

African Americans and the New York Draft Riots: Memory and Reconciliation in America's Civil War

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The New York Draft Riots of 1863 was one of the most violent civil insurrections in American history, pitting working-class men — primarily Irish and Catholic — against the city's power structure and social elite, and most especially against abolitionist activists and African Americans. It was sparked by the federal government's decision to draft soldiers into the Union army during the Civil War. In March of 1863 Congress passed a National Conscription Act decreeing that all male citizens between the ages of twenty and thirty-five were to be enrolled in the military, and then a lottery conducted to determine who would actually serve. But the Act also made it possible for drafted men to be exempted from service by offering an acceptable substitute or paying 300 dollars. The terms of this exemption thus insured that it would be the poor rather than the rich who would go to war. New York's white working class population — native born, Irish, and German — initially supported the war, seeing military service as a source of employment and also as an act of good citizenship. But a variety of factors gradually led them to withdraw their support. They were disillusioned by the mounting number of war deaths; frustrated by rising prices and falling wages; resentful of the government's power; fearful of economic competition from blacks and especially of the specter of ex-slave labor flooding the North after a Union victory; and, finally, angry that they were being asked to risk their lives in an armed conflict in which neither those whom they held responsible for the war — the political elites — nor those who they believed to be the cause of the war — blacks — were participants. On July 13th, they took to the streets and rioted (Bernstein 7–28).

Historians have extensively documented the ways in which the Draft Riots took shape and evolved over a five-day period. The rioters' goal was to assert authority over city spaces — to control its infrastructure, invade and police neighborhoods and work places in order to rid them of all African American presence, and finally to destroy black property, both individual and communal.

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On the first day, the mob was composed of a mixed group of native born, Irish, German, Protestant, and Catholic men and women, who came from different parts of the city. They were mostly journeymen in the older artisan trades and were mainly intent on destroying government property — municipal and federal buildings, telegraph lines, railroads and streetcar tracks, ferries and bridges. By the second day, however, the riot took a new turn as artisans and Germans retreated, and workers in the new industrial occupations as well as common laborers — mostly Irish Catholic — seized control, venting their anger against the wealthy and the ruling elites in a wholesale destruction of private property. But from the first day and through to the end of the week, rioters reserved special animus for New York's black population, targeting black institutions, property, homes, and individuals (Bernstein 5, 20–26). The Draft Riots may thus be seen as a contestation over city spaces, as a violent reaction on the part of the white, working-class mob to challenge black New Yorkers' right to create meaningful spaces of their own in a city that both groups called home.

Space and Memory

Space in this instance is not merely physical or geographical, but is marked by human relationships; it is social and political. Michel de Certeau's concept of "strategy" proves useful here to an understanding of the ways in which space is inhabited and worked upon. De Certeau defines strategy as the manipulation of power relationships. It necessitates first of all "subjects" in possession of what he calls "will and power," perhaps a business or an institution of knowledge. Second, a strategy requires a "place" that can be delimited "as its *own*." From this place, subjects establish relations with what de Certeau terms an "exteriority" composed of collaborative or hostile forces — whether customers, competitors, or enemies — that must be managed. To do so requires distinguishing the delimited place of will and power from its surrounding environment. In other words, a strategy represents "an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible [or not so invisible] powers of the Other." The (utopian) hope is that such manipulation of relations with outside forces will result in "mastery." In its most concrete form, mastery is the ownership of place. Yet another form might be mastery through sight as the subject transforms foreign forces into objects that he can observe, measure, and ultimately control. Most ambitiously, mastery represents the triumph of place over time, the "ability to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces" (de Certeau 35–36).

By seeking to delimit places of will and power of their own, black New Yorkers sought to transform the uncertainties of history into readable spaces. Like the spaces of the city, however, the spaces of history are unstable and subject to negotiation. One way for black New Yorkers to negotiate history was to endow the spaces they inhabited with meanings that offered them some measure of comfort within their hostile environment. Another way was to preserve collective

memories of historically significant events that would make reconciliation possible for future generations.

