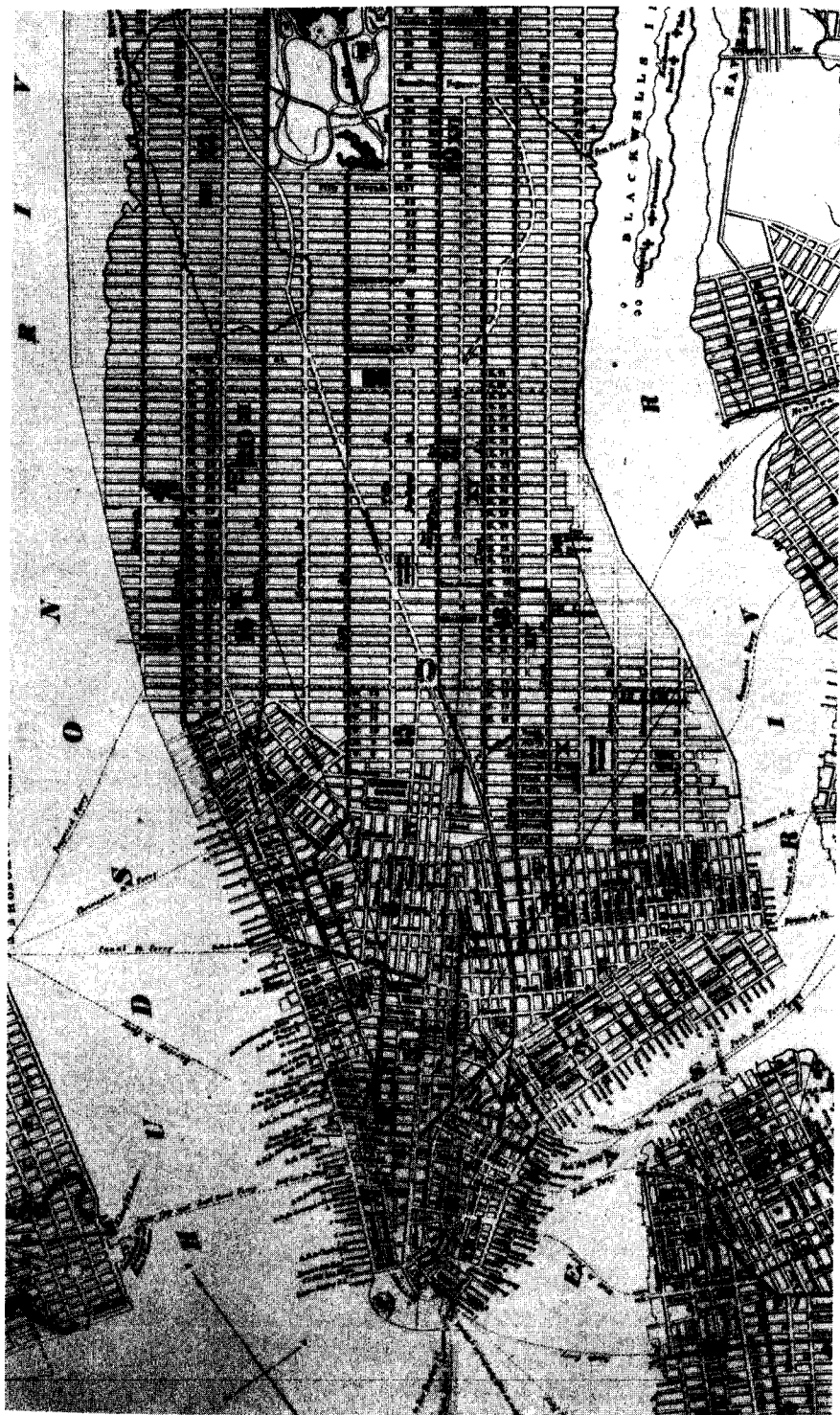




Map of New York City in 1859. Arabic numerals indicate the ward numbers.
Map courtesy of Harvard Map Collection.

The Monied Metropolis

New York City and the Consolidation
of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850–1896

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Reconstructing New York

When President Andrew Johnson signed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865, and slavery was outlawed in North America, the major political and social fault line of the United States suddenly disappeared. Emancipation removed what until then had been the most important reference point for the political discourse of northern society. Though New York's economic elite had been aware of the social changes fostered by economic expansion in the antebellum North, they had linked the problem of proletarianization in one way or another to slavery: Some had believed that an expanding slave economy would provide for prosperous employment of northern wage workers while others had held that the destruction of slavery would reinvigorate social and geographical mobility for temporary proletarians.¹ Yet by the late 1860s and early 1870s, both the republic of independent producers, envisioned by Abraham Lincoln along with New York manufacturers, and the commercial capitalism based on slavery championed by August Belmont and many of the city's mercantile elite were rapidly faltering on the shoals of industrialization.

Indeed, social tensions arising from the blossoming of capitalism sharpened considerably in the wake of the Civil War. During the 1860s, rapid economic development and novel political arrangements mitigated these strains, but workers' collective action eventually forced upper-class New Yorkers to come to terms with the emerging new world. This reorientation was at first careful and tentative, but by the early 1870s, New York's merchants, industrialists, and bankers began to reconsider the meaning of proletarianization and the role of the state in society, with dramatic results not only for class relations in the North but also for Reconstruction and the fate of the freedpeople in the South.

Proletarianization was a central fact of life in the city, the direct result of its relentless growth. As economic opportunity beckoned, manufacturers searched for ever-increasing numbers of wage workers, workers who

arrived from the American countryside and Europe, as well as from the ranks of the city's artisans.² By 1870, Manhattan alone counted close to 130,000 laboring women and men among its inhabitants, and was adding new workers at a rate of about 340 a month. Each morning, thousands of toilers streamed into the factories along the East River, into the myriad clothing workshops in lower Manhattan, and to the building sites farther uptown. These workingmen and women now decisively stamped the character of large areas of the city, particularly below 14th Street on the east side of Manhattan, a section inhabited by laborers and their families, many of them recent immigrants from Ireland and Germany. Here lived the "elements," according to the *New York Times*, "who possess . . . no property and can get none."³

As never before in the history of New York City, many of these workers, especially those with skills, organized into unions and engaged in strikes. Whereas in 1861 there had been only about fifteen unions in the city, the number exploded to 157 three years later.⁴ In June 1864, the Workingmen's Union formed, assembling different trades into one body.⁵ This degree of organization translated into novel collective challenges to employers: According to the estimates of one historian, 249 tradewide strikes occurred in New York between 1863 and 1873, some of them – like the 1868 bricklayers strike – involving several thousand workers.⁶ Though most disputes focused on wages, the length of the workday motivated an increasing number of conflicts. This new emphasis was particularly encouraged by the passing of an eight-hour bill in the New York State legislature by Radical Republicans, symbolizing how the reconstruction of the southern states suddenly seemed to open new political opportunities in the North, as the boundaries of the antebellum political world fell apart.⁷ The successful outcome of many of these strikes inspired workers in late 1868 to organize a labor party.⁸ By 1870, New York's skilled workers had achieved a degree of mobilization and organization they had never sustained before.

