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## Separating the Boy's from the B'hoys: The Working Class Masculine Identity during the Mid-Nineteenth Century

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For the American man living during the nineteenth century, testing and proving ones "manhood" became a very significant process. Masculinity was the foremost concept behind the definition of a man. In order to gain respect, one needed to establish his own masculinity and demonstrate it amongst his peers. This was especially true in New York City, a standard of manhood was affecting the working class. A common understanding of appearance, attitude, and personality dominated the way working class men carried themselves. The thriving social atmosphere of New York's urban center obliged men to "prove" themselves. It was essential for them to socialize with their peers, demonstrating their manhood as they drank and danced through working class neighborhoods. The desire for male camaraderie brought men into volunteer fire departments, where their masculinity was reinforced on a daily basis. Men gathered in the streets after stressful hours of work as they felt the need to release the tension associated with being a working man. Throughout the nineteenth century a new "manly culture" evolved which ritualized violence amongst men. A sense of competition grew and men struggled to gain respect in society. They were forced to fight by whatever means necessary to protect their manhood. By 1845, the New York City Police Department was established bringing authority figures into the streets. Police officers were to stop the violent nature of the working class but the presence of authority figures only introduced another layer of violence to society. The archetypal man was one who had a manly appearance, socialized with his fellow fire laddies, was always prepared for an honorable fight, and stood up to authority figures. Masculinity dominated every part of a working class man's life forcing him to do whatever it took to uphold his reputation.

This essay focuses on four major aspects of masculinity found in working class men in mid-nineteenth century New York City. After studying the research of historians; Michael Kaplan, Richard Stott,

Elliot Gorn, Amy Greenberg, and James Richardson it was clear that there are many factors that formulate the definition of masculinity during this time period. Richard

Stott provides detailed analysis on working class culture which supplied valuable evidence used for the appearance section of this essay. Kaplan has done research about the importance of drinking establishments and alcohol on the definition of masculinity. This essay digs deeper into the meaning of masculinity and explains how the volunteer fire department of New York City played an enormous role in the lives of men. The works of Amy Greenberg and Alvin Harlow provided insight about firemen and their roles in society. It was originally believed that masculinity was as simple as analyzing violence between men. This essay started as an exploration of how the violent culture of the working class was the driving force behind their masculine attitudes using Elliot Gorn's specialization on the violent interactions between men and how fighting defined masculinity. By analyzing James Richardson's research about the New York City Police Department it was obvious that the presence of authority figures played an enormous role in working class male society. This essay has since evolved and has combined the ideas of these historians to discuss how masculinity is much more complex than one single topic. Without male socialization and the fire department, appearance would not be important. Without a standard of appearance the violence between men would have certainly declined. Each of these factors of masculinity are closely related and are extremely important to the bigger picture of mid-nineteenth century manhood.

## Part I - Masculine Appearance

In mid-nineteenth century New York City, having a masculine appearance became essential for working class men. Not only the clothes they wore but also the way they carried themselves became important. Men wanted to separate themselves from the middle class and establish their own niche in society. By the mid-nineteenth century, a rivalry surfaced between the two classes. Members of the working class were content with their social standing and wanted everyone to know it. A man's clothing played a crucial role in the way they were seen by their peers. Members of the working class did not earn a large amount of money for their labor. Although clothing was expensive most workers dressed well, demonstrating that appearance was vital to one's reputation. Though the working class wore stylish clothing, it did not mean that they were modeling themselves after their middle class superiors. (Foster, 14)

By examining figure 1.1 and 1.2, many differences can be seen between the two styles of dress. Figure 1.1 shows three working class men on a street corner while figure 1.2 is an image of what two middle class gentlemen with the epitome of middle class style.

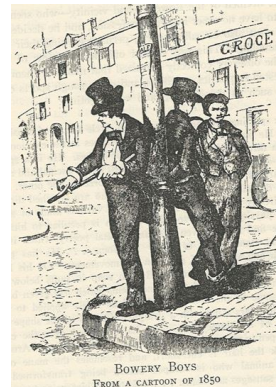


Figure 1.1 Source: Alvin F. Harlow, *Old Bowery Days: The Chronicles of a Famous Street* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1931), 194.

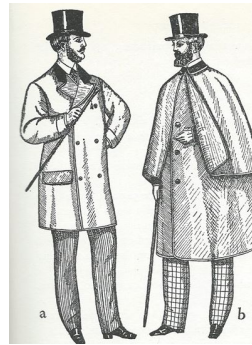


Figure 1.2 Source: Phillis Cunningham, *Costumes of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970) 17.