Yet the history of black New Yorkers has for the most part been “disremembered,” to quote a phrase by Toni Morrison, in favor of a narrative that privileges a history of welcoming European immigration. Like all other histories, the history of New York has been built on exclusions. In *Silencing the Past* Michel-Rolph Trouillot has argued that such omissions are due to unequal control over historical production; the dominant culture decides what to include and what to exclude in its constructions of history. These decisions give rise to what he calls the four silences of history: the silence of the sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact); the silence of the archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments); the silence of the historical narrative (the retrieval and writing of facts); and finally, the silence of history itself (48).

Participating in these silences, conventional historical accounts of New York City have ignored the degree to which the longing for freedom of its black population has so often been thwarted, if not actively resisted. Until quite recently, for example, there has been a general reluctance to recall New York’s commercial ties to southern slave states and the Caribbean, ties that inhibited the state’s abolition of slavery until 1827. Likewise, there has been a refusal to recognize the highly qualified nature of black freedom post-Emancipation as well as a willingness to forget the city’s shameful role in the nation’s history of violence against African Americans: the Maiden Lane insurrection of 1712, the Negro plot of 1741, the Draft Riots of 1863, the 1900 race riot. At the same time, in neglecting the city’s African-American population these rememberings have left unacknowledged the significant accomplishments of many of its members.

To recover New York’s buried history and construct a new historical narrative, I have needed to turn to the archives. With the material I uncovered, I have constructed a story about specific individuals and institutions affected by the Draft Riots. This story has been all the more important to me on a personal level because it has involved my discovery of nineteenth-century ancestors whose lives my family never told me about. Philip White was my paternal great-grandfather; Albro Lyons was his wife’s uncle; James McCune Smith was a close friend of both men. We need to remain sensitive to the fact that subordinated groups — here African Americans — have often colluded in the disremembering of their own history. Black New Yorkers’ silence about their nineteenth-century past generally, and the Draft Riots specifically, derives from a variety of factors: lack of resources to preserve archival material; shame about ancestors who might have been slaves or otherwise victims of racial prejudice and violence; a desire in the twentieth century to leave the pre-modern behind and become “New Negroes”; the temptation to obscure racial origins and pass as “colored” or white. For some, recovering this history can be quite painful.

In telling my story, I have engaged in what I call “spatial history,” the analysis

of historical events through the lens not only of time, but of space in and over time. From this perspective, I argue that black New Yorkers lived simultaneously in the black community, the local neighborhood, and the city itself. In each of these spaces, they sought to delimit places of will and power of their own, which other racial and ethnic groups in turn contested and forced them to negotiate.

The black community encompassed the many places in which African Americans came together and established institutions of their own — churches, mutual aid societies, literary and educational organizations — that they hoped would grant them greater control over their lives. Their will and power found expression in the creation and maintenance of these institutions: members forged a common sense of identity born of shared racial origins and history, a belief in a commonality of interests leading to collective action, and the preservation of a common historical memory.

Ideally, community enables the mastery of place over the uncertainties of history. Yet, New York's antebellum black community remained vulnerable and unstable. First, its members were not a monolithic group but rather a heterogeneous population divided by class, color, place of origin, religion, etc. Second, if New York's black community had originally been localized, under urban pressures it gradually became aspatial or "unbounded," to use a term employed by Kenneth Scherzer, and spread out over many of the city's lower wards (169). In this sense, it fit Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community" (6). Such geographical diversity often resulted in affiliations outside the black community. Third, many black institutions were not fully autonomous but remained dependent on the patronage of white religious and abolitionist groups. And fourth, the black community remained threatened from without, subject to the antagonism of racist white New Yorkers.

In contrast, the neighborhood is a localized and bounded space, defined by particular landmarks and objects. In the early antebellum period, New York neighborhoods were highly heterogeneous in terms of class, race, and ethnicity. People tended to live in close proximity to their work place, so neighborhoods brought together manufacturers, merchants, artisans, skilled and unskilled laborers; the well-to-do and the poor; the native born, African Americans, Irish, and Germans. Class and racial/ethnic differentiation occurred within buildings and blocks rather than from neighborhood to neighborhood (Scherzer 51, 95). Thus, black New Yorkers lived in neighborhoods that were neither identical to the black community nor racialized.

Within its boundaries, the neighborhood functions as a social space created by daily interaction among neighbors. In Benedict Anderson's terms, it closely approximates "the primordial village of face-to-face contact" characterized by "particularistic ties of kinship and clientship" (6). Such face-to-face interactions revolve around family and kin networks, but also entail practices of work, trade, and property ownership. They give rise to different forms of community. For one, the neighborhood can lead to relations of physical and social intimacy.