Indeed, the newfound power of workers was indirectly reflected in the local political arrangements that emerged toward the end of the war. According to historian Iver Bernstein, in 1865 the exuberant confidence of well-to-do New Yorkers, along with the resources made available by the booming local economy, provided them with a way out of the local political crisis that had unfolded in the wake of the Draft Riots. The city's merchants, manufacturers, and bankers came to accept a political compromise that was negotiated by William M. Tweed and his Tammany Hall faction of the Democratic Party. Tweed delivered social peace and extracted, in

return, a comprehensive system of public aid and patronage jobs for the city's working class.⁹

William Tweed, who had become an influential politician in the city's Democratic Party by 1864, celebrated his first citywide electoral victory in December 1865, carried the state in 1869, and dominated the political life of the city until 1871. Tweed's Tammany Hall derived its strength from a coalition of working-class New Yorkers, particularly Irish immigrants, along with large segments of the city's economic elite, both of which benefited from the urban expansion fostered by his deficit-spending program. Though Tweed decreased taxes, he increased per capita expenditure by more than 50 percent between 1860 and 1869 – from \$17.99 to \$28.12 (in 1869 dollars).¹⁰ The resulting social stability was so apparent to upper-class New Yorkers that the city's Republican Party was said to be aligned with Tammany Hall, with even so staunch a Republican as George Templeton Strong voting, albeit reluctantly, for Tammany.¹¹

While Tweed's Tammany Hall was certainly not their ideal of urban rule, the city's economic elite accommodated themselves to its policies. Among bourgeois New Yorkers, support for Tweed came at first mainly from bankers and real estate developers.¹² International financiers profited from selling municipal bonds in domestic and overseas markets, bonds that were used to finance the city's expansion. Between 1867 and 1871, the city's debt increased nearly threefold – a windfall for local bond dealers such as August Belmont, John A. Dix, Augustus R. Schell, and Moses Taylor.¹³ One of the voices of the city's bondholders, the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, hence saw little reason to be concerned about Tweed's spiraling expenditures, arguing that “the whole debt is well secured.”¹⁴

The other elite group supporting William Tweed was comprised of those who capitalized most directly on urban expansion – builders, uptown landowners, and investors in utilities. With the physical growth of Manhattan northward, especially of residential districts along Central Park, property holders had organized in the West Side Association (1866), the East River Improvement Association (1868), and the East Side Association and stood ready to defend the policy of urban expansion.¹⁵ The president of the West Side Association, the lawyer and developer William R. Martin, proudly proclaimed that Tweed was “by our aid, firmly seated.”¹⁶ When Tweed obtained a new city charter in 1870, one that restored to the city much of the power that had been assumed by Albany in 1857, thus concentrating authority over infrastructure improvements in New York itself, he could count on the backing of large segments of the city's upper class.¹⁷



Net bonded debt of New York City, 1865–1871.

Source: Edward Dana Durand, *The Finances of New York City* (New York: Macmillan, 1898), p. 375.

Indeed, so pervasive was this support that in 1870, upon an investigation of the comptroller's books, John Jacob Astor, Moses Taylor, Edward Schell, and others found nothing wrong with Tweed's financial dealings.¹⁸

Tweed's form of rule was attractive to elite New Yorkers, not only because of the particular material benefits they derived from his administration but also because his policies won the allegiance of large segments of the working class, and helped to bolster their commitment to the nationalism that the Union League Club had pioneered during the war years. The price of this alliance – public relief and city patronage jobs – seemed affordable during economic boom times. In this age of exuberant confidence, support for Tweed reflected economic elites' continued belief in stewardship and a shared polity, while indirectly acknowledging the strength of labor.



The emergence of a large wage-earning class, however, confronted capital-rich New Yorkers not only in city politics but also in all other spheres of their lives, from the streets to the workshops. Manufacturers faced conflicts over the terms of employment most directly.¹⁹ But merchants had to come to terms with this new world as well. While most of them did not have a large number of employees on their payrolls, nor profits derived directly from production, massive stakes in real estate involved them with the city's construction workers, and investments in railroads and mines exposed them to the organizing efforts in these industries.²⁰ Moreover, as we have seen, the rise of a new agricultural proletariat in the South fundamentally changed the ways agricultural commodities were planted and harvested. Slowly but persistently, the relationship to wage workers moved to the center of attention for all of the city's property owners, including merchants.

How did both merchants and manufacturers negotiate the sudden expansion of the city's working class? Politically, as we have seen, they found, at first, a workable solution facilitated by Tweed's activist state, a solution that in many ways harked back to the politics of stewardship characteristic of the antebellum world. Ideologically, however, the problem was of considerably greater scope. Americans were unaccustomed to think of their country as possessing a permanent working class. Before the Civil War, merchants had hoped to limit proletarianization and address its social effects with the profits derived from a prosperous southern plantation economy. Manufacturers, in turn, believed in the promise of social and geographical mobility enabled by westward expansion. For merchants, wage work had been ephemeral to the American economy; for industrialists, it had been only a temporary condition in life.

Despite the challenges of the postwar years, most manufacturers, having grown up in an ideological world entrenched in free-labor thought, held onto their older beliefs. Prominently representing this outlook, Horace Greeley stuck determinedly to his credo, telling and retelling the tale of free labor, protectionism, and agricultural prosperity.²¹ He and other industrialists saw free-labor ideology validated and strengthened by the experience of the war.²² As Greeley pointed out, "[r]ecent events have opened the Southern States to settlement and cultivation by free labor," which, according to the *Manufacturer and Builder*, "is stimulating the Southern people."²³ Free labor, now generalized throughout the nation, could contain the potentially divisive effects of industrialization. As a speaker at the annual fair of the industrialists' American Institute argued, the world needed to learn that "free, self-reliant, well paid labor, the citizenship of a republic of human equality, lies at the foundation of national greatness."²⁴ In such a society, *Iron Age* concluded optimistically, "there is much less apparent danger . . . than in any other of the great producing countries of the world of a conflict of classes."²⁵

Validated by the war, free-labor ideology flowered once more during the second half of the 1860s. It also flowered because the war had vastly strengthened the political economy of the industrialists. The new economic and political arrangements promised to guarantee future social mobility so essential to free-labor thought. "The America of the future must differ greatly from the America of the past," argued one manufacturer, pointing to a system in which high tariffs protected rapidly expanding American industries and in which the resulting prosperity created bountiful markets for American farmers.²⁶ This vision, now turned into governmental policy, put industrialists and free-labor ideology squarely at the center of the American political economy.²⁷