It seems as though they are wearing similar types of clothing but their appearances are clearly different. Although two classes wore the same pants, shirts, and jackets, it was how they wore it that mattered. The working class men stand in a rebellious way symbolizing a masculine attitude. Their hats are pointing down for an intimidating look. As Benjamin Baker, author of *A Glance at New York*, would write, they "held their cigar with an air of defiance." (Dorson, 288) The shirt collar was open and the tie loosely fit to the neck which seemed to expose their muscular chest which was the opposite of a tightly tied middle class man's tie. Everything about them screamed, "lets make a muss, I dare you." Figure 1.2 shows two men dressed properly with their coats buttoned up giving them a very refined look. Their hats and ties were straight and their bodies were completely covered. They used their canes as fashion accessories and took pride of their perfect posture. The differences between the men in the images are clear. Clothing was

the visual aspect of masculinity and the men shown in figure 1.1 assured everyone that they were proud to be members of the working class. (Gray, 139-143)

Surveying New York City District Attorney Indictment Records from the mid-nineteenth century provides a window into the masculine world of men like these found in figure 1.1. Looking at detailed witness testimonies from assault and battery cases clothing undoubtedly played a role in interactions between men. On November 5, 1840, Eli Kane got into a physical altercation with another man. (The People vs. Eli Kane) While Kane was choking the man, he proceeded to rip apart some of his clothing. It was obvious that Kane had the upper hand in the fight and had control over his opponent, so why did he rip up his clothes? For a man clothing was a symbol of masculinity. Therefore Kane was undermining his reputation, part of the facade of masculinity, by ripping his clothes. Four other cases; The trials of James Murphy, George McGee, Peter Schmidt, and Henry Hetchum report similar acts of men destroying their adversaries clothing. (The People vs. Henry Hetchum, The People vs. George Magee, The People vs. James Murphy) The trial of James Murphy provides excellent evidence confirming that clothing was essential to men. After Murphy pulled Josiah Landon from a rail car he struck him several times while he was on the ground. After being pulled from a rail car and struck in the face multiple times Landon was unable to protect himself. Murphy then, "kicked him and took his clothes." (The People vs. James Murphy) As a historian, the only way to interpret this witness report was that Murphy took Landon's clothes off his body for a reason. He was diminishing his masculinity by leaving him half naked in the street. For a working class man, dressed in the colors of his gang or fire department losing ones clothing would have been devastating. The trial of Henry Hetchum is another unique case because after he tore the clothing of Frederick Loss he proceeded to scratch his face, leaving him scarred. This brings up another correlation between masculinity and appearance. The study of witness reports from District Attorney Indictment Papers proves that when men fought they would try to inflict as much damage possible upon the appearance of their combatant.

By analyzing violent tests of manhood it is apparent that men would try to disfigure their opponent with any means necessary. On November 5, 1859 John Malohan got into a fist fight with John O'Connor. As the fight progressed and Malohan asserted his dominance and went on to bite off a portion of O'Connors ear. (The

People vs. John O'Connor) This would be an injury that O'Connor would be forced to live with for the rest of his life. It would be display it for all to see, thus being reminded that Malohan was a more competent man. The idea that deforming an opponent seemed to reinforce masculinity in the victor and challenge it within the victim. Examining the trial of Raphael Marks demonstrates how far men would go to change another appearance. On April 30, 1860, Marks knocked down Patrick Garvey with a club and proceeded to bite a portion of his lip off. (The People vs. Raphael Marks) Such an action demonstrates the tenacity in which men fought. Garvey was already beaten to the ground and the fight could have ended there. Instead Marks bent down and used his teeth to bite off part of Garvey's lip. In these trials of masculinity, as Richard Stott argues, "everything was allowed-wrestling, punching, choking, kicking, biting, even eye gouging-unless the combatants specifically agreed to prohibit them." (Stott, Jolly Fellows, 17) Evidence shows that during the nineteenth century, scars and wounds received in combat with another man represented weakness and incompetence. To provide further analysis of the importance of appearance, newspaper articles discussing court sessions put emphasis on how men looked when they went to trial. In the trial of Richard Robinson for the murder of Helen Jewett, two newspapers went into great detail about the appearance of Robinson while he committed the murder as well as during the trial itself. ("Trial of Richard Robinson," "The Murder Trial of Helen Jewett")

This notion of scarring an opponent to bolster ones own manhood became obvious when investigating assault and battery cases involving a knife. On June 10, 1860, William McDonald and George Decker engaged in a knife fight. McDonald, a twenty-one year old man won the fight and went on to pierce the right cheek of George Decker with his dagger. Witness reports from John Riley of 239 East Nineteenth Street indicate that McDonald held the knife in his right hand. (The People vs. William McDonald) If in fact the men had been standing face to face, it would have been difficult for McDonald, a right handed man, to stab Deckers right cheek unless he was purposely trying to maim him. Altercations incorporating weapons such as knives usually resulted in serious injury. On August 31, 1840, Alexander Grespach took his knife and cut the forehead of Henry Schaffer. (The People vs. Alexander Grespach) Schaffer would be forced to live with a noticeable scar on his forehead, therefore, constantly reminding his peers that his