But it can just as readily result in hostility. As Freud noted, the neighbor “has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred”; he is “someone who tempts [me] to satisfy [my] aggressiveness on him” (67, 69). Finally, even though the neighborhood may be bounded, its boundaries are never fixed and absolute; rather, they are porous and subject to invasion by strangers.

White Aggression, Black Victimization: The Colored Orphan Asylum; Albro Lyons’s Seaman’s Home for Colored Sailors

In their account of the Draft Riots, historians have emphasized white mob aggression to produce narratives of black victimization. They point without fail to the destruction on the very first evening of the Colored Orphan Asylum, one of the most important benevolent institutions for African Americans. A report by the Committee of Merchants formed in the aftermath of the riot described the event as follows:

The crowd had swelled to an immense number at this locality, and went professionally to work in order to destroy the building, and, at the same time, to make appropriation of any thing of value by which they might aggrandize themselves. About four hundred entered the house at the time, and immediately proceeded to pitch out beds, chairs, tables, and every species of furniture, which were eagerly seized by the crowd below, and carried off. When all was taken, the house was then set on fire. . . .

While the rioters were clamoring for admittance at the front door, the matron and Superintendent were quietly and rapidly conducting the children out the back yard, down to the police station. They remained there until Thursday (the burning of the Asylum occurred on Monday, July 13th, when they were all removed in safety to Blackwell’s island, where they still remain. (24–25)

The fact that this episode involving children is perhaps the most frequently cited event of riots points to historians’ unquestioning acceptance of African Americans’ utter helplessness. Established by a group of white women in a building located at Fifth Avenue and 43rd Street outside of the black community, the Asylum took care of some 200 orphaned children between the ages of four and twelve. In 1843, its Board of Managers appointed James McCune Smith, graduate of New York’s African Free School, pharmacist, doctor, and reformer, as the orphanage’s physician (Harris 147–48, 154). Black New Yorkers might well have felt a certain ambivalence toward the Asylum as an institution that provided relief to the most vulnerable among them, but also reminded them of their necessary dependence on white benevolence. But the rioting mob felt no ambivalence. They were as interested in theft of the building’s furnishings as they were in attacking the children. To them, the Asylum was a symbol of the will and power of the city’s elite. It represented undeserved white largesse toward blacks and intimated undeserved possibilities of black upward mobility.

The rioters also attacked successful black individuals, one of whom was

Albro Lyons. Born in 1814, Lyons attended the African Free School with James McCune Smith. He was active in community affairs, a member of mutual relief, freemasonry, and literary societies, and several times New York delegate to National Conventions of Colored People. He also operated a Seaman's Home, which he moved in the mid-1850s into his own home at 20 Vandewater Street; it was reputed to be a station on the Underground Railroad. Finally, he owned a Seaman's General Outfitting Store close by on Roosevelt Street (*NY Age* Jan. 9, 1896). I suggest that Lyons's fate during the riots was shaped by his conduct as both a private and public figure inhabiting spaces in both the black community and the local city neighborhood.

Vandewater and Roosevelt streets were located in the city's lower Fourth Ward in an area that extended to the East River and was called the Swamp because it had once been marshland. As the most densely populated place on earth containing 290,000 people per square mile, in 1861 the Fourth Ward was a slum; its inhabitants suffered from overcrowded conditions, poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, and disease. Like other neighborhoods in Lower Manhattan, the Swamp was defined primarily by the kinds of industries that were located there and the people who worked in them. Shipbuilding industries dominated the waterfront area along with associated trades such as boarding houses and outfitting stores for sailors like Lyons's as well as grog shops and brothels (Scherzer 31, 66). Such workplaces brought together a heterogeneous population. By the early 1860s, however, the area had become increasingly working-class and Irish. Although merchants still maintained their businesses in the Swamp, they had begun to move their households to residential enclaves in a gradual process that was completed in the 1870s (Scherzer 51, 95).