Ironically, the growing dominance of the manufacturers' political economy also undermined the future of free-labor ideology. It undermined it for two reasons: First, it helped create a larger working class, as an ever-smaller percentage of workers became independent entrepreneurs or farmers. And, second, because northern victory in the Civil War had created the conditions industrialists thought to be sufficient to the unfolding of a free-labor society, the legitimacy of further state intervention diminished. Permanent proletarianization, despite being much more widespread now, could be seen by manufacturers as the result of individual failure, not large-scale social change. Horace Greeley, typically, held workers responsible for their status, arguing that "they might be their own employers if they chose."²⁸

Free-labor ideology prepared industrialists to blame workers for their social standing and to see workers' collective action as a threat to their core beliefs. As proletarianization widened, workers organized, and the social distance between manufacturers and their employees increased; commitment to a shared social contract centered on social mobility became more difficult to maintain. With notions of a mutuality of interest between workers and their employers diminishing, industrialists eventually would recast their relationship to the people in their employ.²⁹ This new orientation emerged most forcefully, as we will see shortly, among large-scale employers, especially the railroads, but in due time affected ever larger numbers of the city's manufacturers. As an expression of this reorientation and the solidarities it enabled, by the early 1870s *Iron Age* and the *New-York Commercial Advertiser* appealed to manufacturers to organize against the power of trade unions.³⁰

Yet throughout the 1860s, it was difficult for industrialists to come to terms with their workers' greater assertiveness. The Hoe brothers, for example, on the one hand tried to blame strikes on "outside influences," or even "a society of Communists . . . who advocate the wildest theories, such as the division of property etc."³¹ On the other hand, however, they also took note of their changing relationship to the people in their employ: "I am persuaded," wrote Robert Hoe II, "that there has been too little attention paid during the last 10 or 15 years to recruiting the shops with foremen of character and ability and filling the shops with workmen upon whom we can depend. . . . All these things have weakened our influence directly and indirectly over the minds of the men."³² Hoe did "not feel disposed to waste much sympathy" on the workmen. "I do not believe in any system of cooperation such as is being tried," he asserted, since "it is very fair to let the natural law of supply and demand alone."³³

Merchants and bankers were even less prepared than manufacturers for navigating the new world that resulted from the Civil War. Their notions of paternalist stewardship became more difficult to maintain in the face of a massively enlarged group of wage laborers. Moreover, while the political economy of industrialists, and with it their free-labor ideology, had been validated by the war, that of the merchants had experienced a defeat.

The political and economic ideas of merchants made it difficult for them to come to terms with the massive wave of proletarianization. "It is one of the misfortunes of the times that . . . antagonism has arisen between capital and labor in place of the feeling of identity of interests which should exist," expounded the *United States Economist and Dry Goods Reporter*.³⁴ China merchant Abiel Abbot Low concurred, asserting that the only real dangers to "the prosperity of our port and our city . . . appear to be . . . the combinations of men who seek continually to advance the prices of labor beyond what employers can afford to pay."³⁵ But what should be done about it? Thinking of strikes as "against reason, and opposed to that community of interest which Providence has instituted between the workmen and the employer," merchants persistently appealed to the "intellectual and moral elevation of the working class."³⁶ Yet this "community of interest" was threatened, as "industrial society . . . during the past ten years has been . . . broken down among us into the two great classes of rich and poor - capitalists and their employes [*sic*], making it more difficult for the "man of small means" to "begin business for himself."³⁷ In fact, workingmen "were deprived of the facility for rising as rapidly and easily to be masters."³⁸ But what should be done about the growing number of wage workers and the increasing social conflict remained unclear.³⁹

Slowly, however, the old merchant paternalism weakened. Especially once the Tweed regime had unraveled and workers had shown their collective power in the streets and workshops of New York in the early 1870s, the merchants' concern with order, along with their traditional embrace of a weak state, made them fall easily into a new ideological orientation of laissez-faire individualism. This orientation denied the state's responsibility for addressing social inequality and allowed for the repression of citizens of the Republic if they were seen as endangering order. ← Adjusting themselves to the new order of things, the *Merchants' Magazine and Commercial Review* found that "[s]ociety is divided into two classes, the laborer and the capitalist. . . . A certain amount of suffering and misery will always exist; and no amount of benevolence on the part of the capitalist, nor of the philanthropist, can materially lessen it."⁴⁰ Here, the merchants joined the ideological universe of the city's industrialists, forg-

From Community of Interest → to Two classes,

ing an ideology that made the defense of the prerogatives of property the centerpiece of their shared beliefs.

This halting ideological reorientation went along, as we have seen, with the social and geographic retreat of ever-larger segments of New York's upper class from other social groups. But the more bourgeois New Yorkers tried to gain control of their physical surroundings, the more removed the working class became from the paternalist control of earlier times. "The boy is now left to run at large," declared the Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor (AICP) in a report mourning the decline of the paternalist apprenticeship system.⁴¹ And as workers moved farther away from the field of vision of their betters, the fear of them increased exponentially. Not surprisingly, journalists responded to the worries of their upper-class readers by reporting on the mysterious lower ranks of society, sometimes with a kind of anthropological curiosity. "It is very difficult for a journalist who knows the condition and feelings of the working classes throughout the world to make readers of the comfortable classes understand how they regard their relations to capitalists and to society at large," remarked the *New York Times*.⁴² From 1866 onward, the AICP published yearly reports on "Labor Movements and Strikes."⁴³ And the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 1871 printed a detailed study on "Organization of Labor: Its Aggressive Phases," focusing in particular on the International Workingmen's Association.⁴⁴ Slowly but persistently, workers were cast as "the other."

Anxiety, bordering on fear, was the clearest expression of the decay of antebellum ideological certainties. For this reason, around the early 1870s there was an increasing discrepancy between what workers and unions actually did and how upper-class New Yorkers interpreted their actions. Skilled workers fought for improvements in their living conditions to enable them to live a dignified life. Workers recognized that a condition of permanent wage labor clouded the fundamental ideological pillars of American society. After all, a republic of independent producers was the basis of republican democratic theory - a man's economic independence guaranteed his political independence and, most importantly, a shared interest in the defense of private property. ← Many if not most skilled workers did not accept the permanence of their proletarian station, and for them, unions were just one way to improve their standing. Employers, however, saw the same kind of activities increasingly as interference with property rights they held to be sacred, and their concerns about the collective power of workers in improving their shop conditions easily turned into hysteria.