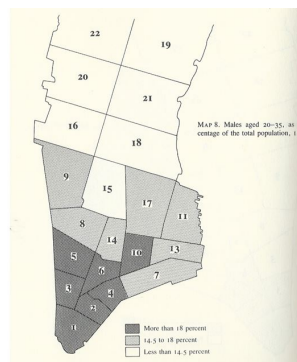


masculinity had once been questioned. Men would often go to extremes to ruin their enemies appearance. On October 12, 1840 Robert Percy tried to pull Abraham Morse's eye out of his head with his fingers. When he was unsuccessful he went on to bite off part of his nose. (The People vs. Robert Percy) It is obvious that Percy's only intention was to leave Morse with permanent physical damage. The study of some of the most extreme cases of violence show that men would go to great lengths to make a lasting impact against their opponents appearance. Using fists and weapons men would disfigure their enemies in order to assert that they successfully defended their own masculinity and compromised the masculinity of another man.

Clothing and appearance was a definition of the man. It was essential for a man to dress and act a certain way. They were constantly being judged by their peers and always had to uphold their masculine reputation. Masculinity was the driving force behind the way working class men separated themselves from their superiors and defended themselves against their rivals. As clothing became the way men associated themselves with each other, it became a prime target in physical altercations. When destroying ones clothing was not enough, men turned towards the gruesome act of disfigurement to prove that they were a man.

## Part II - Male Socialization

In mid-nineteenth century New York City a man was not considered masculine unless he socialized with his peers during his leisure time. In 1850 the city was home to 515,547 people and 35 percent of the male population was between ages fifteen and thirty. (Stott, Jolly Fellows, 99) At this time working class neighborhoods in lower wards such as The Bowery and Five Points surfaced as centers for entertainment. Figure 2.1 illustrates how most of New York City's men lived in the lower wards which brought forth strong ties between men and their community. (Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis*, 206)



Source of Figure 2.1: Richard B. Stott *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990) 208.

Men gathered at drinking establishments, theaters, and dance halls to fulfill their need for male camaraderie. (Blumin, 11)

Throughout the working class neighborhoods of New York City, drinking establishments proved to be centers for social life. The tavern, modeled after the English pub, began to transform into the saloon by the 1840s. Soon the saloon became known as the "American" drinking house. Drinking establishments had many social benefits because they promoted working-class political communication and provided information on jobs and public events-or public disturbances." (Kaplan, *New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity*, 599) Americanized public houses featured a straight bar and a room without tables and chairs giving men ample room to interact in larger groups. Men felt as though the alcohol-serving saloon was a haven from the harsh conditions of the working class world.

Alcohol accompanied almost every activity in the male recreational world. Historian Anthony Rotundo, focused on alcohol and its impact on working class, and argues that men emphasized liquor as the universal solvent of "male play". (Rotundo, 201) Once groups of men gathered and began consuming alcohol they drank to get drunk and their masculine tendencies quickly surfaced. After 1850 the adult per capita consumption of beer rose from two gallons per year to thirty. (Kingsdale, 473) Drinking large amounts of alcohol resulted in irrational decision making, disorientation, and even loss of consciousness. The New York City District Attorney Indictment Records illustrate that alcohol played a key role in assault and battery cases concerning the questions of masculinity between men. Saloons encouraged arguments, fighting, and the playing of pranks. Cliques of men gathered and created a sense of identity with their favorite saloon. Here the saloon

keeper “promoted various recreations, including dogfights, rat-baiting contests, and boxing matches, partly to sell more liquor and arrange profitable betting pools.” (Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 133) The atmosphere of saloon’s offered a place where men could let their masculine feelings overwhelm them. This led to violence which often spilled out into the street. The social underworld of New York City that was created by the abundance of drinking establishments stimulated the concept of masculinity. (Kaplan, *The World of the B’hoys*, 17) Historian Elliott Gorn argues that, “with alcohol lowering inhibitions, men affirmed their right to drink together or, alternatively, to cast aspersions that only blood could redeem.” (Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 143) At this time in New York City distilled spirits was the drink of choice for the working class because it was much cheaper than beer. Historian Michael Kaplan explains, “disturbances in taverns often revealed the day-to-day stresses generated in these communities by urban growth and disorder.” (Kaplan, *New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity*, 592)

Men saw drinking alcohol as a defining part of their life. The act of drinking and even purchasing another man a drink was significant. In one instance famed New York City butcher, Bill Poole offered James Turner a drink and he refused it. Poole took his refusal as an insult and glared at Turner and his friends until one of them exclaimed, “What are you staring at, you black muzzled son of a bitch.” Poole, already insulted from Turners refusal, gave the bartender one hundred dollars’ worth of gold as a wager and proclaimed he would “whip” any man in the room. (Gorn, *Good-Bye Boys, I Die a True American*, 389) The simple act of refusing an alcoholic drink could lead to a violent altercation between men.