In addition to Lyons's activism in the black community, we must also consider his place in the neighborhood of the Swamp. Lyons's house on Vandewater Street brought together both private and public functions: it was at once domestic space (family home), economic space (Seaman's Home), and black community space (a station on the Underground Railroad). In an unpublished autobiographical sketch, Lyons's daughter, Maritcha, described how the multiple functions of her home made it especially suitable as a stopping point for runaway slaves: "Father's connection with the underground railroad brought many strange faces to our house, for it was semi-public and persons could go in and out without attracting special attention" (46). By the mid-1850s, Lyons had accumulated a sizeable estate and was not hesitant about displaying his wealth; property assessment records indicate that in 1862 the house was valued at \$5,500.

Lyons's obituary in the January 9, 1896 issue of the *New York Age*, the most prominent black newspaper of the period, recalled the destruction of his home in the following terms:

In 1849 Mr. Lyons became the proprietor of the Seaman's Home for colored sailors. In connection with this he kept a sailor's outfitting store until the time of the

draft riots in 1863. Being a prominent man and always fighting the oppression of his race, the mob threatened to hang him. Three times he alone repulsed dastardly attempts to wreck his home, but was compelled to flee to a police station to save his life, being pursued through the streets by a howling mob.

In her autobiographical sketch, Maritcha Lyons gave an equally vivid account of how the “rabble” launched three attacks on the home before finally gutting it; in the first, window panes were broken, shutters smashed, and the front door partially demolished; in the second, her father fired a pistol to disperse the crowd; in the third, the mob successfully penetrated the house (8–9). After its destruction, Lyons submitted claims for compensation that itemized the value of his possessions in exquisite detail. The fact that he was able to recover \$1,500 confirms Lyons’s substantial wealth (Williamson Papers).

A convergence of factors helps to explain the assault on Lyons’s house. To Lyons himself, the delimited space of his home represented a haven for his family and members of the wider black community as well as a well-deserved reward for successful entrepreneurship. To the Irish mob, however, it was a harsh reminder of their own lack of will and power, of their inability to delimit places of their own. Their attack had manifold meanings. First, it struck at the very heart of the black domestic household. Second, it was directed against black property and wealth, the manifestations of which could only seem illegitimate to the rioters. Third, it was designed to destroy a black workplace and threaten black sailors inclined to seek “white” work on the docks. And finally, it sought to eliminate a black community institution dedicated to antislavery work. Maritcha Lyons does not say whether the mob was composed of neighbors or strangers or both. What is particularly significant, however, is that Lyons’s neighbors found no compelling reason to come to his aid. In both his establishment of a colored Seaman’s Home and his social activism, Lyons had chosen to cater exclusively to the black community rather than to his neighborhood community. He had been unable — or unwilling — to translate his daily face-to-face contacts within the neighborhood into particularistic ties that might have motivated those around him to come to his defense.

Beyond the Aggression/Victimization Dichotomy: Police Department Headquarters and St. Philip’s Episcopal Church

Further research into the archives reveals, however, other kinds of encounters far more complex than straightforward narratives of white aggression and black victimization. Of particular interest were the actions of the New York Police Department. Unlike recent episodes of police brutality in U.S. cities, the police did not assault African Americans during the Draft Riots. Yet, the protection they offered was a qualified one, based on the meanings that they gave to white and black space. In its coverage of the riots, the *New York Daily Tribune* praised the police for bringing terrorized blacks into their stations, protecting, clothing, and

feeding them; Police Headquarters even allocated a room for a Sabbath school and church services. In their own place of will and power over which they had full control, the police were willing to extend largesse to victimized blacks. To them, the refugees were temporary, dependent guests whose social subordination they assumed and reinforced. The following account in the July 20 issue of the *Tribune* underscores their sense of the proper place of blacks who inhabit white space: “The rooms are scrubbed and dusted and kept in excellent order by the Negroes, many of whom are employed as servants — making themselves very useful. They work well and cheerfully, and have earned the good opinion of the officers in charge.”