Employers, more attuned to the permanence of proletarianization than

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many workers, feared the consequences of non-property owners becoming a majority of the voting citizenry. After all, there was no example in history for a republic based upon unequal distribution of property and a simultaneously enfranchised working class. The British, German, and French bourgeoisie all had lost their enthusiasm for a broad-based suffrage in the face of growing working-class militancy. Consequently, as the importance of slavery and sectional conflict retreated in the political discourse of the city's merchants, industrialists, and bankers, the existence of a large, permanent proletariat began to permeate ever more debates. Prophetically, silk merchant Elliot C. Cowdin remarked in 1871 that the "relations between Capital and Labor now raise questions which have assumed colossal magnitude."⁴⁵

Events abroad magnified the fears of the city's economic elite. In March 1871, Parisian workers and sympathetic National Guard soldiers took control of Paris and, in the words of the *New York Times*, "declared war . . . against art, property, and religion – against civilization itself."⁴⁶ For the first time ever, the lower classes had taken control of the government of one of the world's premier cities. Propertied citizens everywhere woke to the potential of the working classes to seize political power and to threaten private property.⁴⁷ In this moment, upper-class New Yorkers articulated many of their greatest fears about the direction in which their society was headed. According to *The Nation*, the Commune gave "an air of practicalness to what all the rest of the world sneered at as impractical": that "a great crowd of persons" could seize the "government of a great capital and administer it."⁴⁸ "This demonstration against capital . . . may prove as memorable as the first organized and violent move of any importance toward great changes," confided lawyer George Templeton Strong to his diary.⁴⁹ And *The Nation* editorialized:

On the whole, the reign of the Commune must be pronounced the most extraordinary episode of modern times, and strikingly illustrates the truth of observation that the barbarians whose ravages the modern world has to dread, live not in the forests, but in the heart of our large cities.⁵⁰

With great determination, bourgeois New Yorkers tried to persuade themselves that the European situation was fundamentally different from that in the United States. In America, "[t]here is no pressure on the *proletaire* class beyond the necessary inequalities of life," wrote the *New York Times*.⁵¹ Social mobility and westward migration would distinguish America's workers from those of Europe. "In our own happy country,"

explained the *New York Herald*, workers were equal before the law, were better paid, and had access to land as well as political rights; therefore they showed less revolutionary inclination.⁵² The silk merchant Elliot Cowdin, in an address on the Commune delivered at Cooper Union, thought conditions in the United States "no . . . longer dangerous" and hoped that common schools, a free press, free speech, free religious worship, and an open Bible, "would prevent another Commune."⁵³

Despite such beliefs in American exceptionalism, uneasiness prevailed. The *New York Times* predicted direly that the "great revolution of labor has yet to come," and saw dangers lurking close at home: "[T]he dangerous and seething materials . . . are to be found in every large capital . . . [where] the thousands of wretched creatures . . . hide in attics and cellars, poor, slovenly and hard-pressed."⁵⁴ The AICP agreed, warning that communism in the United States "found a soil so congenial to its growth that it is already formidable in numbers."⁵⁵ Indeed, it was such thinking that led to comparisons between the Commune and the Draft Riots of 1863. "For a few days in 1863, New-York seemed like Paris under the Reds," remarked the *New York Times* retrospectively. "Our Communists had already begun towards the houses of the rich, and the cry of war to property was already heard."⁵⁶ If not for the resistance of the "better classes . . . we should have seen a communistic explosion in New-York which would have probably left the City in ashes and blood."⁵⁷ The experience of Paris even encouraged one author, J. T. Headley, to pen down an account of all riots that had occurred in New York's history, furnishing "a sort of moral history of that vast, ignorant, turbulent class which is one of the distinguishing features of a great city, and at the same time the chief cause of its solicitude and anxiety, and often of dread."⁵⁸ It was hardly surprising, then, that George Templeton Strong expressed relief when the Commune was finally repressed and "[t]he foot of the [French] bourgeoisie is on the neck of the dreaded and hated Rouges at last, and it will stay there till they are made powerless for mischief on any large scale, if anything short of extermination can render them innocuous."⁵⁹

In the weeks following the Paris Commune, the Tweed regime unraveled in New York City. The relationship between the two events was only symbolic, but the experiences in France had probably encouraged the city's economic elite to act boldly, and indeed the *New York Daily Tribune* had already editorialized in April that "[u]nless we succeed in the political reform we shall not need to look abroad to inquire whether republican government is a failure."⁶⁰ It was a confluence of factors that made Tweed's

regime collapse. In July 1871, the first accusations of fraud became public. Manhattan newspapers revealed corruption on a scale unheard of before. As a result, international bondholders cut off the city's credit.⁶¹ In the same month, bloody riots (the so-called "Orange Riots") pitted Catholic and Protestant Irish immigrants against one another, the city's bourgeoisie nearly unanimously siding with the Orangemen. Urban disorder on a scale not seen since the Draft Riots threatened New York, and in the eyes of the city's wealthy, Catholics and workers were the cause of it. Tweed, identified with both, now drew the wrath of upper-class New Yorkers.⁶²

On September 3, 1871, hundreds of merchants, industrialists, bankers, and professionals assembled at Cooper Union to force a retreat of the Tweed faction and a restructuring of city government. Called by the newly founded "Committee of Citizens and Taxpayers for the Financial Reform of the City and County of New York," the meeting witnessed a bipartisan condemnation of Tweed by the likes of sugar manufacturer William Havemeyer, banker James Brown, publisher Oswald Ottendorfer, financier Jesse Seligman, and printing press manufacturer Robert Hoe II.⁶³ The demands of the first meeting – which were for the next year articulated by the Committee of Seventy, so named for the number of members on the executive board – were twofold: First, they pressed for an immediate inquiry into the corruption and fraud of the Tweed Ring and the prosecution of its members. Second, they wanted to secure "good" government by reforming the political structure of the city's administration. They resolved to "give to the City of New York a form of government such as shall be devised . . . by our wisest and best citizens."⁶⁴

At the center of the storm was New York City's financial community and, in particular, James Brown, who presided over the first meeting and whose son, James M. Brown, also joined the group. Shortly after the first meeting, Charles O'Connor, the special deputy attorney general for the State of New York, along with lawyers prosecuting Tweed (who were hired by the committee), located their offices in the building of Brown Brothers.⁶⁵ In effect, the offices of Brown Brothers became City Hall. From here, the committee controlled the city's accounts and decided over expenditures.⁶⁶ They pressured city officials to step down in order to make space for the committee's members. They pressured the mayor to nominate one of their own, Andrew H. Green, as the new comptroller.⁶⁷ For a few weeks, the committee ruled the city. It was a municipal coup d'état.

The suddenness with which the Committee of Seventy organized may at first glance be surprising. Yet most of the individuals, ideas, and strategies

associated with the committee had been articulated before 1871. Of the older organizations that had formulated a critique of Tammany rule, the Citizens' Association had been the most important. In the wake of the Draft Riots and a failed attempt to form a reform party, a bipartisan group of merchants, industrialists, and bankers – among them Hamilton Fish, Morris Ketchum, Peter Cooper, and James Brown – had come together in December 1863 to advocate "a reduction of our taxes, the protection of our homes and business."⁶⁸ Though the association they founded was a class-based organization ("Bankers, Merchants, Capitalists and Manufacturers are cordially invited to become members . . ."),⁶⁹ it appealed in its early years for support from skilled workers, in line with some antebellum reform organizations.⁷⁰

