife loves me . . . as dearly as a woman can love," he explained to Misters Teller and Smithson, his sympathetic friends residing elsewhere in the hotel, "but she is mastered and led by the nose by those harridans." Mrs. Beldrum and Mrs. Evans, Letty's "bosom friends" at the St. Thunder, were, by Brown's estimation, unsuitable companions for his wife who was but "a simple little child." Mrs. Beldrum, divorced from both a California and a Texas man, was on her fourth husband. When, after learning this fact, "I suggested privately . . . to Letty that she should not become intimate with Mrs. B," the exasperated Mr. Brown moaned, "my angel of a wife, who was a perfect dove on

[49] Marryat, *A Diary in America*, 391-2.

ordinary occasions, flared up, and asked me if I wished to sever her from the only sympathetic heart she had found." Mrs. Evans was no better. She "controlled [Letty] entirely," and drove a wedge between husband and wife by pulling Letty away from her sole domestic duty – caring for her husband – in favor of socializing both within the hotel and beyond.[50]

Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Beldrum convinced Letty, despite her ill husband's protestations, to join them for the Opera while he convalesced alone. "I said I was ill, and that I would take it kindly if Letty would stay at home with me; and I noticed an impulsive movement toward me on her part; but on Mrs. Beldrum's observing that my conduct was just like the selfishness of husbands, and reminded her of her second, she drew back. Mrs. Evans then observed that, if I was unwell, quiet was evidently the best thing for me, and that *she* would take charge of her darling Letitia; whereupon Letty joined them, and the whole party went to the Opera, leaving me abed." It did nothing to ease his mind that the young bachelor Merdon had agreed to escort his wife in his place. "When Letty came home, she was flushed, unusually excited, and unusually affectionate." Two days later, again without her husband (or his blessing), Letty joined her friends, completing a party of "four ladies, all married, and four gentlemen, all single," for a picnic at Harlem's High Bridge. "I found them at eight in the evening, business having detained me very late," Brown griped. "They had dined, and the Champagne had flowed freely. Young Merdon was sitting beside my wife in so maudlin a state that he did not hear her introduction to me, and stammered – 'Wha-at? Who's that f-f-f-fellow?'" Brown dispatched of the drunken bachelor, seizing him by the collar and flinging him away. "Then sitting down by

[50] "American Homes in New York Hotels."

Letty's side, I asked her would she not like to come home? 'Home?' she cried, 'where's home?' Where, indeed!" her husband concurred.[51]

Eventually, Letty's viperous friends manipulated her into enacting a separation from her husband. After numerous unsuccessful attempts to contact his wife, by now completely under the sway of her dangerous female circle, Brown took the separation decree and quit the St. Thunder. Fortunately for Mr. Brown, his friend Smithson intervened. While the dejected husband awaited the completion of his divorce, Smithson "plotted together" with Letty to mend the couple's rift and find them a real home. Smithson led Brown to "a very snug little house in Thirty-_____ Street," where his apologetic wife "rushed out of a back room and flung herself into my arms, sobbing, 'My own dear husband, I am so sorry, so ashamed of myself!" Begging his forgiveness and denouncing the St. Thunder as "that horrid place," Letty beseeched her husband to let her stay with him "here. . . at home, at OUR OWN HOME." The relieved Brown proclaimed: "Then I knew. . . that she had thrown off the hateful women's yoke she had accepted at the St. Thunder; and that, for the first time in her life, my own Letty knew the importance of a home."[52]

If prescriptive literature is an indication not of real but admonished behavior, then middle-class, antebellum urban women neither feared nor cloistered themselves from the public sphere. They were opening their doors to it and begging it to enter. The very grounds that critics found to assail hotel living – the opportunities they provided for socializing, the lack of privacy they afforded, and the relief from domestic responsibilities – were the reasons that many women preferred hotel life to

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[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.

establishing a private home. And the critiques waged against women's behavior in residential hotels – their frivolity, their maltreatment of their husbands, their consorting with other women (and sometimes men) instead of sitting around the hearth with their families, the fact that women seemed to be enjoying themselves too much – suggest a rejection of the romantic family image and its model of the family as primary social unit forwarded by prescriptive writers. Even in private residences, as noted above, women used their domestic space for social, public purposes, replicating in a sense the opportunities for sociability provided by the hotel drawing room and ordinary. Indeed, it appears that as their idealized role was becoming more constrained and their world more constricted, these women carved out a public space within the domestic sphere.

Inside that realm, guests did not need to be present, the home did not need to be serving a public purpose for public concerns to intrude. While domestic advisers urged against sacrificing the family's comfort for fashion or for the approval of guests, they still saw the dining room as serving a public purpose in at least one respect. Worldly motivations were at the root of the family meal in its ideological aspects: to serve as a reunion for an otherwise scattered family, and to educate and socialize one's children. "More than means of sustaining physical wants," claimed popular novelist Catharine Sedgwick, family meals were "opportunities of improvement and social happiness," a chance to "teach, at the rate of *three lessons a day*, punctuality, order, neatness, temperance, self-denial, kindness, generosity, and

hospitality."[53] If the family was, as historian Mary Ryan claims, the "cradle of the middle class," then the family dinner was its breast.[54]

The educational function of the family meal was not foremost for the edification of the family. Parents may have thought it important that their children learn the lessons outlined by Sedgwick so that they behaved properly around the hearth. But more important was that they learn how to behave beyond the front door. And that could be achieved only, as Catharine Beecher put it, "in the domestic circle." "The feeling," Beecher wrote,

> That it is of little consequence how we behave at home, if we conduct properly abroad, is a very fallacious one. Persons who are careless and ill bred at home, may imagine that they can assume good-manners abroad; but they mistake. . . . Those who are ill bred at home, even when they try to hide their bad habits, are sure to violate many of the obvious rules of propriety, and yet be unconscious of it.[55]

Among the behaviors to be learned at family meals and informal family gatherings were: "the avoidance of all disgusting or offensive personal habits, such as fingering the hair; cleaning the teeth or nails; picking the nose; spitting on carpets; snuffing, instead of using a handkerchief, or using the article in an offensive manner; lifting up the boots or shoes, as some men do, to tend them on the knee, or to finger them."[56] In addition, Beecher instructed, children should be taught manners exclusive to the table, such as not "eating fast, and in a noisy manner; putting large pieces in the mouth;

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[53] Sedgwick, *Home*, 28.
[54] Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*.
[55] Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 142.
[56] Ibid., 144.

looking and eating as if very hungry" or "sitting at too great a distance from the table, and dropping food."[57]

Parents did not bear this educational burden alone. They could lean on a host of etiquette manuals that flooded the market in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although etiquette manuals had been available even in colonial America, it was not until the nineteenth century that American-authored manuals began to emerge. From the 1830s to the 1860s, an average of three new etiquette manuals were published annually in the United States. Many of these were published into the thirtieth edition.[58]

Children had to learn how to behave at table, even if only the family was present, because at any given time, guests could arrive. Furthermore, the children eventually would be partaking of meals in others' homes, and in the hotels and restaurants of the city. An individual and family's reputation in the outside world could only be assured if children were taught early and often not to eat off of their knives, or blow their noses on the tablecloth, or speak with a mouthful of food. Catharine Sedgwick nods to this aspect when she writes of a family where mealtimes were not seen as sacred. "Would there not be some danger," she implored, "that young persons, bred in such utter disregard of . . . *les petites morales* would prove, as men and women, sadly deficient in the social virtues?"[59]

Social virtues were no trivial matter. Many writers drew strong links between manners and character – both individual and national. Beecher herself argued that

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[57] Ibid., 144-5.
[58] Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave: A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books* (New York: MacMillan, 1946).
[59] Sedgwick, *Home*, 48.

"the general cultivation of good breeding in the domestic circle" would be the most effective means of silencing critics of "our democratic institutions."[60] Catharine Sedgwick made a similar argument, suggesting that poor table manners would "elicit the strictures of foreign observers . . . and call down a sentence of inevitable and hopeless vulgarity upon democratic institutions."[61]

As dining – both in private homes and in public spaces – became part of daily life for more and more New Yorkers, one's performance around food became a crucial marker of character as well as social status. This link is particularly evident in the domestic novels of the antebellum period. Nothing spells out character or lack of proper breeding more clearly than one's behavior at table. In his novel, *Home as Found*, James Fenimore Cooper attempts to describe American life and culture through the eyes of Eve Effingham, an elite young American woman who returns to New York after being raised in Paris. Cooper introduces a host of American characters, including Aristabulus Bragg, Eve's father's land agent and lawyer,

> an epitome of all that is good and all that is bad, in a very large class of his fellow citizens. He is quick-witted, prompt in action, enterprising in all things in which he has nothing to lose, but wary and cautious in all things in which he has a real stake, and ready to turn not only his hand, but his heart and his principles to any thing that offers an advantage.[62]

These aspects of Bragg's character are illustrated when, in the second chapter of the book, he sits down to dine at the Effinghams' table. The meal is served in the French style – the servants carve the meat, and adorn the plates at a sideboard and hand them individually to each guest. This does not suit Bragg's requirements for "there were a

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[60] Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 142.
[61] Sedgwick, *Home*, 48.
[62] James Fenimore Cooper, *Home as Found* (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1838), 16-17.

delay and a finish in this arrangement that suited neither [his] go-a-head-ism, nor his organ of acquisitiveness."

> Instead of waiting, therefore, for the more graduated movements of the domestics, he began to take care of himself. . . . [Like] one who had laid the foundation of a fortune, by some lucky windfall in the commencement of his career, he began to make accessions, right and left, as opportunity offered. Sundry *entremets*, or light dishes that had a peculiarly tempting appearance, came first under his grasp. Of these he soon accumulated all within his reach, by taxing his neighbours, when he ventured to send his plate, here and there, or wherever he saw a dish that promised to reward his trouble.

Bragg betrays not only his character but also a lack of breeding by using his knife "as a coal-heaver uses a shovel," smacking his lips, and swallowing his food without bothering to chew it.[63]

Cooper provides a perfect demonstration of conduct advisers' worst fears – that a failure to learn proper habits at table would reflect poorly on one's character and breeding. Indeed, Bragg's eating habits are an index to his character. Perhaps if he had been better schooled in his family's dining room, Bragg would have had a more sincere character, and a better face to show to the world. But Bragg learned his acquisitiveness in part "by frequenting ordinaries – a school, by the way, in which he had obtained most of his notions of the proprieties of the table."[64] It is telling that Cooper chooses a meal as the best means to show the ways in which Bragg stands out in and apart from refined company. The essence of the family meal, in much of the literature of the period, was its function in preparing children for the public world. Bragg, denied such an education, was clearly unprepared to conduct himself properly in public.

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[63] Ibid., 25.
[64] Ibid.

A more positive example of children's character being properly formed around the dining table is illustrated in Catharine Sedgwick's *Home*. The children of the Barclay family of New York, on whose home the novel focuses, are perfectly bred, their parents understanding that "the right ministration of the table is an important item in *home* education." These children, of course, display perfect table manners. "They would never," Sedgwick explains, "pick their teeth at table, sit on two legs of a chair, hawk. . . spit on the carpet or grate, or in any other of the usual modes, betray the coarseness of early associations." But, more importantly, their characters are unassailable. They are considerate of each other, their parents, and their guests, they wait their turn to be served, they perform their duties perfectly with no need for reminder or correction, and they are sincere and courteous all around. In short, they "wouldn't be found wanting in the 'weightier matters'" so important to personal conduct both within and outside of the home.[65]

The middle-class dining room, and the family meal that took place in it, then, served as a rehearsal space for the public sphere. Just as space and performance were becoming ever more important markers of status in the city's hotels and restaurants, so too were these factors gaining importance in the dining space within the home. Writers of household manuals and other works on domestic life urged their readers to decorate their dining rooms simply and tastefully. "Every room should be furnished in a style not inconsistent with the use for which it is set apart," wrote Mrs. William Parkes in her volume on domestic management. The dining room, as "the place of rendezvous for the *important* concerns of the table," she continued, "should not be furnished in the light and airy style which you may adopt in your drawing room. . . .

[65] Sedgwick, *Home*, 49.

there, no other attraction is desirable, nor scarcely anything requisite, beyond the well-arranged table, and the chairs that surround it."[66] A writer in *Putnam's Monthly* agreed, though warning his readers to paint their dining room walls a pleasing color: "Cold white walls and ceilings in a dining-room are enough to destroy a keen appetite and impair digestion. Pictures, unless of fruits and flowers, are very objectionable in a dining-room, if they are of a sufficiently positive character to call off the attention of the convives from the table, which should be the most attractive object in it."[67] Many homemakers refused to listen to such advice. The dining rooms of middle-class New Yorkers, James Fenimore Cooper complained, were apt to mimic those of the elite, furnished with "French paper; curtains in silk and in muslin; mantel-pieces of carved figures in white marble . . . Brussels carpets; large mirrors. . . chandeliers" and "spacious, heavy. . . side-board, in mahogany, groaning with plate, knife, and spoon cases."[68]

Whether they chose to decorate their dining rooms simply or ostentatiously, many antebellum middle-class New Yorkers followed the arbiters of taste by including a dining room in their homes. The attention that domestic advisers called to the importance of setting aside a special room for dining has already been noted. It is clear, from a review of the planbooks published in the antebellum period, that dining rooms were becoming a prerequisite (at least in the minds of the planbook writers) for a proper middle-class home. The few descriptions of working-class homes that these books contained did not specify the need for a separate room for dining; rather they

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[66] Mrs. William Parkes, *Domestic Duties; or, Instructions to Young Married Ladies on the Management of their Households, and the Relation of Their Conduct in the Various Relations and Duties of Married Life*, 3d. ed. (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1829), 173.
[67] "New-York Daguerrotyped," *Putnam's Monthly Magazine*, May 1853, 362.
[68] Cooper, *Notions of the Americans*, 146-9.

incorporated flexible rooms in these spaces to be used for multiple purposes, along the vein of most eighteenth-century dwellings. In middle-class dwellings, however, dining rooms were essential.[69]

Household manuals included instructions for choosing and arranging the furnishings and accoutrements of the dining room. In addition to the table and chairs, "a large closet is indispensable to a dining-room," Eliza Leslie explained. "Two small side-boards, one in each recess, occupy less space than a large one standing out, and are therefore preferable, unless the dining-room is very spacious and expensively furnished, so that an elegant side-board may be classed among its ornaments." The sideboard or closet housed the various props requisite to the proper conduct of the dinner. They included: table linens, castors and salt-stands, glass, crystal, and china, and various utensils.[70]

The shift to specialized and individual dishes and utensils was a relatively new one. Until the mid-seventeenth century, most colonists eschewed utensils, serving themselves from communal dishes. While sharp-pointed knives and large spoons were used to spear meats and serve stews, even the most refined colonists ate with their hands. The fork was yet an unknown entity. "Inventories," according to historian Cary Carson, "routinely record piles of napkins and motley assortments of wood, pewter, tin, and pottery hollow wares."[71] In the late 1600s, wealthy colonists began to incorporate pewter and ceramic serving dishes and individualized plates, as

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[69] Clark, "The Vision of the Dining Room," 142-72.
[70] Leslie, *The House Book*, 250; Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 306-7.
[71] Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?," In *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville and London: The University Press of Virginia, 1994), 598.

well as individualized drinking vessels, knives, spoons, and eventually forks into their dining repertoire. Late-seventeenth and eighteenth-century inventories show collections of dishes imported from Europe and East Asia, along with domestic pewter and ceramics.[72] By the mid-eighteenth century, most Americans had acquired at least "a somewhat broader range of dining . . . equipment" than their seventeenth-century forebears. In terms of the domestic environment, "what really marked the mid-eighteenth century off from previous periods," historian Carole Shammas explains, "was the diffusion of eating and drinking goods into the ordinary household." In her examination of probate inventories from eighteenth-century Massachusetts, she found "knives and forks, glassware, and tea equipment . . . in a majority of inventories . . . in the average wealth category. . . . Nearly a third owned some pieces of china."[73]

While many rural and poor urban families of the early Republic still went without personal utensils and individualized dishes, New Yorkers above middling means had incorporated specialized plates, and a variety of utensils into their dining ritual.[74] Mass-produced British ceramics and Chinese porcelains increasingly found their way into the homes of many middling New Yorkers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By the mid-1800s, they could dress their dining tables

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[72] Ibid., 598-603; Wall, *The Archaeology of Gender*, 131-33.