It was common for men to return to their favorite saloon and drink with similar company. An incident happened on the night of September 20, 1859 when John Linder and Louis Obenhoffer began arguing with John McIntire at a saloon on Fifth Avenue. The origin of the argument is unknown but the men’s presence in a saloon during late hours of the night indicates the involvement of alcohol. The argument between the three men quickly escalated when Louis Obenhoffer cut McIntire in the back of the head with a knife while John Linder beat him with a club. McIntire was then thrown down the stairs of the saloon and onto the street. This demonstrates the territorial feeling men had with their favorite place to drink. Space was a quintessential part

of a man’s persona. Obenhoffer and Linder could have beat McIntire in the saloon and left once he was incapable of fighting back, instead they forcibly removed him. It was their space, not his and even though he had been humiliated he had to leave.

When men were not conversing in drinking establishments they could be found dancing in the numerous dance halls throughout the lower wards of the city. The majority can be found throughout the sixth and seventh wards, especially in Five Points, on the Bowery, and along the side streets near the Bowery. The dance halls of the mid-nineteenth century were located in the basements of shops during the night. These rooms were about, “twelve feet wide by thirty long...the ceiling was so low that taller customers had to duck to avoid hitting the floor joists.” (Anbinder, 197) There was barely any room for musicians to sit and play and the crowd usually forced them to stand. Dancing proved to be another way to exemplify a mans masculinity. Contests were held to see which man was the best dancer. When other men were not dancing they would be betting on which was best. Because men gambled on dance contests, dancers became symbols of victory and manhood. An ad in the Herald describes the nature of one of the more public contests, “GREAT PUBLIC CONTEST Between the two most renowned Dancers in the world, the Original JOHN DIAMOND, and the Colored Boy JUBA, for a Wager of \$300...at the BOWERY AMPHITHEATER.” (*Dancing Across the Color Line*, 4) Not all contests were so widely published; many took place in the heat of the moment when two men felt the need to control the dance floor. Historian Tyler Anbinder explains that Walt Whitman once noted that when butchers in their market stalls “have nothing else to do, they amuse themselves with a jig, or a break down...there was more muscle expended in one shuffle than in a whole evening of [dance at] a fashionable party.” (Anbinder, 173) Figure 2.2 demonstrates what these contests would have looked like, showing men watching, dancing, and gambling.



Source of Figure 2.2: “Dancing for Eels Explained.” PBS.

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/fts/washingtondc\\_201006A44.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/roadshow/fts/washingtondc_201006A44.html) (accessed December 8, 2012).

The men are in a public market, demonstrating how these events were public spectacles. In order to assert ones masculinity he had to be prepared to accept any challenges, regardless of his surroundings. Dancing was a perfect way for men to socialize, they could drink, test their masculinity, and converse with friends whether in a dance hall, street corner, or saloon. (Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis*, 220; Weber, 83)

The new masculine culture of New York City also became centered around the local theaters of the working class neighborhoods. During this time the Bowery and surrounding streets continued to develop as a center for working class social life. (Baranski, 609) A number of theaters were opened offering a wide variety of entertainment. Shakespeare, Restoration comedies, and Minstrel shows occurred nightly along the Bowery. A working class theater culture was born in these neighborhoods which simultaneously created a new rowdy definition of American nightlife.

The working class saw the entertainment in the lower wards of New York City as a chance to rival the uptown theatergoers of the social elite. In comparison to the fancy black attire worn by the middle class, patrons of Bowery theaters dressed in colorful attire of their fire company or gang. Figure 2.3 demonstrates how the working class felt about their middle class counterparts.



Source of Figure 2.3: Peter Buckley, *To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860*. (Michigan: Proquest Company, 1984), 200.