The goal of the association, chaired at first by the banker James Brown and in later years by the manufacturer Peter Cooper, was "to organize the highest intelligence of society represented by the better classes of merchants, manufacturers, capitalists, bankers and others to oppose corruption and promote reform and progress in all matters that interest the citizen."⁷¹ It advocated a reduction in taxes and government expenditures, lower wages for city employees, housing reform in working-class districts, and improvement of the city's docks.⁷² In contrast to later reform movements, however, the Citizens' Association still operated very much in a paternalist mold that embraced the activist state, asserting that its reforms would create a city in which "streets [are] carefully graded and paved, swept and cleaned daily; comfortable, clean and cheap public conveyances [are run] so that the poorest might enjoy them, . . . model dwellings for the laboring and poorer classes [are provided]; and presiding over all a Mayor, Common Council, and other city officials, chosen from among well-known and universally esteemed citizens."⁷³ The Citizens' Association had great hopes for its reforms as it saw New York City politics as important to the nation as a whole: "Great cities have always wielded a moral sovereignty in human affairs. Thebes, Nineveh, Babylon, Palmyra, Rome gave laws and manners to ancient times. London, Paris, Vienna, Constantinople, St. Petersburg, sway nations now and advance or depress the standard of civilization, freedom and social economy. As are its great cities, so is Europe, so is Christendom."⁷⁴ Hence, "imperial New York [must] fulfill a like destiny to the States and territories which commerce, science, and other interests shall attract towards her bosom."⁷⁵

Implementing these lofty goals, however, was difficult. After the war, once William Tweed's Tammany Hall had entrenched itself firmly in the politics of the city, the Citizens' Association lost the support of workers,

and many of its wealthy backers. In response, it radicalized its demands. The much smaller organization now focused increasingly on the way New York City was governed, searching for ways to limit popular influence over local politics.⁷⁶ Although this antidemocratic impulse of the Citizens' Association was not entirely new among the city's mercantile elite and rising manufacturers, its organized expression was without precedent.⁷⁷ As early as 1860, for example, Samuel P. Dinsmore (who later would join the association) had demanded that a board, elected only "by actual taxpayers," be created, one which would approve all expenditures of the city, with the effect that "the numerical limit to the franchise . . . should secure the worthiest of our citizens."⁷⁸ In the second half of the 1860s, the Citizens' Association translated an argument like Dinsmore's into concrete reform proposals. They organized meetings, printed pamphlets, and developed plans for changes in the government of the city.⁷⁹ Arguing that a clique of professional politicians had subverted republican government, they called Tweed's domination of local politics a "[f]oul and Monstrous Conspiracy."⁸⁰ The city had to be rescued from the "dregs of Europe," from the "rascality of the old world" that flowed into it.⁸¹

Although their analysis was still couched in an earlier nativist mold that feared the subversion of the Republic from the outside, the conclusions they drew did not suggest a limitation of immigration. Indeed, the opinion of the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* that immigration was "the most fruitful source . . . of the rapid material progress of the country" was widely shared.⁸² A limitation of political rights was not to be based on nativity, but rather on economic status.

Organizing those who stayed outside of Tweed's growth coalition, the Citizens' Association, in effect, sought to reform the way New York City was governed. An opportunity to embark upon such reform came in 1868, when the New York Constitutional Convention worked on rewriting the constitution of the state, including those parts that governed its cities. The Citizens' Association's main mission was to limit suffrage rights: They warned that "[t]he advocates of the unrestricted use of the ballot-box must . . . have forgotten the fearful scenes enacted in the July riots of 1863 [when] the thousands and tens of thousand . . . came forth from lanes, alleys, cellars and slums, and from dark holes and corners," and argued that "[i]t is not safe to place the execution of the laws in the hands of the classes against which they are principally to be enforced."⁸³ Having "abandoned all hope" for reform by the city itself, they instead appealed to the State of New York to give the city a new charter that

would exclude "political parties and cliques from the control of interests . . . and selecting from our citizens men of character, intelligence and thorough knowledge of the branches of public duty to which they may be assigned."⁸⁴ A new state constitution was to secure that elections should be few, and "held to fill the highest offices only," with other posts, such as judgeships, filled by gubernatorial appointments only.⁸⁵ Suffrage was to be restricted by educational requirements, one branch of the Common Council elected only by "tax-payers," and a system of "minority representation" devised.⁸⁶ Furthermore, a board of 24 taxpayers – selected by lot from a group of 250 taxpayers assessed at more than \$20,000 – "SHALL DETERMINE . . . THE SUMS NECESSARY TO BE RAISED FOR ALL LOCAL PURPOSES," thus enjoying practical veto power over all local decisions.⁸⁷

The reform plans of the Citizens' Association, however, came to naught, and the association slowly disintegrated.⁸⁸ Despite the organization's frantic publicity efforts, their positions found only minority support among New York's upper class. While it had gained backers in the wake of the Draft Riots, many well-to-do citizens eventually found a comfortable arrangement with the Tweed regime and left the association.⁸⁹ August Belmont, the international financier benefiting from the sale of New York City bonds in international credit markets, for example, was not mentioned in relation to the Citizens' Association after 1864, and banker James Brown was replaced as president by manufacturer Peter Cooper. Ironically, by 1870, Tweed even succeeded in drawing Cooper into his ranks by advocating some of the very same reforms the Citizens' Association had demanded. He and his associates lowered taxes and passed a new charter in the legislature, which, while not limiting the franchise, radically increased the power of the mayor and provided for the improvement of the docks.⁹⁰ Hence, in March 1871, the Citizens' Association advocated the passage of "An Act to provide the Government of the City and County of New-York" – the very charter the once-despised William Tweed supported.⁹¹ By 1870, the Citizens' Association was only a shadow of its former self.

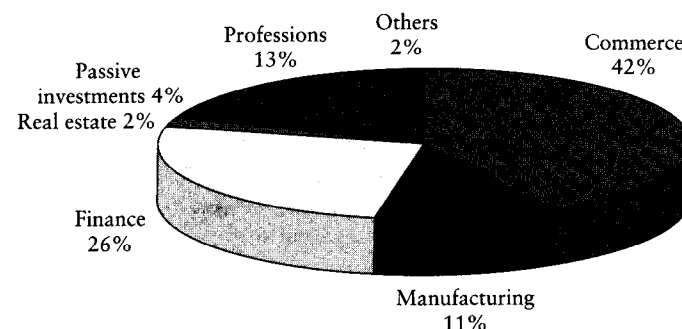
Tweed had been so successful in weakening the Citizens' Association that in the spring of 1870 a group of upper-class New Yorkers established a new reform organization – the New York City Council of Political Reform – to drum up opposition to Tweed.⁹² This council, moderate in its demands, expressed anxiety about government spending and corruption at the national, state, and local levels.⁹³ It was dominated by a group of lawyers, bankers of lesser stature, and prominent manufacturers – among them printing press manufacturer Robert Hoe II and sugar refiner William

F. Havemeyer. Relatively few merchants joined. In the fall of 1871, however, William F. Havemeyer, in close cooperation with the railroad lawyer Samuel Tilden, bypassed both organizations and absorbed many of their original supporters into the newly formed Committee of Seventy. They were out to prove what the Citizens' Association had optimistically declared three years earlier: "Any government the capitalists and merchants may determine to have in New-York can be established."⁹⁴



In early September 1871, the Committee of Seventy began its work where the Citizens' Association and the Council of Political Reform had left off.⁹⁵ In addition to activists of the two precursor groups, many merchants, industrialists, and bankers who had stayed away from such organizations before joined the Committee of Seventy. Indeed, the first meeting in Cooper Union was so crowded that George Templeton Strong found it "beyond endurance."⁹⁶ The Committee of Seventy was entirely bourgeois; no worker, not even a lesser shop owner, was among its 239 vice presidents and secretaries.