[73] Lorena Walsh, "Consumer Behavior, Diet, and the Standard of Living in Late Colonial and Early Antebellum America, 1770-1840," in *American Economic Growth and the Standard of Living before the Civil War*, eds. Robert E. Gallman and John Joseph Wallis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 220; Carole Shammas, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History* 14:1 (Fall 1980): 14.

[74] In "Consumer Behavior," 222-23, Walsh writes: "Most elite and a goodly proportion of upper-middle-class town dwellers accumulated a burgeoning array of mahogany furnishings, sideboards, silver plate, decorative items . . . and elaborate dining and cooking equipment designed for entertainment and display," by the early nineteenth century.

with machine-pressed glass, transfer-printed earthenware, bone china, and Britannia metal or silver-plated tableware, all made affordable by mass-production techniques and other industrial developments.[75]

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the number of specialized dishes, forks, spoons, and other dining accessories that domestic advisers suggested were necessary to conducting a meal grew exponentially. Mid-century dinner sets consisted of numerous pieces, up to 500, including dinner plates, soup plates, side plates in various sizes, hot water plates, serving bowls, platters, soup tureens, sauce tureens, and gravy boats. In addition to dishes for the main meal, tea sets, dessert sets, and display items would also grace the sideboard. Flatware sets included specialized forks, knives, and spoons, such as fish forks, oyster forks, grapefruit spoons, and asparagus forks. While few antebellum middle class families had call for such a large collection of dishes and utensils, families that hoped to serve proper dinners in several courses required a far greater variety of accoutrements than we could even imagine today.[76]

Homemakers who wished to host elaborate dinner parties needed matched sets for dozens of people. Most middle-class New Yorkers, however, owned service enough to entertain six to twelve people at the dining table, with perhaps extra dinner

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[75] Wall, *The Archaeology of Gender*, 132-4; Susan Williams, *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 37, 67; Walsh, "Consumer Behavior," 228-29. Manufacturers began to mass produce silver-plated items in the 1840s, for example, after English inventors perfected an electrolytic process of transferring silver onto base metals. The price of silver plate declined further after the Comstock silver lode was discovered in Nevada in 1859. While silver service was unaffordable to most Americans, silver-plated dishes fell within the mains of many middle-class families by the 1860s. See: Dorothy Rainwater, "Victorian Dining Silver," in Grover, ed., *Dining in America*, 173-77.

[76] Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 78-90.

plates, dessert plates, and teaspoons for company. For a dinner for twelve, Catharine Beecher recommended one dozen each of: forks, tumblers, soup plates, and silver spoons; two dozen each of wine glasses and large knives; and four dozen plates. This number, Beecher explained, would "allow one plate for fish, and two for changes of meat for each guest." For those who wanted more specialized dishes, she added: three dozen dessert plates, two dozen dessert forks and knives, one dozen saucers, and a dozen dessert spoons. Middle-class families might also own several dedicated items such as nutpicks, soup ladles, sugar spoons, pie knives, syrup pitchers, and serving spoons for berries.[77]

In addition to these utensils and serving dishes, Catharine Beecher advised her readers to employ a "table-rug, or crumb cloth . . . to save carpets from injury. . . . table-mats . . . to prevent injury to the table from the warm dishes," as well as "teacup-mats, or small plates . . . to save the table-cloths from dripping tea or coffee." Beecher also recommended a variety of table linens, including a table cloth, table napkins "to save the tablecloth and pocket-handkerchief," and "doilies,. . . colored napkins, which, when fruit is offered, should always be furnished to prevent a person from staining a nice handkerchief, or permitting the fruit-juice to dry on the fingers."[78] Eliza Leslie also included knife rests, butter knives, finger glasses, crumb-cloths, and salt-cellars in her list of requisite dining paraphernalia.[79]

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[77] Wall, *Archaeology of Gender*, 134; Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 81, 87-88. Beecher, quoted in Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 81.
[78] Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 307.
[79] Leslie, *House Book*, 254-6.

Domestic advisers provided detailed and formalized instructions for placing these varied items on the dining table. "Neat housekeepers observe the manner in which a table is set more than anything else," Beecher warned,

> And to a person of good taste, few things are more annoying, than to see the table placed askew; the tablecloth soiled, rumpled, and put on awry; the plates, knives, and dishes thrown about, without any order, the pitchers soiled on the outside, and sometimes within; the tumblers dim; the caster out of order; the butter pitched on the plate without any symmetry; the salt coarse, damp, and dark; the bread cut in a mixture of junks and slices; the dishes of food set on at random, and without mats, the knives dark or rusty, and their handles greasy, the tea-furniture all out of order, and everything in similar style. And yet, many of these negligences will be met with, at the tables of persons who call themselves well bred, and who have wealth enough to make much outside show. [80]

Beecher thus laid out a series of "rules for setting a table," including directions for laying the rug and the tablecloth, and placement of the castors, plates and utensils, bread basket, and water pitcher.[81] Domestic manuals often compiled their lists of essential dining equipment and instructions for table-setting with an eye to formal dinner parties. It is likely that homemakers did not set such a formal table on a daily basis. Nonetheless, the domestic advisers hoped that they would. In her copious instructions on setting a proper table, Eliza Leslie specifies practices that should be reserved specifically for dinner parties, suggesting that the rest of her advice should be followed on a daily basis.

Household inventories and other evidence do show clear indications that middle-class homemakers were adorning their tables with more and more specialized dishes, utensils, and linens, dividing their dinners into a series of courses, and

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[80] Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 307-8.
[81] Ibid.

engaging in more ritualized conduct around food.[82] In other words, in many ways, New Yorkers of means were replicating in their homes the dining performance honed in the city's hotels and restaurants.

As in those locales, the performance was shored up by an increasing reliance on servants to ensure the smooth conduct of the meal.[83] Just as etiquette advisers warned their readers to comport themselves properly at the family dinner to ensure acceptable behavior in public, they advised servants to treat the family dinner as if it were a public affair. "In genteel houses the arrangements of a family dinner should be so conducted, that the waiter, being accustomed every day to setting the table nicely, and waiting on it properly, will not feel the least at a loss when he is required to do so for company," Eliza Leslie counseled. "If the family fall into the habit of waiting on themselves when they are alone," she continued, "the domestics (besides losing some of their respect for them) soon get out of practice: and when there are

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[82] Wall, *Archaeology of Gender*, 147-9; Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 168.

[83] Elizabeth Blackmar argues that the status of the independent householder and the canon of domesticity relied upon the employment of servants. "For an independent citizen to require a mother, wife, daughter, or sister to do heavy and exposed domestic labor associated with slavery or 'hiring,'" Blackmar writes, "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.'" Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 117. Blackmar's discussion of servants continues on pp. 117-22.

strangers at dinner, become so bewildered and awkward as frequently to cause much vexation."[84]

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most middle-class households employed at least one servant. Catharine Beecher suggested that the smooth conduct of the dining performance required at least two. If hosting a dinner party in the French style, as was increasingly the mode in private homes as well as hotels after the 1830s, one waiter was recommended for every four guests.[85] Antebellum domestic servants, unlike their eighteenth-century counterparts, were not welcome to join family meals. Beecher explained:

> One person is needed during meals to attend to matters in the kitchen, and another person to change dishes and carry food back and forth, and if these persons sat at table there would be constant disorder and confusion in jumping up from table to perform these services, while a dress suitable for kitchen work would not be suitable at a table where company is often entertained.[86]

Furthermore, she argued, since mealtime was the only occasion that "the master of a family" had to spend with his wife and children, "he wishes to be at liberty to talk freely, as he could not do, if every stranger he hires must come to his family meal."[87]

This portrayal of servants as strangers, rather than as members of the family, reflected a new understanding of the role of domestics in the nineteenth century. As

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[84] Leslie, *House Book*, 267.
[85] Beecher, *Letters to Persons*, 89; Lynes, *The Domesticated Americans*, 192; Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 153-4; Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent*, 121. Blackmar states that by 1855, New York had 43,000 houses and 32,000 women employed as domestics. Susan Williams notes: "Almost 25 percent of all urban and suburban households in 1852 employed at least one servant. The increasing numbers of servants in m-c homes were both a result of and a factor in the elaboration of domestic rituals – particularly those related to food. Servants provided most of the labor that enabled such events to take place, and women were able to embrace more freely the intricate behaviors of the wealthy knowing that they had adequate support from their domestic help. The quantity of food provided and large numbers of serving dishes and clean plates required would have resulted in a logistical nightmare for a hostess without serving help." *Savory Suppers*, 153-4.
[86] Beecher, *Letters to Persons*, 89.
[87] Ibid.

productive work left the home and middle-class women purchased more of the items that their mothers and grandmothers would have produced themselves, the nature of domestic servitude changed. Servants were increasingly seen as apart from, rather than a part of the family and their status within the home declined accordingly.[88] "The old New England notion that the word servant was degrading, and that a separate servant's table was a thing not to be thought of, has died out in this meridian long since, and it is well so," claimed *Harper's Weekly* in 1857.[89] It is telling that a major indicator of the formalization of servitude was the increasingly general custom of servants to eat apart from the families they served. In her work on domestic service, Faye Dudden points out: "Eating with the family had considerable significance in the life of a servant. . . . Hired girls grasped intuitively what anthropologists carefully explain: eating together is one of the most fundamental ways in which human beings form and maintain relationships. Help insisted on eating at the family table as a matter of pride, more so, perhaps, when separate tables for urban domestics became the rule in many areas."[90] The constant reminders to servants and their employers that it was inappropriate for servants to dine with their masters' families further highlight the increased ritualization of the family meal. More importantly, the act of separating servants from the families they served provided middle-class families with a constant and captive audience for the dining performance that they were honing for the public sphere.

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[88] Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983) 44-52.
[89] "House Servants," *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, 9 May 1857, 20.
[90] Dudden, *Serving Women*, 37.

Thus, as the dining room emerged as an important entity in antebellum New York's middle-class homes, it served both private and public purposes. At the same time that prescriptive advisers were stressing the familial, private aspects of the middle-class home, the families who lived in those homes were opening them up for public uses. While cultural arbiters urged women to concentrate their attentions on childrearing, and making their houses a comfortable haven for their families, many of these women focused instead on preparing their homes for entertaining guests or even worse, failing to set up housekeeping at all in favor of residing in hotels. And even the most filial domestic activity – the family meal – was, in many ways, a rehearsal for the public world.

Through furniture, silverware, and plate-ware catalogs, middle-class New Yorkers gained access to the trappings of middle-class respectability. Through the flood of advice literature, domestic manuals, and architectural plan books, they learned how to use those trappings to convince themselves and others of their claims to genteel status. In their well-furnished, well-appointed dining rooms, they shared more than meals with their families; they displayed their wealth, their claims to gentility, and their knowledge of requisite middle-class behaviors. They educated their children in proper comportment, both at the table, and in the world outside of the home. And they entertained acquaintances and friends in these rooms, all the time adhering to a dining performance through which they spelled out their class identity. As one's behavior around food became an increasingly important marker of status and gentility, and as members of New York's burgeoning middle classes became

more vested in a "middle-class" lifestyle, their dining rooms became crucial staging grounds for the world beyond the front stoop.

CHAPTER FIVE

"TURNING ALL OUR REFINEMENTS AND DECANTERS UPSIDE DOWN" DIET REFORM AND THE DISCOURSE OF FOOD IN ANTEBELLUM NEW YORK CITY

"What a wonderful stir the *Grahamites* are making in our city!" a New Yorker remarked sarcastically in 1831. Diet reformer Sylvester Graham, and his group of "hooting owl" supporters, he complained, were "taking away all the good living . . . and turning all our refinements and decanters upside down."[1] Graham had only been in New York for a few months but he had begun to gain a following for his theories on diet, health, and proper living. In subsequent decades, many middle-class New Yorkers, like their counterparts in other areas of the country, would adhere to the principles laid out by Sylvester Graham and his disciples.

While many individuals participated in the diet reform movement, Graham was its main popularizer. During the 1830s and 1840s, the man Ralph Waldo Emerson described as the "prophet of bran bread," delivered lectures around the country, some of which were published into multiple editions. As Graham's name and theories became more widely known throughout the nation, those who paid attention to the connection between diet, health, and morality, became known as "Grahamites." By 1836, the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* – a well-respected medical journal and the precursor to the *New England Journal of Medicine* – which

[1] Quotation from Edith Walters Cole, "Sylvester Graham, Lecturer on the Science of Human Life: The Rhetoric of a Dietary Reformer (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1975), 68.

had little respect for Graham's theories, begrudgingly admitted that "no man can travel . . . or go into any part of our country and begin to advocate a vegetable diet . . . without being immediately asked: 'What. Are you a Grahamite?'" Graham himself, never one to underestimate his own worth and fame, predicted that his home would eventually become a shrine, where pilgrims would come to see "the peg on which he had hung his hat," and that his house would eventually be dismantled stone by stone by relic seekers.[2]

This, of course, was an optimistic assessment. Few Americans today know who Sylvester Graham is, or realize that they memorialize him in some small way every time they eat a Graham cracker – an adulterated form of the bran bread that was central to Graham's system. But Graham's impact was strongly felt in nineteenth-century America, and particularly in the cities of the northeast, such as New York. During the 1830s and 1840s, many individuals became adherents to Graham's system, cutting out meat from their diets, abstaining from alcohol, avoiding spices, condiments, and complex preparations of food, bathing regularly, and wearing only flannel pajamas. Graham's followers established boarding houses in various cities throughout the country, including New York, home to the first one. In these establishments, those who wished to follow Graham's precepts when traveling could avoid the decidedly un-Grahamite taverns and hotels. New York Grahamites such as Horace Greeley, Lorenzo Fowler, and Arthur Tappan took their meals at these

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[2] Emerson, quoted in Stephen Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America: Sylvester Graham and Health Reform* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 3; *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 14 (1836), 25; Gerald Carson, *Cornflake Crusade: From the Pulpit to the Breakfast Table* (New York: Rinehart & Co., 1957), 55.

institutions and at the city's temperance hotels, rather than at restaurants. Greeley, in fact, met his wife at a Graham boarding house.