The illustration is a cartoon making fun of how the aristocracy would have looked going to a show at the theater. The “Codfish aristocracy” is wearing all black, a coat that reaches down to his knees, and a monocle which are all symbols of wealth. An image like this proves that the working class was not trying to imitate how their superiors dressed, they would make fun of them and dress how they wanted to. The significance of the working class dress is that it shows how the working class was content with their place on the class

spectrum. It represents a workers desire to be unique and separate themselves from the elite, rather than attempting to impersonate them. The Bowery area included many boardinghouses where single men and women lived leaving an abundance of people in the surrounding neighborhood searching for entertainment. The Bowery offered a sense of life and excitement for men and was an escape from the dull and harsh conditions of a workers routine. The plays being shown in these theaters seemed to progress along with the new masculine culture. (Buckley, 201-202)

Plays in the mid-nineteenth century were written with subliminal meanings for the purpose of rousing different feelings throughout the audience. Similar to how minstrel shows allowed whites to feel superior, new “American-style” plays emerged to bring awareness to the middle class about working class life; a world which unknown to them. This was Benjamin Baker’s original intention when he wrote *A Glance at New York* in 1848. Instead of educating the middle class about the jarring life of a working class New Yorker, Baker’s play gave birth to the legendary character of Mose. Baker’s character put a face to the concept of masculinity. Mose was the typical Bowery b’hoi, he dressed, talked, and acted the part. Actor, Frank Chanfrau played the part of Mose in the plays first productions. (See figure 2.4)



Source of Figure 2.4: “Bowery B’hoys.” Patell and Waterman’s *History of New York*. <http://www.ahistoryofnewyork.com/tag/bowery-bhoys/> (accessed December 7, 2012).

Upon taking center stage he exclaimed, “I ain’t a goin’ to run with dat mercheen no more,” (referring to his volunteer fire engine) the audience exploded in cheer. (Rinear, 201) The working class man instantly discovered his hero. Mose physically championed every man that challenged him and was the protector of the weak. He coined statements such as, “If I don’t have a muss soon, I’ll spile,” (Baker, 15) representing the violent lifestyle working class gang members and firemen lived. His red fireman’s jacket, tight trousers,



and shiny top hat combined with his use of typical “Bowery” slang spoken in a hefty tone meant, “the city’s young male workers had found themselves on stage.” (Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis*, 223) Although Mose was described as a New York native he signified a new definition of an urban worker. He embodied the virtues of the working class and glorified them on stage. They viewed Mose as one of their own. Stories emerged that Mose, “charged into battle against the New York gangs, he carried an uprooted lamppost in one hand and a butcher’s cleaver in the other...For sport he drank drayloads of beer at a sitting.” (Dorson, 298) *A Glance at New York* became immortalized as one of the popular plays that defined New York City and was featured in a number of different theaters. Men would go to theaters to watch working class heroes on stage at the very moment that the working class was being overwhelmed and destroyed by the immigrant population.

Working class men needed to socialize. The pressures of their lives drove them into drinking establishments, dance halls, and theaters. These retreats from the harsh realities of New York City provided men with a home away from home. Gangs and fire companies formed amongst men with similar interests. “Mose” could be found drinking and dancing on every street in the working class neighborhoods surrounding the Bowery and Five Points. The working class had separated themselves from the rest of the city and played by their own boisterous rules and only the coppers got in their way.

### Part III - Volunteer Firemen

A volunteer fireman was one of the most masculine figures in working class society. The historian, Amy Greenberg explains that, “Volunteer fire companies offered a chance for real heroics, rough masculine camaraderie and colorful display.” (A. Greenberg, 66) Men would pride themselves on their bravery and willingness to fight fires throughout New York City. In the mid-nineteenth century most of the city buildings stood close together and were constructed with wood. A fire was the most destructive thing that could happen and was feared by all, especially members of the working class. If they lost their homes they would be cast out into the streets with almost no hope of getting back on their feet. Without firemen, the working class would not have been able to survive, therefore, firemen were champions of the people. Men would join volunteer fire companies to feel the

camaraderie between members and to serve their communities. Volunteer fire companies would act as gangs, often getting violent with other rival companies resulting in firemen living the epitome of a masculine lifestyle.

In 1842, New York City recognized fifty engine companies, thirty-eight hose companies, three hydrant companies, and ten hook and ladder companies located throughout the city. (Costello, 106) By 1854 there were over 4,000 official volunteer firemen and thousands more “runners” unofficially associated with the numerous companies. Historian Richard Stott argues that, “the fire companies reflected the youthful energy of city workers.” (Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis*, 230) The fire company was the closest thing to a fraternity amongst the mid-nineteenth century working class. It provided men with a cohesive social network where individuals formed bonds with deep feelings of brotherhood. Once men were strong enough to work the pumps and brave enough to run into burning buildings they were expected to join their local company. Benjamin Baker’s Mose from *A Glance At New York* is the perfect description of how firemen looked and acted. A fireman wore the traditional red flannel shirt with the number of his engine company embroidered on his chest, tight black pants, and calfskin boots with high heels. (Harlow, 196) Men were always in uniform because at any moment the fire alarm could sound. It was important for firemen to represent ones fire company with pride and always act with a masculine attitude.