By far the most important group supporting the movement was the merchants, who made up a full 42 percent of the organization's leadership. Among them were traders, such as Simeon B. Chittenden, Marshall O. Roberts, and Thomas Sturges, importers, such as Joseph Blumenthal, and dry goods dealers, such as Howbett Scudder and William L. Pomeroy. Financiers constituted the next largest group; with 26 percent of all members, they were significantly overrepresented, as they accounted for only 6 percent of the city's upper class. Among them were bankers, such as James Brown, Joseph Seligman, and Washington R. Vermilye. Thirteen percent of the leadership were professionals – for example, the lawyers Samuel B. Ruggles, Edgar Ketchum, and Charles P. Kirkland. Manufacturers made up 11 percent of the leadership, including the city's most important industrialists, such as the printing press maker Robert Hoe II, the paint manufacturer Julius W. Tieman, and sugar refiner Henry Havemeyer.⁹⁷ (William Steinway, though not in the leadership of the organization, donated \$100 to the committee and attended its meetings regularly.)⁹⁸ Owners of small workshops, retail traders, and real estate interests were significantly underrepresented, which was not surprising considering that they had been closest to Tweed and took a generally subordinate role in the leadership of bourgeois political mobilization. In contrast, professionals – especially lawyers – had become, to some extent, the spokesmen of their class, its "practical theorists," as they represented fully 36 percent of the secretaries of the Committee of Seventy – the small group that actually ran its



Committee of Seventy, vice presidents and secretaries
by economic sector (N = 191).

Source: *New York Times*, 15 September 1871, supplement, p. 1.
The occupations of the activists were culled from *Trow's City Directory* (1871).

day-to-day operations.⁹⁹ Altogether, the Committee of Seventy represented one of the very few classwide political mobilizations, its scope comparable only to the mobilizations for war in April 1861.

As with the mobilizations of April 1861, the members of the Committee of Seventy agreed on certain essentials, while differing on the ultimate goal of the fight on which they were embarking. They agreed to remove William Tweed and his associates from office and to reform city government. Yet the relationship of reform to the working class remained controversial. While Democrats, such as Oswald Ottendorfer and Robert B. Roosevelt, tended to stress the rescue of popular democracy and the working class from Tweed's corruption, Republican members articulated a vision of restricting the political power of workers. Thus, while Edwards Pierrepont sought to appeal to workers by blaming "high rents" as well as expensive food, clothes, and fuel on "your rulers [who] defraud you," the *Republican Nation* argued that "[t]he first remedy which any sane mind would suggest to correct these abuses would be to place the funds of the city under the control of the men who contribute them."¹⁰⁰ But limiting suffrage was, in 1871, not a step most upper-class New Yorkers were willing to take, as they remained committed to democratic solutions.¹⁰¹

Despite these divisions, the Committee of Seventy succeeded in usurping municipal power at a moment of grave crisis. This momentum carried into the electoral campaign for the State Assembly and the Common Council in the fall of 1871, when the committee successfully endorsed candidates and financed their campaigns.¹⁰² By the end of 1872, the committee had reached its first goal, purging Tweed's supporters from local politics and

capturing political power in the city. In 1872, the chairman of the committee, William F. Havemeyer, was elected mayor of New York. He proceeded immediately to implement an important element of the committee's program by laying off city workers, thus helping in "the retrenchment in the extravagant customs that existed everywhere."¹⁰³ Robert Hoe II reported that as a result of these measures, "there is a feeling of relief as to the financial affairs of the City especially among those Savings Banks who are full of the City and County Bonds."¹⁰⁴

Despite these victories, their second goal, to rewrite the charter of the city of New York, failed. Opposition in Albany and the internal disunity of the Committee of Seventy on the question of the relationship of reform to the working class broke the coalition apart. While some more radical members sought to curtail the number of elections, and reorganize the governmental structure of the city by, for example, merging the Police, Fire, and Health Department into a "Department of Public Safety," the opposition of those more optimistic about democracy blocked them.¹⁰⁵

Most importantly, the more radical members failed to implement their scheme for "minority representation," a euphemism for electoral mechanisms designed to give "respectable" bourgeois citizens a permanent foothold in city government.¹⁰⁶ According to this plan, proposed by the committee to the legislature of New York State, the legislative board of the city was to include those who did not receive the majority of votes in an election. Similarly, losing mayoral candidates (presumably those supported by the city's upper class) should become first and second assistant mayors.¹⁰⁷ No "party majority" should govern the city but "all classes of citizens."¹⁰⁸ Reflecting the fear that bourgeois politicians would not be able to win a majority of votes, minority representation seemed to guarantee at least some bourgeois influence in local politics, in turn making class-based political movements more viable. Indeed, the idea had floated around the city's elite circles since 1865, when the Personal Representation Society under the leadership of the young lawyer Simon Sterne began its agitation, and it would surface again in the North and South throughout the last decades of the century as a way to "prevent the swamping of the more intelligent classes and of the property interests of the community."¹⁰⁹

A charter drafted on these principles passed the state House and Senate, but it was vetoed by Democratic Governor Hoffman, who maintained that it was unconstitutional.¹¹⁰ The dreams of a segment of New York City's upper class for structural reforms foundered on the shoals of political democracy. Not surprisingly, they could not convince popularly elected

politicos entrenched in the system to rearrange the democratic institutions of American local politics in order to guarantee elite power. An even more radical plan to limit suffrage rights, proposed by the Constitutional Commission's Committee on Municipal Reform (chaired by none other than Committee of Seventy member George Opdyke), similarly failed.¹¹¹