Grahamites opened provisions stores where they could be assured of pure, healthy foodstuffs. They issued publications, like the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, as well as numerous tracts, books, and pamphlets; they established physiological societies in cities like Boston and New York, and on college campuses like Oberlin, Wesleyan, and Williams; and they held health conventions in Boston and New York. As Grahamism spread, it gained adherents and disciples. Other food reformers, many influenced by Graham's theories, popularized the ideas of the "peristaltic persuader" even as he himself moved into the wings of the movement. By the Civil War, Graham's tenets and theories had entered the lexicon of other, even more wide-spread health crusades, such as the water-cure movement and phrenology. New religious movements like Christian Science and Seventh Day Adventism incorporated Grahamite principles. And, following the war, entrepreneurs such as the cereal mavens the Kellogg brothers, integrated the Grahamites' concerns into the marketing of their commercial products. Even those Americans who did not consider themselves Grahamites were influenced by the diet reform movement, be it through recipes for Graham bread in their manuscript cookbooks, sermons delivered by their ministers on the connection between diet and morality, daily consumption of cereal, or simply more frequent bathing or greater consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. In short, the ideas and values of the diet reform movement, if not the movement entire, became part of mainstream American life

Historians who have examined health and diet reform have grounded these movements firmly in the larger context of antebellum reform, as well as the structural shifts in American society and culture brought about by the transportation and industrial revolutions.[3] In seeking to explain the popularity of Grahamism and other health reforms, many scholars have settled on a "social anxiety" thesis. The health reformers, the argument goes, were responding to a society in flux. Faced with sweeping transformations to their culture brought about by urbanization, industrialization, and commercialization, Graham and others like him hearkened back to a simpler time when tradition and outside sources of authority held sway. While some antebellum Americans translated their anxieties into religious movements, political participation, temperance, and abolitionism, others tried to reorder society by controlling their bodily functions and encouraging others to do so as well. Diet

[3] On Sylvester Graham and Grahamism see: Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*; Jayme A. Sokolow, *Eros and Modernization: Sylvester Graham, Health Reform, and the Origins of Victorian Sexuality in America* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983); Cole, "Sylvester Graham"; Richard Shryock, "Sylvester Graham and the Popular Health Movement," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18 (1931): 172-183; John P. Coleman, "Casting Bread on Troubled Waters: Grahamism and the West," *Journal of American Culture* 9 (1986): 1-8. Studies of antebellum reform which include chapters on health reform include: Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (1978, Revised ed., New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 147-173; Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 163-182. The following works deal with health reform specifically: Harvey Green, *Fit for America: Health, Fitness, and Sport in American Society* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986); James Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); William B. Walker, "The Health Reform Movement in the United States, 1830-1870," (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1955); Regina Markell Morantz, "Making Women Modern: Middle Class Women and Health Reform in Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of Social History* 10 (1977): 490-507. See also: Joan Burbick, *Healing the Republic: The Language of Health and the Culture of Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Martha Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). For a popular treatise of nineteenth century health reform, see Carson, *Cornflake Crusade*.

reform, these historians argue, was thus both a response to and, ultimately, a method of dealing with modernization.[4]

The problem with the "social anxiety thesis" is that it explains both everything and nothing. The notion that people are nervous about change, and that this anxiety drives them to seek ways to adjust to the transitions around them can be applied to virtually any historical phenomenon in any period, as indeed it has. But in terms of Grahamism, it does not explain why this particular program, with its particular shape, carried salience when it did. Why, the question remains, were Graham's rules for living – which were not entirely new – embraced by a popular audience at this time? Why did they single out certain foods, and certain dietary habits, for derision? There is not an immediate causal connection between a perceived void of authority, or concern about social disorder and the notion, for example, that bread made with refined flour is evil.

Graham and his followers were anxious; that is clear from their writings. But their anxiety was rooted in and geared toward a particular object – food and its connection to health, morality, and society. In many ways, the concerns and prescriptions of the antebellum diet reformers *were* linked to the development of an increasingly urban, commercial culture. Indeed, the diet reform movement itself was inherently commercial and urban. Its greatest flowering and greatest impact were seen in the burgeoning cities of the young Republic. Its spread was made possible by the existence of urban, commercial networks. And its largest concerns were rooted in the shifts transforming those very locales, including enormous changes in terms of

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[4] See for example, Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*; Sokolow, *Eros and Modernization*; Morantz, "Making Women Modern"; Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness*.

food production and consumption. These changes provide context for Grahamism and may explain some of its appeal – and controversy – to middle-class New Yorkers.[5] Despite his frequent insistence that his theories were novel and original, Graham was hardly the first individual to advocate a regimented diet, or to draw connections between diet and character. But Graham *was* the first individual in the United States to gain fame for such ideas. Scholars have examined Graham's background and motivations in an effort to explain the reformer and his program. But a more compelling question is why the man raised such interest and ire.

Some of Graham's impact may be explained in structural terms. Quite simply, Graham reached more Americans than any of his predecessors because he had greater access to them. The same technological and industrial developments that brought about the massive expansion in food-related alternatives led as well to a much broader audience for the individuals who concerned themselves with dietary implications. Technological innovations in printing processes yielded an explosion in printed material, leading to broad participation in a large and varied print culture. New York City was at the center of this production, which included newspapers, broadsides, periodicals, prescriptive texts, popular novels, sensational literature, cookbooks and other "how-to" manuals, and reformers' tracts. Antebellum diet

[5] Scholars have seen Grahamism as both a critique of and adjustment to modernization. Stephen Nissenbaum argues this point in *Sex, Diet, and Debility in Jacksonian America*, 4-5, 18-20. Jayme Sokolow makes a similar point in *Eros and Modernization*, 14. Sokolow argues that health reform ultimately served to help urban Americans adjust to modernization by "encouraging traits that led to success in an increasingly commercial and urban America." Both Nissenbaum and Sokolow point out that Graham critiqued new foods and methods of production but both scholars take a wider view of the roots of diet reform theories and both focus more on Graham's theories on sexuality than on the links between Grahamism and changing dietary patterns.

reformers were joined by etiquette advisers, moral reformers, and other cultural arbiters on a soapbox of unprecedented height and breadth.[6]

Furthermore, the food reformers imbued their theories and ideas with the fervor of a crusade and this fact, along with their ability to spread their ideas far and wide, set them apart from their earlier counterparts. Diet reform was part of the larger health reform movement of the early nineteenth century which sought alternative approaches to prevailing medical practice. Homeopaths, water curists, and Thompsonians developed preventives and cures for disease that did not involve the heroic measures such as leeching, bloodletting, blistering, and the use of opiates and other debilitating drugs embraced by professional medical practitioners since the colonial period.[7] These movements, in turn, were linked to the general reform ferment that spread through the United States in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century. Most health reformers, and certainly the Grahamites grounded their beliefs and theories in the millennial thought that gripped the nation during and after the Second Great Awakening. Unlike their Puritan forebears, millennialists held strongly to the concept of perfectionism. The second coming, they believed, was soon to appear, and Americans must perfect themselves to assure its arrival. This notion of perfectionism – and the potential for achieving it – was at the root of most of the reform movements of the nineteenth century, and diet reform was no exception.

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[6] For information on the growth of publishing, see Carl S. Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959); John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 34-47.

[7] On alternatives to prevailing medical practices, see: Walker, "Health Reform Movement"; Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 47-54.

Diet reformers and their followers, as their writings show, firmly believed they had found the route to salvation, and it began in their stomachs.[8]

But it was not merely salvation the Grahamites were seeking. They were also seeking, it would seem, a sense of control over the tremendous options with which they were confronted as a burgeoning consumer society took hold. They did not face merely a society that seemed to be out of control, as the social anxiety thesis holds. Rather, they faced concrete areas of their own lives that seemed in need of ordering. At a time when Americans of middling means faced an overwhelming level of abundance in terms of food-related consumer items, Graham and the other diet reformers provided a detailed set of instructions for dealing with that abundance. In short, Grahamism served as a sort of instruction manual for a culture in a sudden confrontation with access and excess in terms of consumption.

Diet reform also gave people control over aspects of their lives that seemed increasingly to be out of their control. Gone were the days, except in the memories of antebellum New Yorkers, when individuals produced the food that they placed on their tables. Indeed, the era had passed as well when one could count even on local production of such items as flour, meat, fruits and vegetables. Increasingly reliant on public dining options, New Yorkers were frequently removed as well from the preparation of their food. Care for one's health too was more and more, as the antebellum period progressed, in the hands of experts. As medicine underwent a process of professionalization, laypeople found themselves dependent on strangers for

[8] On diet reform in the context of antebellum reform movements, see: Walters, *American Reformers*, 147-74; Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 163-182; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 25-64.

the care of their bodies.[9] Diet reform, then, served as a way for many antebellum Americans to reassert control over their bodies, lives, and if the hopes of the reformers were realized, over society as well. The irony, of course, is that their method of gaining that control was to turn to experts such as Sylvester Graham to tell them how to carry out the most basic functions of their lives.

The writings and lectures of the diet reformers were filled with practical advice. But they were also loaded with rhetoric about the importance of asserting control over one's food intake. Poor physical health was not the only potential danger of improper eating habits. As this study shows, performance and behaviors around food became a crucial marker of class status and gentility during the antebellum period. The diet reformers folded that notion into their prescriptions and proscriptions, articulating an explicit connection between improper food choices and improper behavior. For them, it was not merely a matter of sitting properly at the dinner table, or using a napkin instead of the table cloth to wipe one's hands. The food itself carried meaning. Health reformer William Andrus Alcott argued that you could judge a child's character by how he ate, and Graham proposed a specific link between stimulating foods and inordinate lusts.[10] Creating a linked constellation of appetites in which the appetite for food was the most basic, the diet reformers posited dire consequences for those who did not keep their appetites under the strictest control. While some of their prescriptions were extreme, these men and women

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[9] On the professionalization of medicine, see Starr, *Social Transformation of American Medicine*.

[10] William Andrus Alcott, *Vegetable Diet Defended* (London: John Chapman, 1844), iii-v; William Andrus Alcott, *The Young Man's Guide*, 20th ed. (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1849), 292; Green, *Fit for America*, 30-36. On Graham's connection between food and sexuality, see Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 25-38.

appealed to the middle – they urged their audience, made up largely of middling urban folk, to choose moderation over excess. The specter for those who chose poorly -- who took too great advantage of the cornucopia of goods available to them – was not merely poor physical health, though that was, for the reformers, bad enough. The specter was a fall out of the middle -- a position that was precariously held by many middle-class Americans – into the realm of the fop who was guided by his appetites or worse, an animal who was enslaved by them.

It all started with Sylvester Graham -- a combative little man with great big theories. Born in 1794 in Suffield, Connecticut, the seventeenth and youngest child of John Graham, a Calvinist minister and his second wife, Ruth, Graham suffered an isolated childhood, and one beset by poverty and poor health. His father died when Sylvester was two years old, leaving no will and a virtually destitute family behind. Ruth Graham, unable to deal with the strain of raising seven young children with little money, suffered a nervous breakdown. "My mother's health," Graham later wrote, "sunk under her complicated trials, the family was broken up, and . . . I fell into the hands of strangers."[11]

Graham spent the first six years of his childhood living first with a local tavernkeeper, and then with his half-sister's family. In 1801, a West Suffield court declared Ruth Graham to be "in a deranged state of mind," and named a local farmer to be Sylvester's legal guardian. Despite chronic bouts of tuberculosis and other

[11] Graham, quoted in Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 10. On Graham's childhood and early adult life, see: Nissenbaum, *Sex Diet, and Debility*, 9-15; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 1-24; Alden Whitman, ed., *American Reformers, An H.W. Wilson Biographical Dictionary* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1985), s.v. "Graham."

illnesses, Graham served as a "farmer's boy" for five years. Subsequently, he worked at various jobs, and lived with a series of relatives including, for a few years, his temporarily-convalesced mother. As a teenager, Graham participated in the social life of West Suffield, which included parties, balls, and tavern-going. Despite his enjoyment of these activities, Graham was developing a strong distaste – both physical and moral – for liquor. This aversion would become a full-blown crusade for Graham, and he spent his late adolescence trying to convince his friends of the evils of ardent spirits, in many cases to their great annoyance. "My feelings," Graham later said, "would become so strong, when I . . . witnessed the evils of drinking, that out of the abundance of my heart, my mouth spoke; and thus I drew upon myself a great deal of displeasure, without perhaps, diminishing in the least degree the evil which I warred against."[12]

In 1823, Graham delivered his first lecture on temperance at the debating society in Suffield, CT. But he was not yet ready to take on temperance advocacy as a career. Instead, he entered Amherst Academy with the hope of preparing for the ministry, like his father and grandfather before him. Graham did not last long at Amherst. His ardent beliefs and his lack of compunction in spreading them, made him unpopular with his fellow students as well as the faculty who labeled him a "stage actor" and a "mad enthusiast." This penchant for offending and alienating his fellows would plague Graham for the rest of his life. It also led to his dismissal from Amherst on apparently unfounded charges of assault. Graham left Amherst despondent, and suffered a mental breakdown, from which he convalesced in the home of Oliver Potter Earl, a Rhode Island sea captain. Deborah and Sarah, the

[12] Graham, quoted in Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 12-13.

captain's two daughters, nursed Graham through his illness and in 1824, his recovery complete, he married Sarah.[13]

Over the next four years, Graham continued to prepare for the ministry, studying under the tutelage of a local minister, and also versed himself in theories on temperance, diet, and health. Graham entered the Presbyterian ministry in 1826 and was ordained as an evangelist two years later. He served as minister to several congregations in New Jersey but, as elsewhere, Graham's avid stance against intemperance and his abrasive style alienated him from these communities. So in 1830, when he was offered a position as an agent for the Pennsylvania Temperance Society, Graham leapt at the chance and left the formal ministry for good.[14]

As a temperance agent, Graham traveled around eastern Pennsylvania delivering lectures and helping to form local outposts of the Pennsylvania Temperance Society. Graham's lectures were very popular and his stint as a temperance agent quite successful. Within a few months, the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia invited him to deliver a four-week lecture series. Thousands flocked to the Franklin Institute to hear Graham's temperance lectures, which also were peppered with his developing theories on the connection between diet, health, and morality. The New York-based journal *Genius of Temperance* raved about Graham's lectures, exclaiming that they were well worth the trip to the City of Brotherly Love. Its editor, William Goodell issued an invitation to Graham to repeat his bravura performance in New York, proclaiming that Graham's wisdom and "rare talent of

[13] Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 14.
[14] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 13; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 18.

interesting all who hear him" were especially needed in the nation's "commercial emporium."[15]

Graham accepted the invitation, arriving in Gotham in the summer of 1831. His lecture series at Clinton Hall, entitled the "Science of Human Life," was well publicized, receiving numerous notices and comments in the New York press. In the *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, one detractor described Graham's two-hour talk as "one of the most rambling, desultory . . . badly connected discourses" he had ever had the displeasure to hear. Another reader of the *Courier and Enquirer* begged to differ, describing Graham as witty and fascinating to "a thousand delighted auditors." Indeed, he wrote that while he had been privileged to hear some of the best speakers of his day, he had "never heard anything superior to some parts of Mr. Graham's lectures."[16]

Apparently, many agreed. Graham delivered his first lectures to sold-out audiences and returned to Philadelphia where rapt audiences awaited him. He came back to New York the following winter and delivered the "Science of Human Life" twice more – at Clinton Hall and at Mulberry Street Baptist Church – to overflowing crowds. As he finished out his series at Mulberry Street, Graham announced that he would give a special lecture on cholera, its treatment and its causes. Over 2000 individuals turned out to hear Graham's talk on "Epidemic Diseases Generally and Particularly the Spasmodic Cholera," delivered in March 1832 at the Baptist Church.[17]

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[15] *Genius of Temperance*, 6 April 1831; 1 June 1831. On Graham's stint as a temperance lecturer, see Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 13; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 18-24.
[16] *Morning Courier and Enquirer*, 23 June 1831, 28 June 1831.
[17] Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 70-71.