An account in the July 23 issue of the *Tribune* reported that “the Police Headquarters looks more like an arsenal than the great rendezvous of our Metropolitan force . . . and the African church in front of it swarms with soldiers.” This African church was St. Philip’s Episcopal Church whose location on Mulberry Street across from Police Headquarters underscores the aspatial nature of New York’s antebellum black community. Its fate during the Draft Riots suggests the police’s far lesser tolerance of black people’s ownership of their own space, and indeed their deep suspicion, contempt, and anxiety about black space as “strategy.” Founded in 1809, St. Philip’s originated out of the desire of Trinity Church’s black parishioners to delimit a space of their own in order to provide religious instruction to the living and to bury their dead. Like other black churches, St. Philip’s was a site of social activism. It housed a primary school; parishioners periodically collected funds for the Colored Orphan Asylum. Several factors converged, however, to undermine St. Philip’s as an autonomous community institution. One was its continued financial dependence on Trinity Church. A second was white New Yorkers’ contestation of black claims to a delimited place, which was made all too evident in the violent assault on St. Philip’s during an earlier anti-abolitionist riot in 1834 in which the church’s interior was destroyed.

St. Philip’s did not simply represent black social space, however; it was above all sacred space. In the sacred world, the material realities of place function as a means of apprehending the divine, of interpreting the higher order of things. Sacred space thus encompasses a sense both of place and placelessness, particularity and universality, time and timelessness (Sheldrake 30, 56, 153). For St. Philip’s congregants, the physical space itself of their church was a manifestation of divinity. Additionally, it was the embodiment of specifically Episcopalian traditions through which parishioners laid claim to being an integral part of ancient Anglican tradition.

History, however, invaded St. Philip’s during the Draft Riots, albeit in a different form from 1834 riots. The August 4, 1863 church vestry minutes poignantly recorded this invasion:

It may be recollected that it was our pleasure and duty to be permitted to

assemble ourselves in our sanctuary on the Sunday of July 12th for our usual devotions and humble praise and thanksgiving. But on the succeeding day July 13th 1863 anarchy and confusion took the place of law and order and for several days pillage, arson, murder reigned supreme in our midst. Men, women, and children having seemingly, suddenly become transformed into the vilest and savagest of fiends. During the reign of this state of affairs, at a late hour Tuesday night July 14th 1863 the police authorities took possession of our parish to quarter military who had been summoned hither to bring order over chaos, restore law and maintain the peace of the city. Thus our parish has been in their possession since the above mentioned date until Friday noon July 31st 1863. In consequence of such occupation our church has been greatly defaced and damaged and left in an untenable condition requiring thorough renovation. . . . [We must] have our parish put in a restored condition in every respect as soon as possible so that we and our fellow parishioners may once again through God's providence be permitted to draw near and assemble in our old, accustomed, beloved, and familiar spots in united prayer, to mingle our voices in praise and thanksgiving to 'God our refuge.'

Unlike the Colored Orphan Asylum, St. Philip's was not overrun by the mob. Given its location across from the Police Department headquarters, it was turned into a barrack to house military troops brought in to restore order. Ironically, however, this occupation opened the church to another form of violence, and its parishioners' sense of desecration was no less intense. They immediately set about restoring the sanctuary and appealed to city and federal authorities for aid. Yet it was only after months of protracted negotiations that St. Philip's was reimbursed approximately \$1,500 of the \$2,500 that the repairs had cost (De Costa 39–40). No extant records exist to tell us how city and federal agencies viewed the matter. Perhaps their reaction was similar to the contempt heaped upon members of an African Methodist Church, which had also been used as army barrack. An 1887 account of the riots written by William Stoddard, a former volunteer special, indicates the degree to which the municipal authorities were suspicious of black space. They grudgingly agreed to pay the Methodist church for new carpets as well as new books for the Sunday-school library "on the ground that the unrighteous police, soldiery, and 'specials' had read up forever all there was left of the old," but drew the line "with a good deal of quiet fun" at reimbursement for the Sunday collections missed when the church was undergoing repairs. Stoddard cynically concluded: "That church and the Orphan Asylum both made money by the mob, but in somewhat different ways" (120–22).

For the parishioners of the African Methodist Church and St. Philip's, the psychic violation must have been twofold. They must have been dismayed on the one hand by the lack of emotional (not to mention financial) support offered them by those responsible for protecting them, and on the other by the defilement of a sacred space that more than any other had conferred stability on the "uncertainties" of their daily lives. They required spiritual as well as economic reparation.