The committee's political weakness resulted, to a large degree, from clashes among its members. When more radical activists succeeded in December 1871 in pushing through a draft charter that stated that "the common council shall be elected by a system of representation which shall insure to minorities of citizens in proportion to their numerical strength, a pro-rata share of the seats in that body," and that the Common Council "should be invested with a supervision of all the departments," Peter Cooper, who was still chairing the Citizens' Association, opposed the move and resigned from his position eleven days later.¹¹² Though Cooper, the Citizens' Association, and the Committee of Seventy all agreed that the "main object of the passage of this Charter is . . . to take the Government out of the hands of professional politicians . . . and to entrust it to those substantial citizens who have other than political avocations," they disagreed on how to accomplish this goal.¹¹³ *The Nation*, on the forefront of an ideological reorientation of the city's upper class, called for the most radical steps – the formation of a vigilance committee (because "the revolution of force must sooner or later follow") and the disenfranchisement of propertyless voters from city politics, as municipal democracy was a "ridiculous anachronism."¹¹⁴ Though, undoubtedly, many bourgeois New Yorkers agreed with this assessment in 1871, many more were still committed to democratic institutions and believed that a reformed working class might be educated to use its political power wisely, as defined by respectable citizens. A further reason for the collapse of the committee was increasing political strains. The Democratic Party still had a firm hold on New York City, and its upper-class members were not necessarily keen to share this power with a minority Republican Party. Thus, on December 20, 1872, a resolution to cooperate with the Republican Party of New York in writing a new charter failed.¹¹⁵ The committee in early 1873 moved away from its classwide and bipartisan character and became increasingly an organ of elite Republicans, publicly identified as such in the press.¹¹⁶ In October 1873, the Committee of Seventy – now torn by intensifying infighting – disbanded.¹¹⁷

Despite its failure to implement structural reforms in city government, the Committee of Seventy realized the central aim of bourgeois New Yorkers to reclaim political power, which in itself made structural reform less

urgent. It also successfully narrowed the scope of urban politics with its advocacy of retrenchment.¹¹⁸ Not surprisingly, the New York Council of Political Reform reported in 1876 that after 1871, "good government has been two-thirds accomplished."¹¹⁹ Not only did this assertion of bourgeois political power decisively end the rule of Tweed, but it also ended the politics of compromise that had characterized New York since the war, a form of politics that had mitigated social conflict via a redistributive state.



During this ideological reorientation among bourgeois New Yorkers, a number of intellectuals rose to prominence by formulating a theory of society that clarified the sometimes unsystematic ideas emanating from upper-class circles. While merchants, industrialists, and bankers were not silent on these questions – indeed, they articulated important elements of this theory of individualism and laissez-faire liberalism – most did not venture to formulate a theory of society. Instead, such journalists as Elliot Godkin and George William Curtis, together with such lawyers as Samuel Tilden and Simon Sterne and such economists as David A. Wells, all of whom had come of age during the Civil War, elaborated an account of and justification for postwar American society. By the early 1870s, they pushed aside the prewar generation of free-labor ideologues, such as Horace Greeley, who became increasingly isolated among the city's owners of property. Godkin, Curtis, Tilden, Sterne, and Wells were the ideological vanguard of the city's economic elite, as they sought to refashion elite ideology at a time when many of the city's merchants, industrialists, and bankers still supported Tweed's activist state and a somewhat less drastic departure from the mutuality of free-labor paternalism and stewardship.

Despite being somewhat ahead of bourgeois New Yorkers' ideological reorientation, these self-styled "reformers" were in close social, political, and economic contact with the city's owners of capital. At social occasions, for example during the reception for the Grand Duke Alexis of Russia in May 1871, they would mingle with the city's merchants, industrialists, and bankers. Elliot Godkin had most of his contacts among the "moneyed aristocracy of the eastern Seaboard."¹²⁰ His magazine, *The Nation*, had at first been financed by bankers, including James Brown and Brown's son-in-law Howard Potter, and was, according to historian Thomas Bender, "written by gentlemen for gentlemen."¹²¹ Politically as well, intellectuals and bourgeois New Yorkers worked closely together in the reform movement; Curtis, Godkin, Tilden, and Sterne all were con-

nected at one point or another to the Committee of Seventy.¹²² And because these liberal intellectuals were the most articulate defenders of bourgeois privilege and power, the city's economic elite admitted them to their social circles and financed many of their intellectual endeavors. Though these intellectuals were in many ways on the radical edge of bourgeois discourse and somewhat of a vanguard, these "reformers," as they styled themselves, were the organic intellectuals of New York's bourgeoisie.¹²²

The ideologues' main contribution was a theoretical justification for the weakening of the power of the state versus the market and the limitation of democracy, combined with a justification for social inequality. In their most radical moments, they advocated the disenfranchisement of the working class and poor as a way to protect private property; indeed, Godkin supported a national literacy test to decide who would be eligible to vote for Congress.¹²⁴ Their hostility to working-class political power implied nothing less than a "fundamental revision of the democratic tradition."¹²⁵

Although the reformers, together with some powerful merchants, industrialists, and bankers, failed in their fight for suffrage restrictions, they much more successfully advocated the retreat of the expansive Civil War state from economic and social regulation, a theme on which nearly all bourgeois New Yorkers would agree by the mid-1870s.¹²⁶ This was a distinct departure from the 1860s, when many bourgeois New Yorkers had come to embrace or at least accept an expansive public policy that lavished city funds on urban improvements and public schools, as well as on public health and a municipal government deeply involved in urban planning.¹²⁷ The move away from such policies was supported by the liberal reformers' agenda of interpreting laissez-faire economics as a system of natural laws beyond human interference, and they now included in their interpretation not only the protection of private property but also minimal taxation, a stable currency, and a reduction in state spending.¹²⁸

* They believed that it was the market that had to regulate all economic activity, a system of thought that attracted those who controlled markets. The resulting extreme inequality was naturalized by references to the increasingly popular ideas of Herbert Spencer and morally justified by innovators of the interpretation of Christian religious doctrine like Henry Ward Beecher.¹²⁹ Indeed, Beecher, exemplifying the ideological ties between bourgeois and clergy, became a crude apologist for inequality, arguing at one point that higher wages were not called for since "[w]ater costs nothing; and a man who cannot live on bread is not fit to live."¹³⁰

The relationship between ideas articulated by reform intellectuals and bourgeois ideas about public policy was close: *The Nation*, for example, reasoned for an end to public relief on the grounds that it violated the primacy of markets.¹³¹ The AICP similarly argued that "[p]overty, under the constituted order of things, is one of its essential conditions . . . whose universality [is] certain."¹³² "It is," according to those elite welfare specialists, "the order of Divine Providence that a large proportion of the population should be poor."¹³³ The greatest good, they reasoned, is "rendered to the community when each man is left to consult and labor for his own particular advantage."¹³⁴ The Citizens' Association seconded this line of thinking: "Nature has wisely ordained that man, through labor, wins from her all that is necessary for his comfortable support."¹³⁵ In close cooperation, bourgeois intellectuals and intellectualizing bourgeois New Yorkers had moved the locus of democracy from the political rights of the many to economic freedom.¹³⁶

The ideas of Godkin, Curtis, Tilden, Sterne, and Wells also began to permeate the ways in which all segments of the city's bourgeoisie thought about themselves and the world. In 1871, during the mobilizations against Tweed, the ideas of these reformers had informed the thinking of a large number of the upper-class activists. In 1872, during a massive strike of the city's workers, the ideas spread even further among the ranks of the economic elite.