Cholera was much on the minds of New Yorkers and other Americans during the spring of 1832. As they watched the fatal disease move from Asia to Europe and rage through that continent and England, they dreaded the possibility that it might, for the first time, cross the Atlantic and spread its ravages throughout North America. American medical professionals, journalists, and ministers engaged in a frenzied discussion of how to prevent and treat the disease should it come to their shores. Most agreed that the best way to fortify against cholera was to adopt a hearty diet, rich in spices and meat, augmented by "the occasional use of stimuli in the form of generous wine, or brandy, or gin and water." One doctor pointed out that when the cholera hit Asia and Europe, those who followed these ministrations survived while the disease "proved particularly fatal among . . . people . . . whose diet . . .was meagre and abstemious."[18] Never one to follow the mainstream, in his "Lecture on Epidemic Diseases Generally and Particularly the Spasmodic Cholera," Graham put forth the exact opposite advice.

Graham's suggestions for fortifying the body to avoid the cholera were simply an extension of his ideas on diet and health as spelled out in his "Science of Human Life" lectures. With the impending cholera epidemic, Graham was provided with the opportunity to apply his dietary prescriptions to a specific problem. Those prescriptions were, at base, a critique of the new food choices and preparations available to antebellum urbanites. While most medical practitioners were urging an embrace of rich foods, composed dishes, and plenty of meat – all choices that were

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[18] Sylvester Graham, *Lecture on Epidemic Diseases Generally, and Particularly The Spasmodic Cholera, Delivered in the City of New York, March 1832, and Repeated June, 1832, and in Albany, July 4, 1832, and In New York, June, 1833. With An Appendix, Containing Several Testimonials, and a Review of Beaumont's Experiments on the Gastric Juice*. (Boston: David Campbell, 1833), vii.

newly available to most antebellum New Yorkers – Graham advised a plain and simple diet, consisting of "boiled rice, coarse Indian meal hominy, &c. eaten cold with a very little good molasses or sugar, or with a small quantity of good milk." There are several other farinacaeous substances," he added, "which, in proper conditions and quantities, and at proper times, are safe and salutary articles of food; remembering always to avoid the concentrated forms, and unwholesome conditions of all articles."[19]

Indeed, Graham believed that commercially milled flours and commercially baked breads were among the most dangerous of dietary articles. Even those among his contemporaries who knew the least about Grahamite principles associated Graham with the bran bread he advocated. Graham's complaint about commercial flour was rooted in his belief that removing the outer layer, or bran, from the wheat removed all nutritious matter from bread, with dire consequences for health and morality. Of all foods, he argued, bread was the most "intimately . . . . connected with the corporeal and moral and intellectual interests of the human species."[20] Graham attacked commercial bakers, arguing that even if they used unrefined flour, their primary goal was still profit, rather than the health of their customers, and so they created an inherently unsound product. The only fit bread, he concluded, was that made in the home by the mother and wife, who infused her bread with love and care. Graham decried commercial flours and breadstuffs at a time when most urban women were growing reliant on these modern products. Hearkening back to an idealized vision of self-reliance and home production (one which he himself never experienced), Graham

[19] Ibid., 57.
[20] Ibid., 56.

warned his listeners of the dangers to their health, and that of their families, if they embraced new, commercial forms of production and consumption.[21]

Likewise, Graham urged an avoidance of the foods available in the markets and food shops of the city. While his regimen allowed for the "mild fruits of the season, such as strawberries, peaches, pears, &c.," unripe fruit and vegetables were prohibited, "particularly by citizens who depend on the markets and confectionaries for their supplies." Animal foods in general were to be avoided by those who hoped to escape cholera and other diseases. Graham advised against eating "salt" or "shellfish," and, he added, "in this city even fresh scale-fish had better be avoided. Lobsters, in particular," he continued, "are among the very worst and most dangerous articles of food and clams are but little better."[22] In general, Graham argued that a vegetarian diet was the best choice for ensuring a healthy system. But he allowed for "a little boiled or roasted beef or mutton once a day, without any made gravy, and without any seasoning but a little salt," for "they who have always accustomed themselves to a free use of flesh, and shall continue to do so up to the time of the commencement of the cholera in this city – (if such a fearful time shall come!) – if they cannot leave it off entirely at once, without feeling the want of it exceedingly." But, he warned, the meat should be prepared with no seasonings, and should absolutely not be followed by dessert.[23]

In fact, dessert in general was prohibited by the Graham system, as were soups, especially those made from animals, "all stimulating, heating, and irritating

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[21] Ibid., 55-7. See also: Sylvester Graham, *A Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking* (Boston: Light and Stearns, 1837).
[22] Graham, *Lecture on Epidemic Diseases*, 57.
[23] Ibid., 58.

condiments of the table, such as the various spices, pepper, mustard, &c.," tea and coffee. And of course "all other narcotic and all alcoholic substances such as tobacco, opium, distilled spirits, wine, malt liquors, and every other kind and sort, in every form and of every quality should be entirely avoided, with the most rigid and inflexible scrupulosity." "In short," he concluded, "everything should be carefully avoided which is calculated to irritate, and debilitate, and inflame the alimentary canal, and through it the whole system, and thus certainly predispose the body to the cholera and every other disease." [24]

The care of the alimentary canal was central to Graham's system since Graham believed that all disease was rooted in the stomach. While the Graham system of living involved a range of hygienic principles, including bathing regularly, engaging in physical exercise, wearing proper clothing, sleeping in a suitable bed, and avoiding sexual excess, eating a proper diet was most important. If one ate the wrong foods, or even too much of the right ones, none of the other precepts mattered. Graham argued that the body consisted of a series of organs, linked to each other by an interconnected system of nerves. The center of that nerve system, he held, wrapped around the stomach, making that organ the "common index of the whole system." Thus, Graham asserted, "the vital power of the system to resist the influence of noxious agents, and to accomplish the functions of life, always corresponds with the condition of the stomach." When the stomach was healthy, a condition that could be maintained by eating only "healthful" foods, "then it is," Graham held, "that man has the greatest physical power for achievement and endurance; then has life the most complete victory over the causes which induce

[24] Ibid., 59.

death." On the other hand, when one abused one's stomach, making it "debilitated and disordered," then "every other organ in the system sympathizes, and every other function languishes."[25]

Graham deduced that, since most people abused their systems by eating rich, stimulating foods and drinking noxious liquids such as wine, liquor, coffee, and tea they were susceptible to a wide range of diseases, including cholera. "It cannot," he concluded "be any cause of wonder, that chronic and acute diseases, in all their dreadful forms and modes of destruction, should be multiplied throughout the human family, and sweep away the great majority of the species, even in the dawn of life!"[26]

Graham lamented the fact that people ignored poor diet as the root of disease and searched for other causes "as if their only danger were from some mysterious agent, or principle in the atmosphere, or somewhere else, which absolutely and arbitrarily destroys life, without regard to habits or conditions of body." Even worse, he added, individuals who did attempt to regulate their diets were likely to choose the wrong articles of food and methods of preparation, thus increasing further "the debility and irritability of the digestive organs." The vicious cycle continued, in Graham's estimation, when people attempted "to relieve themselves from this depression, and languor, and despondency, resulting from the actions of their mind, and the conditions of their body," by turning to "strong tea and coffee, or to cordials or tonics, or fermented or distilled alcoholic liquors, or opiates, &c. – always, however, under the name of necessary preventives or medicines!"[27] In terms of food, Graham decried the "pernicious doctrine, that 'a generous system of diet,' (including

[25] Ibid., 11.
[26] Ibid., 17.
[27] Ibid., 34-5.

a free use of animal food, and of wine, and even of brandy), is the best preventive of the cholera."[28] In fact, he held, one should steer clear of these and other stimulating substances if one wanted to prevent the disease.

While Graham grounded good health in a healthy digestive system, arguing that to ensure good health, one should take care of "the stomach first," his designation of the roots of poor digestion were linked to the emergence of an urban, commercial society. Among the causes of a debilitated system were failure to maintain "cleanliness of person, habitation, street, and city;" the lack of exercise and fresh air; and overindulgence of one's appetite not just for food but also for drink, sex, gambling, and other forms of commercial vice. "It is . . . of the utmost importance," he warned in his cholera lectures, "that the NATURAL APPETITES should be strictly regulated, and always kept in subordination to enlightened reason and moral propriety. When indulged properly, Graham noted, these appetites are healthy and enjoyable. But, when abused, "they inevitably become the agents of disease and suffering." Accordingly, Graham continued, "we find that in the whole career of the Epidemic Cholera, dietetic intemperance and lewdness have been the grand purveyors to its devastating rage."[29] Graham informed his listeners that the best way to avoid cholera, should it hit New York, was to adopt his dietary system and avoid excess. "Remain not an hour," he warned, in the Sodom of your pernicious habits and indulgences, escape for your lives! – look not behind you! . . . lest ye be consumed!"[30]

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[28] Ibid., 50.
[29] Ibid., 49.
[30] Ibid., 63.

New Yorkers received Graham's cholera lecture with mixed reviews. Many of Graham's auditors – predisposed to follow his dietary precepts – lauded his prescriptions and put them to practice in their own lives. One New York City newspaper labeled Graham's talk "a masterly performance." Skeptics, on the other hand, declared derisively: "If the Cholera comes here, all the Grahamites will certainly die with it."[31] Not surprisingly, the most virulent resistance to Grahamism as a preventive for cholera came from the very professionals and commercial establishments against whom Graham waged his attacks. They included, according to Graham, "[e]very dealer in intoxicating liquors, including Hotels and Coffee Houses, -- every druggist, and almost every butcher, and baker, and tobacconist, and grocer, and flour dealer, and 'free liver' in the city." These critics, wrote Graham "felt deeply interested to save the people from the ravages of cholera by virtue of a '*generous diet*'" which included cures prescribed by medical professionals as well as many dietary items new to the urban scene, among them: "flesh, flesh soups, brandy, wine, porter, tobacco, coffee, tea, fine bread, &c."[32] Such criticism did not stop Graham from repeating his lecture over subsequent months in other cities along the Atlantic seaboard. Many of his listeners were convinced that Graham's system would be the best route for warding off cholera and for treating it should they contract it.

When cholera did hit New York in the summer of 1832, many of Graham's disciples believed that they were ready for it. Graham was not in New York to witness the effects of the disease; he had left the city shortly after delivering his lecture. Again, his detractors claimed, as Graham later wrote, "that all the

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[31] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 87; Graham, *Lecture on Epidemic Diseases*, vii.
[32] Graham, *Lecture on Epidemic Diseases*, 91.

'Grahamites' were dead and dying with the cholera. . . . [E]ven physicians who hold a respectable standing in society, boldly asserted, as a matter of their knowledge, that the 'Grahamites' were dying by hundreds with cholera." Graham brushed off these claims as "the most egregious misinterpretations and unblushing falsehoods . . . daily fabricated and busily circulated throughout the city." And a rash of testimonials that Graham later published indicated that the adherents to his system fared far better than his critics suggested. [33]

Evander D. Fisher, for example, wrote that his family had adopted Graham's system of living following his New York lecture series. He noted that they stayed in New York the summer the cholera hit "and never enjoyed better health than we did through the whole cholera season." In fact, he continued: "That dreadful disease raged all around us, and cut off many of our neighbors, and even came into our own house and attacked our mother, who did not live on [the Graham] system, but ate flesh, &c." Even though Mr. Fisher "was much amongst the dying and the dead, and assisted in laying out and putting into their coffins at least a dozen bodies of those who had died of cholera," neither he, his wife, nor his sister, all of whom had followed Graham's dietary precepts, had "the least premonitory symptom of cholera, nor any other illness during the whole season."[34]

Likewise, William Mitchell wrote that he and his family, who followed Graham's system, were in the city for the cholera season and saw many fatalities around them but escaped the dreaded disease thanks to Graham and his prescriptions.

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[33] Ibid. For testimonials on the effectiveness of Grahamism in treating cholera, see Graham, *Lecture on Epidemic Diseases*, 93-99; Sylvester Graham, *The Aesculapian Tablets of the Nineteenth Century* (Providence: Weeden and Cory, 1834).
[34] Graham, *Lecture on Epidemic Diseases*, 96.