White Benevolence and the City

When Albro Lyons sought compensation for the destruction of his home, he turned not to municipal or federal authorities, but to the Committee of Merchants for the Relief of Colored People composed of New York's most prominent citizens who controlled the city's administration and were determined to wrest their authority back from the mob. Their published report provides considerable insight into their conception of the city as a space of their own will and power, and of the place of the lower orders — both black and white — within it. To outsiders getting news of the riots from afar, the merchants needed first of all to ensure New York's reputation. They took pains to distinguish themselves from the rioters and to reassure the world that they had restored law and order. New York, they maintained, was not a place of barbarism but of civilization, welcoming businessmen and tourists alike. To New Yorkers, the merchants positioned themselves as caring citizens and generous benefactors of the riots' victims. It was they who detailed the destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum and other buildings as well as the deaths of black and white victims of the riots. And it was they who collected considerable funds to compensate these victims.

Yet the merchants' motives reveal a mixture of altruism and self-interest. On the one hand, they maintained that they were dispensing charity with kindness: "There are no harsh or unkind words uttered by the clerks? no impertinent quizzing in regard to irrelevant matters — no partisan or sectarian view. The business is transacted in a straightforward, practical manner, without chilling the charity into an offense by creating the impression that the recipient is humiliated by accepting the gift." On the other hand, their worries about fraudulent claims suggest that they believed many requests to be "impertinent" (*Report* 9).

The merchants' comment that legitimate charity should not be construed as "humiliating" served in fact to reinforce the humiliating dependence in which blacks like Lyons now found themselves. Ultimately, the merchants' benevolence was designed to regulate the city's economy by maintaining order among the lower classes and reducing the possibility of social instability. Black New Yorkers must be provided with work to ensure that they would not become a "pauper race." But, much like the police, the merchants sought to keep them socially subordinate by placing them as servants in the homes of white families. Finally, they urged black employment in order to prevent white laborers from the country from coming to the city and forming "a new class of laborers [such that] the wages of labor would be reduced" (*Report* 12–13). New York's merchant class was determined that the city remain their own space of will and power.

Negotiating Black Space: Philip A White's Drugstore

I close with an account of the Draft Riot experiences of my great-grandfather,

Philip A. White, an account that challenges narratives of black victimization and has so far been excluded from history books. A little younger than Albro Lyons and James McCune Smith, White nonetheless had close ties to both men. He worshiped with them at St. Philip's, and apprenticed in McCune Smith's drugstore in the early 1840s. Like these older men, White was also active in the black community, and in the 1850s joined an educational society that they had founded. He would later marry a niece of Albro Lyons (*NY Age* Feb. 21 1891). By the late 1850s, White was living near Lyons at 40 Vandewater Street and operated a drugstore at the corner of Frankfort and Gold Streets in an area of the Swamp adjacent to the waterfront. This area specialized in tanning and other leather related industries. Many of New York's old merchant class had made their fortune tanning leather and storing hides in warehouses around Frankfort Street until the ill effects of the leather-making process led the city to close down the yards (Buttenwieser 25–26).

On the day of the final assault on Lyons's home, John W. Rode, a sergeant from the fourth precinct, had sent Lyons a note in which he wrote: "I cannot say today what will occur tomorrow. I will be at said drugstore at 3 o'clock this day with horse and wagon" (Williamson Papers). I can only surmise that the named drugstore was Philip White's and that Sergeant Rode believed it to be a safe haven from which he could effect the rescue of the Lyons family. White's very different construction of a social space for himself within the neighborhood of the Swamp accounts for both his personal safety and the preservation of his property during the riots. His position as local druggist enabled him to construct his drugstore as his own place of will and power within the Swamp.

White's drugstore occupied an important space within both the black community and the local neighborhood. For their part, African Americans were highly appreciative of the success of their businessmen. In the February 11, 1848 issue of Frederick Douglass's newspaper, the *North Star*, William C. Nell noted that he had "visited the Apothecary's Hall of Dr. James McCune Smith in West Broadway, as also the establishment of Mr. Philip White in Frankfort Street, both of whom are practical men and conduct their business, preparing medicines, etc. etc. with as much readiness and skill as any other disciple of Galen and Hippocrates. . . . [They] are proving their capacity, as I believe, to their pecuniary benefit, and at the same time thus elevating the character of those with whom they are identified by complexion."