The volunteer fire companies promoted masculinity within men. Amy Greenberg writes, “the volunteer fire department was a mediating figure between sometimes contradictory forces at work...it reconciled the physical virtues with moral powers, and it offered a vision of the mass as a harmonious concert of individuals.” (A. Greenberg, 15) It gave men something to do, and helped give order to a violent society. Historian Alvin Harlow explains a story about a volunteer firemen, “It has even been told that a volunteer fireman standing before the altar to be married, dropped his loved one’s hand at the climax of the ceremony and dashed from the church as the ominous tolling of the alarm bell sounded across the city.” (Harlow, 109) This story verifies that men took their jobs seriously, no matter what was happening if the fire bell rang, they would be ready. Fire companies would often interact with their neighborhoods. A newspaper article from the *Evening Post* on March 11, 1835, advertises a Firemen’s Ball for the community, an opportunity for the

neighborhood to congregate and socialize together. (Firemen's Ball) All of the proceeds from the ball went to the Fire Department Fund, a fundraiser for the widows and orphans of deceased firemen. These actions brought men into close ties with the community and instilled a sense of honor amongst members of the working class. Neighborhoods honored firemen by having parades to display the strength of their heroes. (A. Greenberg, 53) Being a fireman was demanding but extremely rewarding for working class men.

Typically when working class men got together they would generate a competitive atmosphere. Rivalries emerged and fire companies would stage public contests to prove which company had stronger men. These tests of masculinity would include trying to pump water farther or higher than the competition or racing to the fire. (A. Greenberg, 65) When the alarm would ring every volunteer fireman that heard it would be rushing to their engine in hopes to get the glory of putting out the fire. Sometimes fire companies would ring the alarm on purpose solely to cause a race for the neighborhood to see and to bolster the reputation of the winning engine. It was very common for different companies to fight forming massive riots. Companies would establish "turf" and crowds of people would come out and support their favorite company by cheering them on. (Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis*, 231) An article from the *Commercial Advertiser* describes a fireman's fight September 12, 1843. Around two o'clock in the morning two fire companies got into a brawl, "several of them were nearly killed, and two or three watchmen were severely beaten." (Firemen's Fight) Historian Amy Greenberg argues, "urban firefighters posed a serious threat to public order and that firemen stood outside the law, answerable to no power greater than their own." (Firemen's Fight) Masculine feelings dominated the lives of firemen as they did not have any regard for anything other than themselves. A similar report of a fireman's fight from the *Evening Post* on January 31, 1844, explains that the firemen "behaved more like tigers than human beings." (Another Firemen's fight)

Sometimes fights between companies would occur immediately after they worked together to extinguish a fire. Men knew enough to carry out their duties as a firemen but once they were no longer needed, they were ready to fight. An article in the *Commercial Advertiser* reports that firemen threw down their brick-bats and wielded the handles of the engine and branch pipe and began to fight. The men did not

even stop the engine from pumping water before they fought, "water was squirted with most terrific fierceness." (Firemen's Fight) Firemen fought to preserve their own personal masculinity and to defend the masculine reputation of their company. One of the worst reports of firemen's fights occurred on August 16, 1857. One fire company saw their bitter rival's engine sitting at a halt on the street corner and began to push their engine as fast as they could in order to ram their enemy. Before they could reach the rival engine their enemies charged and a huge brawl happened. The men fought with pipes, bricks, stones, and guns. One man even took another in a headlock and proceeded to bite the front of his nose off. This was done to disfigure him and undermine his masculinity (Discussed in Part I). The fight was only to be broken up by an entire posse of policemen. (Firemen's Fight Last Night) Violence was an essential part of masculinity. Firemen emulated themselves after heroes like Mose, therefore, it was necessary for them to brutally fight each other in order to prove their strength.

Firemen were believed to be the strongest and bravest members of working class. In order to become the strongest, they had to prove themselves. Their masculinity was tested in nearly every part of their lives; having a manly appearance, fighting fires, and brawling with rival companies. As heroes of society firemen had a certain standard that they had to live by which included being available whenever the fire bell rang. The camaraderie associated with the fire department was something that could not be found elsewhere. They worked together to save the city, singing songs together as they battled back the flames that threatened their beloved neighborhoods. (Harlow, 203)

#### Part IV - Defending Masculinity

For the American man living during the nineteenth century, testing and proving one's manhood became a very significant experience. A new "manly culture" was born in New York City that ritualized violence amongst men. The perception that the only courageous way to settle a question of masculinity was through the physical risks associated with fighting. Men fought by whatever means necessary to protect their manhood. The obsession with masculinity through the working class of the city prompted men to violently assault each other in order to maintain their reputations.