"What is still more remarkable," he added, was "*the report* . . . that the Grahamites were dying like rotten sheep, and that in *our family* there was only *one Grahamite*, and she had the cholera very bad; and the rest of the family, who *were not* Grahamites, escaped." In truth, he noted, all members of his family subscribed to the Graham system, except his mother, and it was she alone who fell to the ravages of the disease, "while the rest of us had not a symptom, but enjoyed the best of health." Graham noted that while his opponents claimed that Grahamites were dying off during the cholera, in fact he could find not a single case in which one of his adherents contracted the disease except for those like Mr. A_____, in James Street, who had been a Grahamite until the cholera hit, whereupon he ignored Grahamite precepts, ate rich and hearty foods, and fell victim to the cholera. Not surprisingly, his punishment for falling off the Grahamite wagon was a painful death from the disease.[35]

Enough people were convinced of the merits of the Graham system that Graham's name spread throughout the eastern seaboard and he became a lecturer in high demand, both during and following the cholera epidemics of 1832 and 1833. Over the decade of the 1830s, Graham continued to hone his Science of Human Life and to lecture on other topics as well, most notably the importance of proper breadmaking, which he discussed in his *Treatise on Bread and Breadmaking*, and masturbation, the subject of his 1834 *Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*. In these talks, many of which he subsequently published, Graham continued to draw connections between diet, health, and character and to wage his attacks on the new food choices and behaviors available to antebellum Americans. Again, Graham

[35] Ibid., 96, 92.

argued that the United States was a nation of dyspeptics not only because of their poor food choices but also because of their lamentable behaviors, both around food and in other areas.[36]

Like European visitors and other chroniclers of antebellum American mores, Graham critiqued his compatriots' acceptance of excess and abundance. Graham went further than simply commenting on the embrace of excess. He offered solutions for how to deal with it, advising his listeners and readers simply to avoid it. "Every individual," Graham wrote in bold, capital letters in the published version of his *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, "should as a general rule, restrain himself to the smallest quantity, which . . . will fully meet the alimentary wants of . . . his system, – knowing that whatsoever is more than this is evil!"[37]

Graham also believed that too varied a diet was dangerous, arguing that the digestive system was capable of handling only one type of food at a time. An entry in the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* explained:

> The uniform experience of physicians, and indeed, of almost all other men, agrees in the statement, that one article of food, taken at a meal, digests more easily and much quicker, than a mixture of several. This, then is a sufficient ground for establishing the rule of diet, which recommends, as best of all, to confine ourselves at each meal, to a single dish.[38]

That dish, of course, was not to be some rich, overstimulating selection. The foods taken, Graham argued, should be as unadulterated and unprocessed as possible. Again, one should, in Graham's estimation, avoid the newest foods and preparations

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[36] Graham, *Treatise on Bread, and Breadmaking*; Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men on Chastity, Intended Also for the Serious Consideration of Parents and Guardians* (Providence: Weeden and Cory, 1834).
[37] Sylvester Graham, *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, vol. 2 (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1839), p. 537.
[38] "The Less Variety of Food and Drink at Any One Meal, The Better," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 12 December 1837, 285.

available. "By simple food," he explained, "I mean that which is not compounded and complicated by culinary process; – by plain food I mean that which is not dressed with pungent stimulants, seasonings or condiments and by natural food I mean that which the creator has designed for man."[39]

Graham's critiques of the new food choices and of the embrace of excess were linked. People ate too much, he argued, because their systems were overstimulated. Eating the wrong kinds of foods – animal flesh, spices and condiments, rich sauces and gravies, and heavy pastries and confectionery – led to the awakening of unnatural hungers and so people continued to feed themselves, to the detriment of their health. How was one to solve this problem? By following Graham's dietary program, of course. Once one began the proper regimen, the health of the alimentary system would be restored and hunger would dissipate. The "plain liver," as the Grahamites called themselves, simply could not overeat according to Graham, because the extent of his urges for food would correspond exactly to his body's needs. Such a course of action was imperative since, according to Graham, "excessive alimentation is one of the greatest sources of evil to the human family in civic life."[40]

Indeed, "excessive alimentation" could lead to a host of other problematic behaviors. "Some people learn to be intemperate in drinking," a notice in the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* began, "by first becoming intemperate in eating. . . . One intemperate indulgence is apt to lead to another. The person that would not wish to be a drunkard should take care not to let his appetite be his master

[39] Graham, *Science of Human Life*, 2:19.
[40] Ibid.

in any thing."[41] Such indulgence did not end with food and drink. Sexual excess also was a potential result of an improper diet. "All kinds of stimulating and heating substances, high-seasoned foods, rich dishes, the free use of flesh, and even the excess of aliment . . . increase the concupiscent excitability and sensibility of the genital organs," Graham wrote in his *Lecture to Young Men on Chastity.*[42] Thus, Graham created a constellation of appetites of which food was merely the most dangerous since indulging one's appetite for food led so easily to the dangerous gratification of other appetites. Graham's system then, was intended not merely as a way of controlling one's intake of food but a way of avoiding many of the other dangers inherent to an urban, commercial society.

In fact, the don'ts of the Graham dietary system read like a list of new food choices available to antebellum New Yorkers. Again, Graham's solution to dealing with the new alternatives was to simply stay away from them. One could avoid the embarrassment of riches by eating as little food and as plain a diet as possible. Rich foods, composed dishes, gravies, sauces, seasonings and condiments, coffee and tea, pastry, confections, and anything that involved excessive preparation, were all to be strictly avoided by the Grahamite. Graham was extremely critical of foreign food preparations, items that were new to the antebellum urban scene. Soups, for example, which were popularized in the early nineteenth century by French immigrant chefs, were especially disdained. They were far too stimulating and rich for the digestive system to handle. Furthermore, an important rule of Grahamism was proper mastication which of course was impossible with liquid foods.

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[41] *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 9 May 1837, 48.
[42] Graham, *Lecture to Young Men on Chastity*, 47.

Graham reserved his greatest derision, however, for processed foods, attacking not only commercial bakers but commercial butchers as well. While he advocated a vegetarian diet, believing that meat was among the most stimulating of foods, he did allow for a bit of flexibility in this area. However, the meat available in the markets of the city was objectionable. First, he accused butchers of selling bad meat, culled from sick animals. Additionally, he argued that the meat sold in the urban markets was days old, and in an advanced state of putridity, and thus calculated to produce illness. If one had to eat meat, Graham argued, it should be raw and just slaughtered. Clearly then, no meat available to urban dwellers was acceptable to Graham.

The new public dining options were also appalling to the Grahamite. *The Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* printed an Astor House menu from July 1, 1839, under the title "Bill of Fare – Not Nature's, But At the Astor House Parlors, N.Y." Among the clearly un-Grahamite dishes: Oyster Pie, Mutton Cutlets Fried in Crumbs, Calfs' brains "au supreme," Curried Veal and Rice, and Lobster Salad.[43] Indeed, a Grahamite could not find one acceptable item on this menu. The very scale of the menu was offensive – so many different dishes at one meal was anathema to one of the main tenets of the Graham system. Furthermore, virtually every selection was meat-based – hardly the makings of a vegetarian diet. And none of those cuts of meat was raw, or just slaughtered. Of the fish items, all were shellfish, again proscribed by the Graham system. And with the exception of "Beefsteak, plain," and

[43] "Bill of Fare – Not Nature's, but at the Astor House Parlors, N.Y.," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 23 November 1839, 392.

some boiled meats, all of the dishes were, as Graham would put it, "compounded and complicated by culinary processes."[44]

The pages of the *Graham Journal* were filled with Grahamites' complaints about the unhealthy meals served in hotels, boarding houses, and restaurants. "It is indeed impossible," wrote one correspondent," to get healthy food from our steamboat and hotel tables."[45] Another wrote a lengthy letter decrying the meals served at "any genteel boarding house . . . any first rate hotel, . . . any good steamboat-table or . . . any popular restorateur." This "plain liver" was horrified at the speed with which diners ate, the excessive amount of food, and the dishes served. The least offensive to him were the "murdered animals which the diners relished." Worse were the composed dishes such as fricasseed chicken, or sausage. "It is absolutely nauseating," he wrote, "to think of the compound." It was no wonder, he concluded, when one considered the foods served, that "bloated apoplexy, trembling palsy, racking rheumatism, gout, *delirium tremens*, the thousand ministers of death," also took their seats alongside the diners.[46]

Hotels and restaurants were not, of course, alone in creating a nation of dyspeptics. Grahamites saw poor eating habits everywhere, including "our dining rooms, nurseries, fruit-shops, confectionaries, and pleasure gardens. . . even . . . sick-rooms." These "innumerable scenes of gormandizing," a Grahamite wrote, were "not only productive of disease in those concerned in them, but in many instances offensive to beholders." The problem was one of both quantity and quality. "The

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[44] Graham, *Science of Human Life*, 2:19.
[45] "Tricks Upon Travellers," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 3 March 1838, 71.
[46] "Description of a Fashionable or Anti-Graham Dinner," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 21 November 1837, 257-9.

frightful mess often consists of all sorts of eatable materials that can be collected and crowded together, and its only measure is the endurance and capacity of their stomach. . . . Men stow away their viands until they have neither desire nor room for any more."[47]

The ubiquitous evidence of excessive indulgence and poor food choices concerned Grahamites because they saw such a firm connection between diet, health, and character. One plain living New Yorker described a gluttonous acquaintance in a letter to the *Graham Journal*. "His face," the writer confided, "was blotched, pimpled, and swollen – caused by his gluttony." But it was not simply his physical appearance which was affected by overindulging his appetites. It was his nature as well. "His mind," the Grahamite continued, "is naturally bright active, and quick of comprehension – sociable, agreeable, and friendly in his disposition." But this man's natural character had changed since embracing "a table loaded with all the luxuries of modern cookery." Now, "his gormandizing habits have made him quite a different person. He is morose, churlish, dull, and uncompanionable."[48]

Thus, while Graham and his followers evinced great concern about personal health – an outgrowth of the prevalence of disease among and around them – their designation of the roots of and remedy for poor health was firmly linked to urban life and the options it presented. Confronted with unprecedented abundance and suffering from poor health, those who followed Graham must have found his connection of the two issues and his prescriptions for dealing with them appealing. For not only did Graham point out the roots of debility and disease, he provided a solution to these

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[47] "Excess in Quantity of Food," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 30 May 1837, 68-9.

[48] "I Pity You," *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, 20 June 1837, 92.

problems as well as larger societal concerns. Sylvester Graham offered a dietary regimen which, if adhered to, would improve the health and morality of the individual, and by extension that of society as well.

Armed with this mission, the Grahamites set out to convert their fellow Americans to plain living. To this end, they established the American Physiological Society (APS) in Boston in 1837; a New York branch was established shortly after. With a few exceptions, most of the 165 founding members of the Society were laypeople, concerned, according to their Constitution, with "that part of Human Physiology which teaches the influence of air, cleanliness, exercise, sleep, food, drink, medicine, etc., on human health and longevity."[49] According to its president, William Andrus Alcott, the majority of the members of the APS had suffered a lifetime of illness and chronic disease. Indeed, "not a few joined it," he wrote, "as a last resort, after having tried everything else, as drowning men are said to catch at straws."[50]

As members of the APS, they were pledged to follow the laws of physiology. While it was not stated as such in their Constitution, those laws were essentially the rules that Graham had laid out in his "Science of Human Life": cleanliness of person and surroundings, proper clothing, avoidance of sexual excess, temperance in drink, and of course, avoidance of stimulating foods and rich dishes. A central goal was to influence the unconverted to embrace dietary reform. This need was dire since, as they resolved, "the millennium, the near approach of which is by many so

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[49] Hebbel E. Hoff and John F. Fulton, "The Centenary of the First American Physiological Society Founded at Boston by William A. Alcott and Sylvester Graham," *Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine* 5:8 (October 1837): 688.
[50] Alcott quoted in Ibid., 698.

confidently predicted, can never reasonably be expected to arrive until those laws which God has implanted in the *physical* nature of man, are, equally with his moral laws, universally known and obeyed."[51] The Society sponsored lectures and publications and its members proselytized with the fervor of zealots to those who were yet unconverted. By June 1838, the APS claimed a membership of 251 men and women, all convinced of the rightness of plain living. While Graham was never a formal member of the Society, he was an important guest at many of its meetings and his principles were at the foundation of their Constitution.[52]

The demographic make-up of the APS shows Grahamism's appeal mainly to individuals of middling means new to the urban scene – the group for whom shifts in food availability and behaviors had the most direct effect. As Stephen Nissenbaum points out in his study of Sylvester Graham, most of the men who joined the Society were young – between the ages of twenty-five and forty. Most were born in rural New England or upstate New York and had recently moved to the city of Boston. The majority of the founding male members of the APS were of middling means, owning some property and employed overwhelmingly in artisanal trades or as small business owners. Conspicuously absent from the membership list of the APS were individuals of great wealth or poverty.[53]

The APS also claimed a number of female members. In fact, a full quarter of its founding members were women, most of them the wives of middle-class men. Many of the tenets of health reform appealed to women, including: the opposition to

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[51] Ibid, 696-701.
[52] Ibid.; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 143-46; Morantz, "Making Women Modern," 492.
[53] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 144-5.

tight lacing; the urging of male sexual restraint; and the rejection of professional medical practices, many of which had adverse effects on women in particular, especially those which pertained to pregnancy and childbirth.[54] Furthermore, male health reformers spelled out a specific place in their mission for women in their role as wives and mothers. A resolution passed at the second annual meeting of the APS asserted: "That woman in her character as wife and mother is only second to the Deity in the influence that she exerts on the physical, the intellectual, and the moral interests of the human race." Thus, it continued, "her education should be adapted to qualify her in the highest degree to cherish those interests in the wisest and best manner." Women would play an important role not only in the founding and administration of the APS but in spreading the ideals of the health reform movement in the larger society as well.[55]

Mary Neal Gove, for example, became the foremost female lecturer on the tenets of the Graham system. Mary Neal was born in New Hampshire and spent her childhood there and in Vermont. Mary's father, William A. Neal, passed his intellectual curiosity onto his daughter, whom he sent to school at the age of two. Mary proved herself an excellent and precocious student. By six years of age, she had read Plutarch. Like many diet reformers, Mary Neal suffered from poor health. She was also the victim of a dreadful marriage to Hiram Gove, whom she wed in 1831. Hiram Gove was a mean-spirited, tyrannical husband and Mary described her marriage to him as "an eternity of misery." In an effort to ease her physical and emotional suffering, Gove trained herself in medicine, imbibing medical texts with a

[54] Morantz, "Making Women Modern," 495-8
[55] Ibid., 492; See also Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood.*

passion. She also learned of the theories of Sylvester Graham, whom Gove described as "one of the greatest benefactors the world ever had." Gove versed herself in the works of Graham with the same zeal she had brought to her other medical studies. In 1837, she and her husband moved from Weare, New Hampshire to Lynn, Massachusetts where Mary started a "Graham boarding school for young ladies" "conducted on the principles of physiology and hygiene." In addition, she began to lecture on Graham's theories at a female lyceum in Lynn.[56]

Sylvester Graham had been lecturing to groups of men and women since his early days as a public lecturer. But many felt that his talks, focusing as they did on the body and its functions, were too delicate for a mixed audience. This was particularly true of his lectures on chastity. One such event was met by an irate mob in Portland, Maine, which prevented Graham from speaking about masturbation and sexuality in front of women. Mary Gove seemed an obvious choice to share Graham's theories with female audiences and she became the first woman to impart Graham's theories to members of her gender. In the fall of 1838, she delivered her first series of lectures on Grahamism, anatomy, and physiology, sponsored by the Ladies Physiological Society of Boston. In subsequent years, she was invited to speak to women in several towns in Massachusetts, as well as in Providence and New York City. The average size of Gove's audience was about 400; in one case two thousand women attended a free lecture delivered by Gove. Like Graham, Gove published many of her lectures, including one on masturbation in 1839. In addition, in 1841 she founded and edited *The Health Journal and Advocate of Physiological*

[56] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 149; On Mary Gove Nichols, see John B. Blake, "Mary Gove Nichols, Prophetess of Health," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 106:3 (June 1962): 219-34.

Reform, which she intended as a successor to the defunct *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*.[57] As we shall see, Gove continued to spread Grahamite principles through the water-cure movement, of which she was a central member.