White's drugstore was also, however, a part of the local neighborhood of the Swamp, however. The antebellum drugstore sold toilet articles and perfumery as well as items now found mostly in hardware stores. But its main business was the selling of drugs that were compounded right there on the premises (Wimmer 121–22). Until he could afford hiring an apprentice, Philip White would have performed such tasks himself. Thus, unlike Lyons, his labor would have been highly visible to his neighbors. They could watch him day after day working behind his prescription counter, and could appreciate his dedication to his work.

White was a provider in the city's service industry. From his own perspective, he was a small business owner, self-employed, and independent. He also possessed a certain degree of social prestige, and had open before him the possibility of upward mobility, which might eventually culminate in property ownership. From the point of view of his neighbors in the Swamp, he was a healer offering relief to a community ravaged by chronic illness and disease. Consequently, White sought, in ways that Lyons either could not or would not, to serve his immediate neighborhood by building up particularistic ties of clientship.

White's obituary published in the February 19, 1891 issue of the *New York Times* gives us a good sense of how he maintained good relations with his Irish neighbors and consequently received their protection during the riots:

Mr. White carried on the business of druggist and chemist at Frankfort and Gold Streets for nearly forty-seven years. . . . His acts of kindness and charity were numerous, and scores of poor families were befriended and helped by him not only with medicines, but with food and money. Those whom he helped had a chance to show their gratitude during the draft riots of 1863. When the riot was at its height a crowd of men gathered at White's store to defend it from attack. Mr. White was warned by some of the business men that he would be wise if he hid himself. He said: 'What have I to fear? Even if these men here could not protect me, there are as many men among the rioters who would fight for me as there are those who would injure me.' Not the slightest attempt was made to harm him or his property.

The obituary states that White felt certain of protection not only by those standing guard at his drugstore but also by "many men among the rioters." This statement suggests that the mob was at least in part composed of neighbors prepared to destroy black property — perhaps Albro Lyons's home — but determined to "fight" for White's. Throughout the 1850s, White's strategy had been one of delimiting a place in which he could bring together potentially antagonistic groups in his neighborhood and provide useful service to all of them. In his drugstore, White successfully forged a relationship of mutual interdependence between himself and his neighbors in which benevolence and self-interest were inextricably intertwined for the benefit of all concerned. If White took care of his customers, giving away medicines for free, he was through this act of benevolence maintaining the stability of the neighborhood in which he both lived and worked, and protecting his own position within it. In turn, if his poor Irish neighbors accepted his benevolence, they were ultimately able to repay him by protecting him during the riots. In so doing, they were also ensuring that the drugstore on which they depended so heavily would survive the riots and continue to serve them. Here the particularistic ties of clientship made possible the formation of neighborhood bonds that transcended divisions of race, class, and ethnicity.

Yet White's relationship to his neighborhood community was far more complex than his poor Irish neighbors ever imagined. Unknown to them, he had

gained the confidence of the businessmen of the Swamp whose support eventually allowed him to engage in a wholesale drug business (*NY Times* Feb. 19, 1891). White's work, then, extended beyond his visible role as a local service provider to the more invisible, aspatial, and impersonal (but far more lucrative) business of wholesale dealer. As a result, he was able to improve his socioeconomic status but keep it hidden from those who might have resented his rapid upward mobility. White's experiences within the space of the neighborhood were defined then not so much by his race and class as by his neighbors' *perceptions* of them. To his poor Irish customers, he was above all a hardworking shopkeeper whose generosity compelled their loyalty. To the businessmen of the Swamp, he was an entrepreneurial young man whose business prospects they wanted to help improve. To both groups, his drugstore and his practice as druggist contributed to the welfare of their neighborhood that they did not want to see undermined.

Mining the archives to uncover alternative histories of the Draft Riots underscores the degree to which black New Yorkers' claims to space were, and remain, subject to contestation and negotiation. Allowing these narratives to become part of our collective memories might provide us with the necessary groundwork from which to move toward reconciliation. We might be able to start a dialogue around some of the following questions. What makes black space so threatening, and how can we make it less so? How can blacks inhabit public spaces without being subject to social control? Can Philip White's experiences during the Draft Riots teach us a lesson about how to negotiate claims to space? White's story is that of one single individual and occurred within the context of personal rather than systemic relationships. Yet it might well provide us with a countermodel of racism that would allow us to imagine new cross-racial alliances and interactions within this country's tangled web of race relations.

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