The biggest strike the city had ever witnessed began in May 1872. During its eight weeks, it involved approximately 100,000 workers, two-thirds of all those engaged in manufacturing.¹³⁷ What amounted practically to a general strike was initially quite successful, as a number of entrepreneurs, especially the owners of small shops, capitulated in the face of the strong movement. The bricklayers, joiners, carvers, upholsterers, and plumbers succeeded against employers who lacked the resolve and resources to resist their demands.¹³⁸ They "yielded to the storm which they could not resist," wrote the *New York Times*.¹³⁹ Some of the manufacturers, especially in the building trades, even showed sympathy to the workers' demands, "having, with hardly an exception, been workmen themselves."¹⁴⁰ Encouraged by the success of their movement, other groups of workers, such as the piano makers and the 15,000 iron and metal workers of the city, joined the walkout.¹⁴¹

There was a difference, however, between taking on the multiple small capitalists in the building trades and such large factory owners as William Steinway, Isaac Singer, or John Roach.¹⁴² These employers expressed an

increasing willingness to oppose their workers' demand and the "iron despotism" of union leaders, first and foremost by organizing in employers' organizations that coordinated their approach.¹⁴³ Singer, the manufacturer of sewing machines, announced defiantly that he could do without his 2,500 workers, as he had thousands of machines in stock.¹⁴⁴

William Steinway, formerly known for his paternalist labor policies, took the lead in resisting the workers' advances by strengthening his pianoforte manufacturers' association. Steinway & Sons had settled most of its previous labor conflicts by compromise. When on May 27, 1872, the journeymen piano makers of Steinway joined the eight-hour movement, William Steinway at first hoped for another fast settlement with his employees: If they would deal directly only with him (and not through a union), he in turn would give them either the nine-hour day or a 10 percent wage increase.¹⁴⁵ His workers, however, rejected the offer. In response, Steinway called a meeting of all the city's piano manufacturers, who expressed their resolve to hold out.¹⁴⁶ Collective determination, however, proved insufficient as workers mobilized large demonstrations in front of his factory. Now the new control over city government worked to the advantage of Steinway and other manufacturers, who succeeded in getting the city's police deployed to escort strikebreakers to their workplaces.¹⁴⁷ Steinway frequently called the police to dispel demonstrating workers in front of his factory. "We immediately sent for Captain Gunner," he noted in his diary on May 29, 1872, when he faced angry workers in front of his factory's gates. The police responded promptly: "I tell Captain Gunner to drive away the crowd which is done without force."¹⁴⁸ On June 15, "Captain Gunner arrives with about ten men, charges at the strikers and club them over arms and legs, they running as fast as their legs can carry them."¹⁴⁹ Sometimes more than 300 policemen remained stationed around the piano factory.¹⁵⁰ With the help of the police, William Steinway, as well as other employers, were able to recruit sufficient numbers of strikebreakers to resume production.¹⁵¹ Not surprisingly, the strike ended in total defeat for the piano workers. The close cooperation of organized employers with the police eventually proved too powerful for the city's workers.¹⁵² The piano manufacturers were "exultant over their success."¹⁵³

Emboldened by these victories, employers moved closer together to coordinate their relationship to labor.¹⁵⁴ On June 18, 300 to 400 of them met to take "concerted action on the question of maintaining the principles of ten hours for a day's work" – among them such large manufacturers as the owners of the Morgan Iron Works, the Delmater Iron Works,

and the Singer Sewing Machine Company.¹⁵⁵ Collectively, one journal estimated, these employers had 45,000 workers on their payrolls, or about 35 percent of all "hands employed" in New York's industry.¹⁵⁶ This meeting was a first, as it united manufacturers of different trades into the "Executive Committee of the Employers of the City and County of New-York and its Vicinity," led by machine manufacturer A. S. Cameron, engine builder John Roach, carriage manufacturer John W. Britton, the maker of soda water apparatuses John Matthews, and bedding manufacturer George Heyman.¹⁵⁷ Though still appealing to the mutuality of interest between labor and capital, they left no doubts that their position had to prevail. Turning away from an earlier form of paternalism toward workers – a carriage maker was "sorry to say his missionary labors were of no avail" – some employers now saw "behind all this the specter of Communism." "Our duty," one of them proclaimed, "is to take it by the throat and say it has no business here."¹⁵⁸ Adam S. Cameron, a manufacturer of steam pumps, saw it as "the duty of employers to have labor as cheap as they could," and was horrified by the "tyranny exercised by some of the trades of New-York."¹⁵⁹ The Molders' Union, he had to report, enjoyed more influence in the shops than the owners themselves. So urgent had the problem become, that machine builder John Roach concluded that "the question of the strike was more important than the result of the Presidential Campaign."¹⁶⁰ The "temper of employers," observed *Iron Age* aptly, "has . . . changed."¹⁶¹

Merchants went along with the manufacturers' perception of the strike as a threat to public order, warning that the strike would undermine New York City's locational advantages for industrial enterprises. They argued that "a few discontented, artful men have organized the present strike. . . . By means of a minority, like-minded with themselves, these leaders rule the whole body of the workingmen with an iron despotism, which is compacted, united, and riveted by the affiliated trades-unions, and is worked by secret, irresponsible agents."¹⁶² The merchants were puzzled about this new world, observing that "the existing strike differs so much from similar events in the past, that it scarcely seems to have originated with the same men."¹⁶³

By the end of June, workers could not resist the employers' determined opposition and most went back to work – defeated. The employers' association's aggressive posture against unions and workers had moved to center stage in the employers' camp in 1872, the association thanking the police "for the measure of protection we have thus far received."¹⁶⁴ The 1872 strike was a decisive break with employers' reaction to labor con-

flicts in prior decades, when the owners of small shops articulated a dominant vision of paternalism, social mobility, and self-improvement, which frequently had allowed some space for labor organizing. Not that paternalism as such disappeared from the scene, but it increasingly became a tool in the arsenal of containment of workers' collective action, not a shared belief in social mobility. The printer Theodore Low De Vinne, for example, had believed in harmony between labor and capital and conceptualized his company as a "family." Until 1864 he had claimed that labor and capital were not in opposition; as long as unions focused on self-improvement, they would be a positive influence.¹⁶⁵ By 1872, however, faced with the massive movement for the eight-hour day, he argued that "it is from the apostles of the International and the Commune that American mechanics have been unwittingly receiving teachings and orders," and he approved of another employer's step of "thrusting out every union man."¹⁶⁶

By the early 1870s, not only manufacturers but also merchants, bankers, and professionals were experiencing a full-fledged crisis of their older ideological certainties. The conflict with labor had moved toward the center of their political world. As paternalist strategies seemed to fail and as free-labor ideology provided little guidance in the social universe of the early 1870s, many bourgeois New Yorkers sought new explanations for the world they lived in and new ways to safeguard their exalted economic and social status.

These lessons did not bode well for the support of an activist state in the Reconstruction South. When in 1873 the nation's economy collapsed, upper-class New Yorkers pushed for even more radical retrenchment. It was during these years that the merchants, bankers, manufacturers, and professionals of New York City would abandon support for the reconstruction of the southern states, would become ever more ambivalent about democracy, and would formulate important elements of an identity as a class distinct from other social groups. <