Grahamism held appeal as well to many members of the reform community of the 1830s and '40s. Among those who adhered to Graham's system at one time or another were Theodore Weld, Angelina and Sarah Grimké, William Lloyd Garrison, Horace Greeley, Arthur and Louis Tappan, William Goodell, and Joshua Leavitt, all prominent abolitionists.[58] Garrison was prepared for Grahamite guests in his home with "a fine spring of water in our cellar, and plenty of Graham flour up stairs." And a visitor to a Grahamite boarding house in New York noted that almost all of the residents were "Garrisonites," and the topics of conversation at the table were not of bran bread and vegetables but of "Slavery, Colonization, &c."[59]

Like the abolitionists, Graham and his followers attracted a good deal of ridicule and sometimes violent opposition. Indeed, the virulence of the opposition to Graham attests both to his apparent abrasiveness and penchant for alienating his fellows, and to the seriousness with which his theories were regarded, even among those who were most resistant to them. Since Graham's system was, in many ways, an attack on the commercialization of food, it is not surprising that his most vociferous and vocal opponents were those whose businesses were threatened by his prescriptions. As they had in Portland, Maine, angry opponents attacked several of Graham's other lectures. Twice, Boston butchers mobbed Graham, recognizing the

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[57] Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 126; Blake, "Mary Gove Nichols," 219-22; Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 150-52.
[58] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 177.
[59] "Grahamites and Garrisonians," *New York History* 20:1 (January 1939): 190-91.

threat to their livelihoods inherent in his critiques of their trade. Boston's bakers, motivated by similar fears also stormed Graham's lectures.[60]

Medical professionals, too, felt threatened by Graham's unorthodox approach to attaining and preserving good health, as well as his pointed attacks on their profession. The pages of the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* were filled with editorials, letters, and articles declaiming Graham and his theories. The popular press as well contained myriad derisive appraisals of Grahamism. An 1836 article in the *New York Review*, for example, asserted that: "this system (is) . . . most pernicious and abhorrent, . . . a fanatical attempt to shut out from mankind certain sources of happiness and enjoyment, which were clearly provided and intended for them in the economy of the earth. . . . Unless checked," it continued, "this wild Fanaticism will sweep through the land overthrowing every social comfort, every physical enjoyment, every pleasure that springs from sense and refers to sense." The *Boston Courier* exclaimed: "a greater humbug or more disgusting writer never lived." And the *Hampshire Gazette* called Graham and his followers "cranium cracked dyspetics."[61] Graham responded in kind, flinging epithets at his opponents. In the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, Graham accused one of his opponents as quoting "trash," describing him as a "propagator of errors whose only authority is . . . ignorance and depravity." Elsewhere, he labeled a well-known doctor a "stupid blockhead."[62]

Graham's uncanny ability to offend and disaffect even those who embraced his theories prevented him from being the true or lasting leader of the movement that

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[60] Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 122-25, 138, 149, 154-5; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 14.
[61] "Dietetic Charlatanry," *New York Review*, October 1837; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 220.
[62] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 53; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 238.

bore his name. While he achieved great notoriety, drew thousands to his talks, and published numerous editions of his lectures during the 1830s, the subsequent decades saw the broadening of his movement without him at its helm. After publishing his "Science of Human Life" Lectures in 1839, Graham entered semi-retirement in Northampton, Massachusetts. He continued to lecture sporadically, and to frequently and combatively defend his positions in the pages of the local press, but for all intents and purposes, diet reform became institutionalized under the leadership of others.[63]

Indeed, as Graham's theories reached further into American culture, they were stripped of their association with Graham himself and became part of the larger health reform movement. Many of those sympathetic to Grahamite principles began, during the late 1830s, to distance themselves from the man himself and his one-track focus on diet. The American Physiological Society, for example, after three active years, disbanded in 1839 as its officers became disheartened that the Society had become a food-reform organization rather than one with a broader focus on general health and hygiene. And Graham's *Lectures on the Science of Human Life*, which drew large audiences as a lecture series, experienced low sales when published as a book in 1839.[64]

William Andrus Alcott lamented that all of the "Health Associations" established in recent decades had become "mere anti-flesh eating societies." While "it is . . . true," he continued, "that here and there an individual and possibly an association pays some attention to cleanliness, air, temperature, exercise, dress and

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[63] Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 162; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 14-15.
[64] The rejection of Graham even by Grahamites may have been linked to the controversy and occasional violent responses that he engendered. See Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 120-30.

the state of mind and heart as means of promoting health. . . in general . . . the grand inquiry is in regard to eating animal food." Equally regrettable for Alcott was that "even in regard to diet. . . very little is yet done. For flesh and fish they may have indeed substituted potatoes and hasty pudding fried or at least mixed with grease of some sort, hot bread or pastry, hot puddings, custards, soups, and other washy food; but is this a matter of much exultation?"[65] For these reasons, Alcott left his post as president of the APS and went on to publish the periodical, *Library of Health*, whose pages, he pledged, would forward the crusade for physiological reform. While he acknowledged that he still felt strongly that proper diet was important to maintaining good health, and a proportion of the pages of his journal would be devoted to dietary issues, he insisted that diet would not be its exclusive focus. "We shall never," he vowed, "so far yield to the popular clamor as to become a teacher of *mere* dietetics; nor," in a thinly veiled reference to Graham, "suffer the *Library of Health* to be disgraced by a course which would secure to it the patronage of short-sighted reformers. Sooner will we beg our living from door to door, yea, sooner will we starve."[66]

Alcott's wish to distance himself from Graham was not surprising. Although Alcott acknowledged Graham's influence on his thinking, and the two men worked together in establishing the American Physiological Society, Alcott was always wary of the prophet of bran bread. Possibly, this aversion was rooted in Graham's celebrity and in the connection in the public mind of all dietary critiques with Graham. Alcott himself had developed a system of hygienic principles simultaneous to Graham's

[65] Alcott, quoted in Hoff and Fulton, "Centenary," 711-12.
[66] Ibid., 712.

early career as a public lecturer. Indeed, at the same time that Graham began to gain notoriety for his theories, Alcott was busy publishing a series of advice manuals for children, men, and women. In addition to the standard conduct-manual fare – etiquette, character formation, the importance of industry and economy – Alcott included in these volumes the importance of following a regimen of vegetarianism and abstinence from stimulating foods, cleanliness of body and surroundings, and physical exercise. While not a lecturer, Alcott was an extremely prolific writer, publishing numerous pamphlets and magazine articles, over 100 books, some beyond the twentieth edition, and editing several periodicals between 1832 and his death in 1859. All focused on diet or health.[67]

Like Graham and most of the health reformers, Alcott's interest in health grew out of his own battles with illness and debility. Born in 1798, the son of a poor Connecticut farmer (and cousin of Bronson Alcott), William A. Alcott suffered a succession of illnesses as a child and young adult, leading him eventually to study medicine in an effort to cure himself. Before becoming a physician, however, Alcott served as a schoolmaster in Connecticut for six years. Even after receiving his medical degree in 1825, Alcott continued to teach, and focused his attention on his pupils' physical well-being as well as their intellectual development. Among Alcott's early publications were a series of articles in the *Journal of Education* on health conditions in schools and an essay entitled *On the Construction of Schoolhouses*, published in 1831. Among the innovations Alcott proposed were more comfortable benches, school-room decorations, better heating and ventilation, and physical

[67] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 71-8.

exercise in school.[68] These writings were typical of Alcott in that he saw physiology and health reform as touching on every aspect of personal behavior and environment, unlike some of the narrower reformers, like Graham, who saw dietary habits as the main influence on health and character.

Alcott's poor health led him to abandon his career as a teacher in favor of opening a small medical practice. He concerned himself not just with curing disease and illness but with preventing it and his suggestions for its prevention were to follow a similar range of hygienic principles to that proposed by Graham. Alcott remained unfulfilled practicing medicine however and in 1831, he moved to Boston and became an editor of periodicals aimed at children. During the subsequent years, Alcott published his myriad books on health and hygiene, domestic manuals, and a treatise on vegetarianism. He edited a series of physiological journals, including *The Moral Reformer and Teacher in the Human Constitution*, and *The Library of Health*, and in 1837, he began his three year stint as president of the American Physiological Society.[69]

During the 1830s, Graham's fame and the controversy that dogged him throughout his career detracted from Alcott's influence, to the awareness and annoyance of the latter. He decried a criticism of his advocacy of vegetarianism in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* as an attempt "to throw dust in everybody's eyes by the perpetual cry of 'bran bread.'" And he denied vociferously the claim "that I have joined Mr. Graham in applauding the virtues of abstinence and

[68] Ibid., 65-6; Hoff and Fulton, "Centenary," 690.
[69] Hoff and Fulton," Centenary," 691-2.

starvation."[70] But after Graham's retirement in 1839, Alcott would become the foremost proponent of diet and health reform. Alcott's views on diet were more extreme than Graham's. He eschewed all meat, following a strict vegetarian diet; believed even yeast was a stimulant and so prepared bread without it; and for a time drank no liquids at all, including water, believing that thirst was an unnatural appetite. But Alcott saw diet as one component of proper physiology while Graham saw it as the central one.[71]

Alcott reached thousands through his many popular health and advice manuals, which were published through the 1840s and 1850s, and beyond. Indeed, diet reform as a unique system fell away as Graham entered retirement in Northampton. But many of Graham's central tenets were folded into the popular advice literature produced by Alcott and others. The child who was exposed to *The House I Live In*, the teenager who read *The Young Man's Guide* or *The Young Woman's Guide*, the homemaker who had *The Young Housekeeper* on her kitchen shelf, and readers of Alcott's other volumes, imbibed the principles of the Graham system along with advice on such topics as early rising, treatment of domestics, character formation, and household accounting.

The conduct-of-life genre, which focused on character as well as etiquette, was a popular one in antebellum America. By and large, the conduct manuals were geared toward middle-class men and women new to the urban milieu and the advice contained in them spelled out a bourgeois value system which included self-control and moderation, industry and thrift, honesty and sobriety, self-reliance, and loyalty to

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[70] Alcott, quoted in Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 84.
[71] Ibid, 86-95.

God, family, and country. Conduct writers inevitably included advice on proper behaviors around food, and control of the appetites, a central tenet of Grahamism. In the anonymously written *Young Man's Own Book*, published in 1835, eating topped the list of those things in which the author urged moderation. Not surprisingly considering his interest in food and health, Alcott devoted eleven pages of his *Young Man's Guide* specifically to the subject of temperate eating habits, declaring gluttony to be an evil equivalent to drunkenness.[72]

In their advice on eating habits, the conduct advisers forwarded ideas laid out by Graham, urging their readers to regulate their food intake, avoid complicated dishes and rich preparations, and chew their food thoroughly. And, like Graham, they adhered to the principle that the stomach was the central component of an individual's physical and emotional well-being. Thus, the author of *The Young Man's Own Book* warned that "excessive eating is unfavorable to efficient exertion of the body or the mind" and "the inevitable precursor of disease in some form or other." In a similar vein, Frank Fergurson advocated a temperate diet as "promotive of health and activity."[73] And in his *Twelve Lectures to Young Men*, Reverend Henry Ward Beecher drew a direct connection between mental exertion (as experienced by the young man in business) and a weak digestive system. Beecher urged his listeners and readers not to overexert themselves mentally and thus risk destroying their overall health. This danger was particularly frightful because, Beecher held, it was

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[72] *The Young Man's Own Book. A Manual of Politeness, Intellectual Improvement and Moral Deportment, Calculated to Form the Character on a Solid Basis and to Insure Respectability and Success in Life* (Philadelphia: DeSilver, Thomas and Co., 1835), 136; Alcott, *Young Man's Guide*, 62-73.

[73] *Young Man's Own Book*, 136; Frank Fergurson, *The Young Man; or Guide to Knowledge, Virtue, and Happiness* (Nashua, NH: J.M. Fletcher, 1848), 69.

impossible to separate an individual's happiness from his health. "In many cases," he asserted, "the difference between happy men and unhappy men is caused by their digestion."[74]

The conduct advisers also warned of dire consequences for those who failed to control their natural appetites and posited an inextricable link among the various appetites. Excess, the author of *The Young Man's Own Book* declared, wears many faces, appealing to the propensity for sin in every man: "To the epicure, she presents delicious banquets; to the bacchanal, stores of exquisite wines; to the sensualist, his seraglio of mistresses; to each, the allurement he is most prone to; and to all, a pleasing poison that not only impairs the body, but stupifies the mind."[75] The impact on character of losing control over one's appetites was evident to the conduct writers. When the appetites "are allowed to break through . . . and become leading principles of action," wrote the author of *The Young Man's Sunday Book*, "they form a character the lowest in the scale, whether intellectual or moral; and it is impossible to contemplate a more degraded condition of a rational and moral being." In the advice writers' eyes, the ability to maintain such control was the one factor which distinguished man from animal. Indeed, the author of *The Young Man's Sunday Book* defined "appetites" as "the gratification of the animal propensities."[76]

Other writers of popular advice manuals included similar content in their works. For example, in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, Catharine Beecher

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[74] Henry Ward Beecher, *Twelve Lectures to Young Men on Various Important Subjects*, rev. ed. (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1879), 202-3.
[75] *Young Man's Own Book*, 135-6.
[76] *The Young Man's Sunday Book: A Practical Exhibition of Doctrines, Duties, and Principles, Adapted to Improve the Taste, to Excite the Reflection, and to Promote the Piety, Usefulness, and Happiness of the Young* (Philadelphia: DeSilver and Thomas and Co., 1836), 268.

extolled the virtues of a vegetarian diet and urged parents not to feed their children overstimulating foods for fear of causing fever, inflammation, and disease. Beecher also forwarded Graham's moralistic position on bread and breadmaking, arguing that unbolted flour was better than the refined variety, and that women should make every effort to bake personally the bread they fed their families. Finally, Beecher drew a connection between diet, health and character that smacked of Graham's theories. She warned parents, nurses, and teachers not to allow children to eat "at short intervals, through the day. As the stomach is thus kept constantly at work, with no time for repose," she continued, its functions are deranged, and a weak or disordered stomach is the frequent result." The result of a thus disordered stomach: "stupidity of intellect, and irritability of temper, as well as ill health."[77] Beecher connected social disorder with poor eating habits, arguing that overeating was a sign of working-class vice, and that a diet consisting of an overabundance of stimulants would lead to debility.[78] Thus, she made quite explicit the notion that performance around food was a crucial marker of class status and that food-related behaviors were linked to social standing and advancement.

This link must have been an appealing one to the middle-class individuals who made up the audience for the diet reformers and conduct writers. As I have noted, class status was extremely precarious during this period and middle-class arbiters and spokesmen were delineating proper performance and behavior as its central markers. The diet reformers and those who spread their precepts provided instructions for how to handle new food choices and behaviors without sacrificing

[77] Catharine Esther Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1848), 223.
[78] Green, *Fit for America*, 30-6.

one's claims to middle-class status. Adherence to diet reform itself could become a mark of that status. For only those who had the means to partake of the new food alternatives had the luxury of rejecting them. It is interesting that Grahamism had its greatest impact and appeal at a time when impoverished Irish immigrants – fleeing a land of starvation – were flooding into New York and other northeastern cities. Diet reform was not aimed at, nor did it appeal to this group of individuals. Those who struggled to put any kind of food on their tables could not be bothered with the status implications of what and how they ate. Choosing Grahamism then, opting for, as one critic of diet reform put it, "a living skeleton system," could act as a symbolic way for middle-class individuals to separate themselves from those for whom hunger was a true concern.[79] To have access to so much food that one had to be instructed to reject anything greater than the needs of one's system dictated, to be able to *opt* for a meager diet of bran bread and water, was itself an indulgence. Even for those of middling means, Grahamism had greater appeal at times of economic stability. It may be no coincidence, for example, that Graham's greatest popularity occurred during the early 1830s – a time of great prosperity – and dipped around 1838, the year of the dissolution of the American Physiological Society and a devastating financial panic. The tenets of diet reform became popular again after the financial downturn of the late 1830s began to ease during the subsequent decade.