During the nineteenth century two distinct forms of self defense dominated the world of combat. One method of fighting was the test of sheer strength and



skill with ones fists in either a street fight or through the modern art of boxing. (Austin, 447-452; *The Punching Bags of Pugilism*) The other method was engaging in battle using a weapon such as a knife or club. Both styles of fighting were viable and accepted under the condition that both parties had an equal opportunity. Part of the definition of masculinity required that men fight fairly in an established trail of courage. (Kim, 43; Barton-Wright, 1-5) Though in the nineteenth century the reasons for fighting had changed, "the ethic of honor had roots in the Old World, but it continued to thrive where individuals were concerned less with morality or piety, more with flaunting their status among peers through acts of masculine prowess." (Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 143) There will always be the element of honor behind the defense of manhood - but by this period the younger American generation decreased the worth of honor. (Haag, 447) Men's rank in society was based upon arrogance and appearance rather than the underlying honor that should be the foundation. This, in turn, led to the transformation of street fighting into the sport of boxing.

By the mid-nineteenth century fencing had disappeared in New York City and unprovoked attacks with fists ruled the realm of combat. Bare-knuckle fighting was a transitional phenomenon between the fighting styles of old and the new modern styles. Men began to take boxing lessons that allowed him to, "support his dignity, repel insult, resist attack, and defend his rights from aggression." (Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 53) As men trained, the practice of prize fighting emerged on the scene as a form of entertainment as well as a method of defending masculinity. (Monkkonen, 544-552)

The effective defense of masculinity through the use of ones fists can be seen in the case *The People v. Patrick Tannan*, January 23, 1860. On the afternoon of December 2, 1860, Patrick Honeyman entered a liquor store on the corner of Twenty-Eighth Street and First Avenue. While paying the store clerk, a fellow patron in the store Patrick Tannan, exclaimed that Honeyman was using "queer money." Honeyman denied this accusation which provoked an argument between the two men. After an exchange of words, Tannan struck Honeyman with his fists in attempt to force him out of the store. Feeling as though he was unable to contest with Tannan (a much larger man) Honeyman drew his knife. The crowd of people recognized the weapon as an unfair advantage and separated the men. This clearly shows how the concept of honoring a fair fight was universal.

After the incident was broken up by other patrons of the store, the two men parted. Upon reliving the incident the following day, Honeyman came to the understanding that his masculinity had be disgraced and decided to go to Tannan's house and challenge him to a fight. This represents how important the concept of manhood was to a nineteenth century man. A whole day later Patrick Honeyman had concluded that it was his responsibility to defend his reputation even though Patrick Tannan, the larger man, would surely win the fight. Once Honeyman arrived at the house of Tannan the two men agreed to fight in a vacant lot on the corner of Twenty-Eighth Street and First Avenue, located four blocks from Tannan's residence. The men showed composure on the walk to the lot which symbolized their mutual respect for one other. Upon arriving at the lot the men removed their shirts to signify an official fight. As predicted the stronger man, Tannan, took command of the fight. After each round Honeyman was given the opportunity to forfeit but did not in order to demonstrate his courage. This proves how ritualized fighting had become. Even in a street fight both parties agreed to specific rounds with a given time. They would then stop and take a break before continuing. Even the crowd watching the fight expected there to be rounds. The brawl continued and ended once Honeyman could no longer stand. He was beaten so badly that he died before the following day. (*The People vs. Patrick Tannan*) This situation epitomizes masculinity. At the store, Patrick Tannan originally believed that Honeyman was acting in a dishonorable way and brought it to attention. Feeling threatened Honeyman wielded his knife in self-defense. Reflecting on Tannan's and his own actions he understood he had no choice but to defend his manhood. Even though defeat was imminent, Honeyman fought and died like a man. Every part of this altercation was honorable. The death of Patrick Honeyman proves how important the concept of manhood and reputation was to an honorable man. The new style of fighting was efficient and a suitable test for ones' manhood.

When examining cases from the New York City District Attorney from 1860 there are other cases involving the assault of one man from another man's fists. In the separate cases of *The People vs. Edward Long* (1860) and *The People vs. William Cotten* (1860), both men punched their opponents in the face. (*The People vs. Edward Long*) By landing such a blow there is a likely chance of inflicting a contusion. If bruised, the recipient of the punch would have to live with a swollen

face for days, a constant reminder to himself and his peers of his inability to defend himself.

The weapons used by men in these trials of masculinity were almost always small pocket knives or tools that were readily available such as an ax, hammer or club. The men who fought were predominantly members of the working class that typically wielded weapons related to their profession. For example, butchers fought with knives and cleavers while carpenters fought with hammers and axes. Historian Eric Monkkonen explains, "sharp tools were essential to running all households," signifying that men had constant access to weaponry. (Monkkonen, 29) Small pocket knives were sold throughout the city to be used for whittling wood or eating oysters. Knives prevailed as the primary weapon because of how easily they could be concealed. One could quickly hide his knife if police officers were approaching. An examination of an altercation that led to the fatal stabbing of Timothy Mulcahy at a liquor store provides a better understanding of the use of knives.