Indeed, it was during the 1840s that Grahamism became institutionalized under the rubric of other health reform movements such as phrenology and hydropathy ("water-cure"). These movements incorporated Grahamite principles into their larger programs and contributed to the spread of Graham's tenets after his

[79] Anti-Grahamite, quoted in Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 228.

retirement and the disbanding of the American Physiological Society. Both phrenology and hydropathy were developed by Europeans and neither grew out of Grahamism. But those individuals who contributed to the popularization of these programs in the United States in the 1840s linked them firmly to the principles that Graham had laid out in his lectures and writings of the 1830s. Indeed, some of the major American phrenologists and hydropathists – Orson Fowler, Joel Shew, Russell Thacher Trall, David Campbell, and Mary Gove Nichols (the divorced Mary Gove married Dr. Thomas Nichols in 1848) – were prominent Grahamites as well.[80]

Two Austrian physicians, Franz Joseph Gall and Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, developed the theory of phrenology in the early nineteenth century. They held that the brain could be divided into thirty-seven distinct areas, each correlating to a particular personality trait or "faculty." Among the "faculties" they identified were: "amativeness" (or sexual desire), "combativeness," "spirituality," "cautiousness," "agreeablesness," and, of course, "alimentiveness" (or appetite). The size of each faculty, and the external stimuli exercised on each in an individual's brain determined the behavior and character of the individual. In the 1820s, phrenology hit the American scene. European imprints on the subject became available in the United States and American scientists who had visited Europe returned home and began to lecture on the connection between brain anatomy and human behavior. Spurzheim himself visited the United States in 1832 and lectured widely on the subject and by

[80] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 161-92; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 147-51.

1838, when the Scottish phrenologist George Combe visited various lecture halls in the Northeast, many Americans were familiar with phrenological theory.[81]

But it was New York publishers and brothers Orson and Lorenzo Fowler who would spread the ideas of phrenology to the American public and connect the new science to the tenets of diet reform. Not only did they deliver lectures and publish books and a periodical, *The American Phrenological Journal*, on the subject, but the Fowler brothers carried phrenology out of the realm of theory and put it into practice. As "practical phrenologists," they performed "readings" on the skulls of their audience members and opened a "phrenological cabinet" in New York City where they displayed plaster busts of famous individuals, showing the connection between their personality traits and the structures of their brains. In making phrenology a practical science, the Fowler brothers spelled out a way not only to determine character and behavior, but also to correct improper behaviors and foster proper ones. "Every faculty," Orson Fowler wrote, "has its own appropriate aliment and stimulant, by the presentation of which it is excited, and its organ thereby enlarged, and the removal of which its action is diminished, and its size thereby reduced."[82]

The Fowlers' version of phrenology went a step further from the system as laid out by its founders in giving it practical application and in connecting it to the dietary and physiological theories of Graham and the diet reformers. Thus Orson Fowler argued against the use of animal food, stimulating liquors and spices, rich food preparations and bread made with refined flours. Fowler held that the partaking of these substances would lead to a loss of control over the appetites by inflaming the

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[81] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 166-8; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 147-9.
[82] Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*, 168.

area of the brain responsible for controlling them. "Practical phrenology" never became a mainstream movement in the United States. Like Grahamism, it engendered significant controversy and hostility both from medical professionals and those who considered themselves "true" phrenologists. Spurzheim and Gall and their disciples, such as George Combe and Dr. Charles Caldwell, who was known as the "American Spurzheim," were interested in the philosophical, not the practical implications of brain function and behavior. They saw the Fowlers' use of phrenology as a "vulgarization" of Gall and Spurzheim's theories.[83] Nonetheless, practical phrenology did garner significant interest among many antebellum Americans and served as a vehicle for spreading the tenets of the diet reformers beyond their immediate audience.

Even more successful in fulfilling this mission was the water-cure movement, which became popular in the United States during the 1840s and beyond and truly institutionalized the tenets laid out by Graham. Like phrenology, the theory of hydropathy was developed by an Austrian, the Silesian peasant Vincent Priessnitz. And like phrenology, when hydropathy was popularized in the United States, it was in an altered form from that intended by its founders and one that was linked to Grahamite principles. Hydropathy, quite simply, was a medical system that advocated applying water (by means of baths, showers, and compresses) to various areas of the body to cure physical ailments. While water had been used in medical treatment since ancient times, "the novelty of Priessnitz's regime consisted in making it virtually the sole instrument of therapy," explains health reform historian William

[83] Ibid., 176.

Walker.[84] Major American hydropathists, such as Joel Shew, Russell Thacher Trall, and Mary Gove Nichols incorporated the tenets of Grahamism into their version of hydropathy, which they carried to the American public through their journals and water-cure institutes.[85]

The central contribution of water-cure in spreading Grahamite doctrines was in incorporating those principles into a concerted therapeutic system. Graham encouraged individuals to take charge of their own physical health by following his dietary and other advice. But other than the Graham boarding houses – which served mainly as an alternative to urban hotels and restaurants – there was no institution where Grahamite cures were administered. Graham, Alcott and their diet reform contemporaries spread the word about the connection between diet, health, hygiene, and character. But they did not, as medical historian William Walker points out, establish these measures as the "basis of a program of medical practice" or "an instrument of therapeutic medicine."[86] While Grahamism appealed to many Americans and Graham created quite a stir in his time, Grahamism as a system was essentially a flash in the pan. The amount of zeal and self-sacrifice required to truly and permanently adhere to the Graham system was impossible for most. Indeed, even Graham himself, as his health suffered toward the end of his life, is rumored to have turned to some of the cures against which he waged his most vociferous attacks – eating flesh, using camphor, and drinking distilled spirits.

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[84] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 162.
[85] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 149-52; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 242-3; Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 161-235.
[86] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 148; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 242-3; Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 147-51.

The American hydropathists, on the other hand, managed to successfully forward a therapeutic system that offered a cure for physical ailments which relied not only on water applications but also on the dietary precepts forwarded by Graham. They used water-cure as a coherent system of hygiene; water treatment was merely one of many therapeutics they advised for maintaining health and curing disease. Others were regulating sleep, wearing proper clothing, avoiding sexual excess, and following a proper diet. During the 1840s, hydropathists established a number of water-cure institutes in New York City (such as Dr. Joel Shew's Bond Street water-cure, Dr. Rusell Trall's Laight Street Hydropathic and Hygienic Institute, and Mary Gove Nichol's water-cure house on Tenth Street), as well as in upstate New York, New England, Pennsylvania and Ohio. In 1847, twenty-four water-cures were in operation in the United States and by 1854, the number had risen to sixty-two.[87]

Again, there were strong and significant links between Grahamism and water-cure. Some of Graham's most ardent disciples – including Mary Gove Nichols and David Campbell, founder and editor of the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity* – ran water-cures. And in their attitudes toward health and diet, the hydropathists clearly took their cue from Graham and the diet reformers. Water-cure institutes were set up as medical practices where patients were treated according to the principles of hydropathy. Patients could visit the water-cures on a consultative basis, or board at them for an extended period of time. At these sanitaria, residents received water-cure treatments and adhered to a strict regiment, similar to that practiced at the Graham boarding houses. Morning and evening bells determined waking and bed

[87] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 193.

times, and meals were served at specific hours. Diet was strictly regulated at the water-cures. Meat, refined flours, and alcohol were all eschewed.[88]

At Trall's Hydropathic and Hygienic Institute, as at other water-cures, individuals could partake of "the dietary of the institution" even if they chose not to take any water-cure treatments.[89] Proper diet was an important component of the hydropathic system. In his *Hydropathic Encylopedia*, Trall devoted several pages to this subject. While Trall's dietary allowed for the consumption of meat, he preferred a reliance on farinaceous substances, vegetables and fruit. He shunned coffee, tea, wine, and liquor and advocated taking no other drink than water. Like Graham, he urged moderation in diet – both in terms of quantity and quality of foodstuffs and saw a connection between diet and character.[90] Arguing that improper habits and indulgence of appetites would lead not only to poor physical but also mental health, Trall asserted that: "The duty of the . . . hydropath . . . is not limited to water-cure. He should . . . claim knowledge of the laws of life and health, and profess to cure disease by removing the conditions on which it depends, and preserve health by avoiding the abuses which produce disease." "Let a person," he continued, "feel competent to preserve his own health, and [have] . . . a full assurance of . . . long life . . . and he will look forward to a . . . higher destiny . . . discipline his mind for the future, and become a more useful member of the social compact."[91]

In addition to establishing and running sanitaria, the hydropathists published books on water-cure such as Shew's *Hydropathy, or the Water-Cure*, the *Handbook*

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[88] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 150-2; Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 161-92.
[89] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 150.
[90] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 185-87.
[91] Trall, quoted in Ibid.

of Hydropathy, and the *Water-Cure Manual* and Trall's two-volume *The Hydropathic Encyclopedia. The Water-Cure Journal*, a periodical started by Joel Shew and published by the Fowler brothers' publishing company, Fowler and Wells, enjoyed a circulation of over 10,000 during the 1850s.[92]

Through their sanitaria, the water-curists managed to implement some of the goals of Grahamite organizations such as the American Physiological Society. While they did not achieve its loftiest goal – converting the mass of Americans to hygienic principles – hydropathists did create infirmaries where people could be treated according to hygienic tenets, create alternatives to prevailing, heroic medical practice, and integrate Grahamite principles into a mode of living for those who sought treatment at their institutes. The water-cures also served to commercialize many of the features of the Grahamite system. At Trall's Water-Cure Institute, a health food store of sorts was set up where even people who did not board or take cures could buy Graham flour and other health-related food products. James Caleb Jackson established a water-cure in upstate New York called "Our Home on the Hillside," where water-cures were administered and diet reform principles were followed. "Our Home on the Hillside" also provided recreational activities such as theater, concerts, lectures, and physical activities and individuals could stay there and partake of these activities without actually receiving any kind of treatment. Thus, "Our Home on the Hillside" was, as Stephen Nissenbaum points out, "as much a resort as a sanitarium." Jackson also manufactured and sold Grahamite products such as Graham flour.

[92] Walker, "Health Reform Movement," 178.

Graham bread, and a Graham-flour based breakfast cereal which he called "Granula."[93]

Despite his best efforts, Jackson did not manage to successfully market his Graham-based products. But over subsequent decades, others would take up the mantel and capitalize on the commercial possibilities of Grahamism. Among the visitors to "Our Home on the Hillside" were the Seventh-Day Adventist prophetess Ellen White and her family. Seventh-Day Adventism, a religious sect which grew out of the millenialist movement of the 1830s and 1840s incorporated many Grahamite principles into its theology, including vegetarianism and avoidance of sexual excess and masturbation. After visiting Our Home on the Hillside twice – in 1864 and 1865 – Ellen White returned to her home in Battle Creek, Michigan and established her own hydropathic sanitarium, the Western Health Reform Institute. In 1876, John Harvey Kellogg, a former student of Russell Trall, assumed the superintendence of the Institute which he renamed the Battle Creek Sanitarium the following year. Kellogg dropped the emphasis on Adventist theology and made the "San," as it became known, an extremely popular resort and health institute where Grahamite and hydropathic measures were followed. In 1878, Kellogg began to market "granola," a Grahamite cereal quite similar to James Caleb Jackson's patented granula. Jackson sued Kellogg for patent infringement but Kellogg went on to develop and market other unrefined grain cereals, establishing the foundation of the breakfast cereal industry. Even as Graham's name had already begun to fade into the annals of

[93] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 151-2; Cole, "Sylvester Graham," 242.

history, his most ardent tenet – the belief in the merits of unrefined flour as the basis of a healthy diet – was transformed into a commercial product.[94]

This development was not a wholly ironic one. Sylvester Graham and his dietary system became popular at a time of great commercial and consumer change. Graham emerged as a popular figure in a culture in confrontation with access and excess. And middle-class Americans found his precepts appealing in part because they provided them with a way to make sense of the overwhelming options that confronted them and a method through which to gain control over some of the most basic aspects and functions of their lives. In a culture in which behaviors and performance were becoming central to defining one's status, Grahamism also served as a means to assert one's claims to a position in the middle – neither elite with all of the foppery and excess that was associated with that group, nor poor with all of the brutish connotations connected to that realm. As middling Americans grew more accustomed to the abundance available in their increasingly commercial society, they grew comfortable as well with the commercialization of the methods for dealing with that abundance. Grahamism then, emerged not merely as a critique of a consumer society, but as an adjustment to it. And as individuals made that adjustment, they could abandon the zealousness and shrillness that accompanied the original diet reform movement and incorporate some of the tenets of the system into their daily lives.

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[94] Nissenbaum, *Sex, Diet, and Debility*, 152-4.

CONCLUSION

By the dawn of the Civil War, New Yorkers had experienced a transformation in eating habits. Individuals of various means could indulge in ice creams, wild game, pineapples, pastry, and a thousand other food choices. They could visit local retailers and purchase exotic fruits and vegetables, fresh meats, confections, and prepared take-out foods. They could dine luxuriously at Delmonico's, Taylor's, and Downing's or bolt their food at Sweeney's and Butter Cake Dick's. They could show off their genteel credentials by engaging properly in the dining performance staged in the city's hotels, restaurants, and private dining rooms. And as they clutched their distended, pastry-lined stomachs and complained about dyspepsia, they could reflect on the diet reformers' warnings that they were participating in their own and their society's downfall.

New York's food revolution exposes a number of contradictions. The proprietors of mid-century New York's markets and retail food shops stocked a regular and seemingly endless variety of food items. "What in Europe only a certain class could buy seems here to be within the means of all," explained Junius Henri Browne. But appearance did not necessarily accord with reality for as Browne clarified: "Within the purse would be the apter expression; for its contents are the measure of our wants."[1] The contents of poor New Yorkers' wallets were insufficient

[1] Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (1869; Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1975), 406.

to provide them with the finest the markets had to offer. Expanded access to food for many New Yorkers coincided with constriction of access for others.

The growth of New York's commercial entertainments and the increasingly gregarious behavior of many of its citizens were accompanied by a shrill chorus of alarm bells about the dangers of the public world and a growing emphasis in the prescriptive literature on the pleasures of domesticity and the vision of the home as a "haven from a heartless world." Women, the guardians of this world, bucked the very canon they were expected to uphold as they supped among hundreds of others in the city's hotels and restaurants and entertained relations and acquaintances in their well-appointed dining rooms.

The increasing political democratization of the antebellum period was accompanied by growing social stratification. Gentility, which might have served as a leveler for those who learned its rules and attained its trappings, instead functioned as a separator as a mounting emphasis on fashion, performance, and being in the "right place" emerged as important ways of spelling out class identity. Items were degentrified and space, performance, and ritual became the new markers of gentility. Thus, antebellum New Yorkers managed to create a contradiction that has confounded historians of the antebellum period. At a time when more Americans than ever before could exercise the ballot, attain luxury items, and enjoy a greater standard of living than most of the world's citizens, status became increasingly difficult for many to achieve.

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the extension of developments that began during the late colonial and antebellum periods. The establishment of a national rail system and additional improvements in shipping continued the trend toward easier and cheaper carriage of foodstuffs to domestic markets begun during the canal era. Improvements in refrigeration methods and the perfection of refrigerated rail cars furthered this process and contributed to increased supplies of perishables in city markets. In the 1870s, Chicago meatpacker Gustavus Swift established regular meat shipments in refrigerated rail cars. Other meat, produce, fish, and game vendors followed Swift's lead. The technology for ice-making and mechanical refrigeration was perfected in the 1880s and artificial ice plants replaced the natural harvesting of ice. By 1890, 222 artificial ice plants were operating in the United States.[2]

Industrialization, mechanization, and large-scale enterprise were all applied to food production. New methods of food preservation led the way. Thomas Kensett, a New Yorker originally from England, had patented the use of tin cans for hermetically sealing food in 1825. A number of entrepreneurs subsequently established food preservation companies. In 1855, one such firm packed several tons of cherries, strawberries, peaches, tomatoes, pears, plums, gooseberries, quinces, and various vegetables. The popularity of canned goods took off during and after the Civil War. Faced with the difficulty of providing troops with food during the war, the federal government turned to preserved foods, sending several shipments of canned vegetables, fruits, and milk into the field. The government commandeered Gail

[2] Richard Osborn Cummings, *The American and His Food* (New York: Arno Press, 1970), 61-4.

Borden's entire output of condensed milk for wartime purposes. The Union Army depended as well on canned shipments of fruits and vegetables from California.[3]

Civilians too embraced canned foods and by 1870, thirty million cans of food were being produced annually, a six-fold increase from a decade before. By 1880, that output had increased an additional 200 percent. Among the entrepreneurs making a fortune off of canned goods was H.J. Heinz who established his firm, which produced pickles, horseradish, and sauerkraut, in the 1870s. In the following decade, Heinz added cooked macaroni products to his offerings. The Franco-American Company began selling canned meals in the late 1880s, and Campbell's condensed soup was available on the market by the turn of the twentieth century. Thanks to canning, perishable foods in preserved form were available year-round, particularly in the nation's cities, and homemakers increasingly turned to commercial, preserved foods to stock their pantries. The labels of canned foods featured printed recipes and cookbooks increasingly included the use of commercially preserved foods in their instructions. By the turn of the twentieth century, homemakers could avail themselves of a range of processed foods, including pancake mixes, crackers and cookies, and packaged dry cereals, produced by large-scale corporations such as Nabisco and Kellogg's.[4]

They relied as well on commercially milled flours and refined sugar, as agriculture underwent further mechanization and improved methods of flour and

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[3] Ibid., 66-7.

[4] Ibid., 69; Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 73; Susan Williams, *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 93-105. On the rise of large food processors, see: Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), chapter 3.

sugar production were developed in the postbellum period. Mechanization of sugar refining led to a steep decline in the price of refined sugar and a consolidation of sugar refineries, which squeezed out small competitors. Between 1875 and 1880, the number of sugar refineries in the United States had declined from forty-two to twenty-seven. By the 1890s, the American Sugar Refining Company, also known as the Sugar Trust, monopolized the industry. Flour milling underwent similar consolidation. By 1886, a mere 6000 flour mills operated in the United States, a decline from over 27,000 just two years before.[5] Americans, particularly those in urban areas, were relying exclusively on refined sugar and flour from commercial refineries and mills and Sylvester Graham was rolling over in his grave.

Health and moral concerns aside, these technological and commercial shifts led to the further cheapening of foodstuffs. Finally, urban laborers could afford some of the items that had remained out of their grasp during the antebellum period. Spending less on staples such as bread, they dedicated a portion of their income to more expensive items such as meat, fresh milk, and fresh and preserved vegetables and fruit. The poorest urbanites, however, remained hungry in a land of plenty.[6]

Other trends of the antebellum period extended unabated into the late nineteenth century. Restaurants, for example, continued to proliferate in New York and other cities and dining out became an ever-more popular form of entertainment. By the 1890s, New York City housed thousands of restaurants. They included Delmonico's four branches, and Louis Sherry's fine dining establishment as well as more oyster cellars, short-order houses, ladies' restaurants, and lobster palaces. New

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[5] Cummings, *The American and His Food*, 111-14.
[6] Ibid., 76-8.

dining options emerged as well, many within the means even of working-class New Yorkers. In the 1890s, brothers William and Samuel Childs opened their first restaurant in New York. Childs' distinguished itself both by its affordability and by its spotlessness – its walls and floors were tiled in white, its tables were neatly arranged, and its corps of waitresses (the employment of women as servers itself a late nineteenth-century innovation) were clad in starched white uniforms. But the real novelty of Childs' was its mode of service – guests pushed their trays along a long counter and chose from a variety of offerings before sitting at one of the marble-topped tables. Childs', New York's first cafeteria, started a trend. By 1898, the Childs were operating nine restaurants in New York, serving fifteen- to twenty-thousand people per day. In 1903, Horn and Hardart opened their first automat – a slightly modified version of the cafeteria – on Broadway and Thirteenth Street.[7] Other self-service cafeterias, lunchrooms, and soda fountains also dotted the New York landscape, expanding public dining options to laboring New Yorkers who desired inexpensive meals in clean, respectable establishments.

Performance and space were still crucial markers of status in the restaurants of New York City and people dined out as much to see and be seen as they did to enjoy fine cuisine. New York restaurants served as crucial sites of conspicuous display and consumption during the Gilded Age and restaurateurs competed with each other to stage some of the most theatrical events the city had to offer. In 1873, for example, businessman Edward Luckemeyer paid Lorenzo Delmonico $10,000 to organize a "memorable dinner." Delmonico created the "Swan Banquet," appointing a ballroom

[7] Michael and Ariane Batterberry, *On the Town in New York: A History of Eating, Drinking and Entertainments from 1776 to the Present* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), 187-9.

with an enormous oval table that took up the entire room. The center of the table was a thirty-foot lake, home for the evening to four swans from Brooklyn's Prospect Park. A gold cage, designed by Charles Tiffany, reached to the ceiling and contained the hapless birds. Two swans passed the time by engaging in a mating ritual, no doubt disturbing the meal of the guests surrounding the table. In the 1890s, Louis Sherry hosted an equally elaborate dinner for the New York Riding Club at his restaurant. Guests ate on horseback, eating off of trays tethered to pummels, and drinking champagne from saddle bags with the aid of long straws.[8]

The restaurant revolution spread across the country as diners opened near industrial factories to cater to workers, and as chain restaurants such as the Harvey House expanded along railroad routes. The Harvey House restaurants, with their dependable service, cleanliness, and good meals, provided the prototype for the chain restaurants that followed. Westward migration was accompanied by the migration of dining patterns established in the east. San Francisco became a restaurant mecca, leading one visitor in 1877 to claim, "Whatever other ingredients may enter into merry-making in this capital of the Pacific, it is obvious that love and gluttony come first."[9]

Ethnic restaurants emerged as well in the late nineteenth century as Chinese, German, Austrian, Italian and French immigrants opened establishments in New York and other cities. Luchow's, a German beer-hall-turned-luxury-restaurant, became one

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[8] Ibid., 137-39.

[9] Richard Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 37-52; John Mariani, *America Eats Out: An Illustrated History of Restaurants, Taverns, Coffee Shops, Speakeasies, and Other Establishments That Have Fed Us for 350 Years* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 41, 44-6, quotation, p. 41.

of the most famous dining establishments in late nineteenth-century New York. In 1897, the Port Arthur opened its doors on Mott Street, serving Chinese food to an all-white clientele. Other restaurants in New York's Chinatown served food to local residents as well as adventurous gastronomes from other parts of the city. "Chow chop suey" houses dotted Mott and Pell Streets in Chinatown. Although legend has it that chop suey was a dish created specifically for the American palate, in fact it was an adjustment to the American environment. Chinese immigrants, hungry for the flavors of home, created this Cantonese-style dish using vegetables widely available in the United States. Developed for Chinese-Americans, chop suey appealed to their non-Chinese neighbors. "Chow chop sui calls Americans to Chinatown," read an article in *Leslie's* Magazine in 1896. "An American who once falls under the spell of chop sui may forget about all things Chinese for awhile, [but] suddenly a strange craving that almost defies will power arises; as though under a magnetic influence he finds that his feet are carrying him to Mott Street." In nearby Little Italy, pizza was sold in Italian bakeries and in 1905, Giovanni Lombardi opened what is largely acknowledged as New York City's first pizzeria.[10]

The luxury hotels, too, continued to blossom and new hotels were built throughout the late nineteenth century, each more opulent and larger than the last. Families continued to choose hotel living over setting up private residences. In 1874, half of all hotel residents in New York City were permanent dwellers, including Andrew Carnegie, who lived in the Windsor Hotel. However, the decline of

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[10] Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 132-33; Mariani, *America Eats Out*, 66-77; Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points: The 19th-Century New York City Neighborhood That Invented Tap Dance, Stole Elections, and Became the World's Most Notorious Slum* (New York: The Free Press, 2001), 406-7, 436, quotation, p. 407.

permanent hotel residency that *Harper's Weekly* hopefully predicted in the 1850s, finally occurred in the last decades of the century, as "French flats" or luxury apartment buildings were constructed on the Avenues of the Upper East and Upper West Sides.[11]

New Yorkers, however, did not give up their gregarious lifestyles. They continued, as noted, to partake of the myriad public dining options the city had to offer. They also continued to entertain at home, using their dining rooms for public purposes. Late-century domestic advisers evinced less concern about the social and public uses of the dining room than their predecessors. Indeed, they came to see, as women had already discovered, that the dining room was an ideal space for display and entertainment. "Civilized man has a want which a tent cannot supply, viz., a place for the exhibition of his treasure," wrote designer John Brett in the *American Architect and Building News* in 1893. "He requires a base of operations for his enterprises, a museum for his archives and trophies, and above all, for the convenient arrangement of his intellectual resources. He may also require," Brett concluded, "means for the entertainment of his neighbors and his children, and for seeing them to the best advantage." Middle-class homemakers took up the call. Benefiting from technological advances and mass production techniques that cheapened consumer goods, they furnished their dining rooms with mass-produced "suites," and stocked their sideboards with large and varied sets of plates and utensils. And they hosted large and elaborate dinner parties, like the elite of previous generations, availing

[11] Batterberry, *On the Town in New York*, 142-3.

themselves of the services of etiquette advisors, as well as caterers and confectioners who created delicacies to grace their tables and impress their guests.[12]

Along with the further commercialization of food, elaboration of meals, and expansion of public dining options to a variety of Americans came continued discussion of diet and its impact. Medical professionals and scientists uncovered links between diet and health that bore out some of Graham and Alcott's theories. Nutritional discoveries led to a greater understanding of the health components of various foods and the increasing belief that some foods were indeed more salubrious than others. Nutrition emerged as a science and home economics as a field of scholarly study. An increasing emphasis on physical education reflected the belief that physical exercise was also a central component of good health. Cleanliness and efficiency entered the kitchen and instruction in proper food choice entered the classroom. While water cures experienced a steady decline after the 1870s, health food outposts, sanitaria, and spas flourished throughout the United States, many of them offering a modified form of the programs carried out in Grahamite boarding houses of the 1830s and 1840s. Meanwhile, the cereal industry boomed, making wealthy men out of John Harvey Kellogg and C.W. Post, and contributing to the belief, held by many Americans today, that steak and chops are *not* proper breakfast foods.[13] The relation of diet to health became a primary concern of many reformers and medical professionals during the late nineteenth century. But the connection between eating and individual and national character remained an important topic of

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[12] Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 61; Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "The Vision of the Dining Room: Plan Book Dreams and Middle-Class Realities," in *Dining in America, 1850-1900*, ed. Kathryn Grover (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), 157-172, quotation, p. 157; Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 175-84.
[13] Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table*, 80-85.

discussion as Social Darwinism made its way into the dining room. "If the truth must be known," wrote one domestic adviser in 1886, "the dinner, the world over, is the symbol of a people's civilization. A coarse and meanly cooked and raggedly served dinner expresses the thought and perhaps the spiritual perception of a nation or family. A well-cooked and prettily-served dinner will indicate the refinement and taste of a nation or family."[14]

These postbellum developments, significant as they were, reflected changes in scope, rather than in kind. The outlines of the food revolution were well established during the antebellum period. The expanded access to food items, the increasing distance between the producer and consumer, the development of restaurants, the commercialization of various aspects of food production and consumption, the uses of the home for public purposes, and the vocal concerns about the impact of diet on health and character – all were evident in early nineteenth century New York, indeed were part and parcel of the city's expansion and development into a commercial metropolis.

Today, Americans have access to a greater variety and greater quantities of food than perhaps ever before. And they are eating more than perhaps ever before. The number of new food products that hits the market every day is astounding. Dining out has become a habit. New Yorkers eat an average of three-and-a-half restaurant meals a week. The annual Zagat survey of restaurants is referred to as a Bible. And, as journalist Eric Schlosser points out in his best-selling 2002 exposé of the fast food industry, Americans "spend more money on fast food than on higher education, personal computers, computer software, or new cars. They spend more on

[14] Quotation from Williams, *Savory Suppers*, 52.

fast food than on movies, books, magazines, newspapers, videos, and recorded music – combined."[15]

Medical professionals, the government, industry, and the media issue a constant barrage of information about diet, health and nutrition. People fret over the composition and content of their food, its mode of production, and its impact on their waistlines. Vegetarianism is on the rise, health foods and organic products grow increasingly popular, and diet and exercise have become national obsessions. Despite these developments, Americans grow fatter and more unhealthy every day. Obesity is one of the greatest threats to public health. Children sue McDonald's for making them overweight and unhealthy. Social commentators wring their hands at the deplorable state of American eating habits, at our steady national march toward obesity and at the destruction wrought to the American palate and constitution for which they blame agribusiness, the fast food industry, and the vast corporations that dominate food production and marketing.

Meanwhile, food habits remain crucially linked to status and notions of character. Obesity is seen as a vice, proper control of food intake a virtue. Foods are labeled as "good" and "bad," "sinful" and "virtuous," "fine" and "tacky." In a 1996 article in *The New York Times Magazine*, food critic Molly O'Neill asserts: "today, the amount of fat you eat, and the form in which you eat it say more about who you are than the car you drive, the clothes you wear or the neighborhood where you live."[16] Knowledge of the rituals of the table still separates the refined diner from the

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[15] *Zagat Survey, New York City Restaurants, 2003* (New York, 2003); Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of the All-American Meal* (New York: Perennial Books, 2002), 3.

[16] Molly O'Neill, "The Morality of Fat," *The New York Times Magazine*, 10 March 1996, 38.

unrefined one. Images of the hapless parvenu fretting over how to distinguish his salad fork from his dinner fork, or flinging her escargot across a restaurant are familiar tropes in film, television, and novels.

Contemporary Americans' obsession with food and diet, and the food-related contradictions of our age are of course *of* our age. But the confrontation with excess, the attention to food-related rituals, and the linking of food, status, and character, would all look familiar to nineteenth-century New Yorkers. And Sylvester Graham's axiom that the route to health and happiness begins at the dinner table would sound familiar to those of the twenty-first century.

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