On November 24, 1859 Timothy Mulcahy and Henry Laughran were having a drink together at Campbell's liquor store on Tenth Avenue. The two men started to argue and Mulcahy tackled Laughran to the floor. The barkeeper at the liquor store, John Gleeson, stated that once he saw the men fighting on the floor, worried about them breaking his liquor bottles, he ran around the bar to stop the fight. In this amount of time Henry Laughran was able to take out his knife and stab Mulcahy in the abdomen without anyone knowing. After pulling the body of Mulcahy off Laughran a store patron exclaimed "he's been stabbed." A New York Times article explains, "the prisoner [Laughran] then turned over so that his face was down upon the floor; somebody said [the] deceased was stabbed; prisoner had his hands between his knees trying to conceal something." (Law Reports, New York Times) Although Laughran was caught with the knife, his tactic of swiftly stabbing and then concealing a knife was common.

Through understanding the way in which men fought, there is a clear reasoning of why they fought. If a man felt his masculinity was being questioned, it was his responsibility to defend it. The emerging American culture embraced trials of combat, further encouraging violence between men. As methods of fighting evolved it changed the way in which men defined masculinity.

#### Part V—Authority and its Impact on Masculinity

In 1845, the modern New York City Police

Department was established. The force served the city with one night watch, one hundred marshals, thirty one constables, and fifty one municipal officers. (Lankevich, 84) The increase of the city's population during the mid-nineteenth century required an increase of officers patrolling the streets. Working class men saw the growing police presence as an invasion into their world dominated by masculinity. These new Police officers infiltrated working class neighborhoods. They were charged with destroying the violent atmosphere which surrounded the lower wards of the city. For a working class man, these authority figures represented a threat to their masculinity. A deep hatred came forth towards any type of police officer. Throughout neighborhoods near the Bowery and Five Points, men routinely attacked officers with hopes to reclaim their manhood. Violent attacks against police officers undermined their authority which threatened officer's sense of manhood, forcing them to defend themselves. (Johnson, 20) Once attacks against police increased, officers felt the need to demonstrate their own masculinity by exercising and often abusing their authority. The strife between the working class and the police added another layer of violence that enhanced an already violent society.

By 1845, there were only 800 officers patrolling the streets and through the next decade the number of police would only increase to about 1,200 men. With eighty percent of the city's population living south of 14th Street, the police force was spread too thin. In working class neighborhoods there were too few officers to fight crime efficiently. There were no professional standards for recruitment, training, or performance. (Richardson, 51-54) During the mid-nineteenth century Policemen were required to live in the wards in which they served. Working class men saw an infiltration of their world by men who used to be their peers, but now personified middle class morals. Policemen used their newfound sense of authority and tried to radically change the streets by cracking down on intoxication and gang fights. This was a change that working class men were not willing to accept. To make matters worse policemen continued to act as though they still belonged to the working class while they tried to reform the very streets that had previously defined them. Historian James Richardson explains, "Policemen on duty smoked cigars, spat tobacco juice in all directions, and kept their hands in their pockets." (Richardson, 95) Rather than protecting the streets, citizens felt that officers were standing around doing nothing, only using their authority to harass the working class. By chewing tobacco and

smoking cigars they continued to act as if they belonged in working class society. This angered men because police officers were seen as a product of the middle class elite and banished from working class society. While policemen continued to act as if they were part of the working man's world, tensions were elevated between workers and authority figures.

Working class men were determined to fight back against the concept of authority. Street fights between men and police became common. Richardson asserts, the working class saw the police force as "an alien force imposed upon the city by a 'hayseed' legislature in Albany." (Richardson, 110) They viewed the police as another attempt for the middle class to control the only thing the working class had left; their social world. As the police attempted to stop street violence and public intoxication, men responded with force in hopes of warding police officers away through physical intimidation. Attacks against the police were prominent in areas with high crime rates such as the Bowery, Five Points, and near the lower east side docks. These attacks were often brutal and sometimes resulted in death. One such incident occurred on July 14, 1851, early in the morning on Oliver Street. While on patrol, Officer Gillespie observed a group of men disturbing the peace. Intending to restore order, he approached the crowd. Gillespie engaged the crowd, when two men identified as Thomas Brown and John Brown attacked him. Using a cart-rung, one of the men landed a forceful blow to the officer's head. Six hours later Gillespie was pronounced dead in the city hospital. There is no account of an argument or altercation between the Gillespie and the group of men. When the crowd saw an officer approaching, they would rather beat him instead of being told to disperse. Underlying feelings of hatred towards law enforcement is apparent in cases where officers are immediately attacked. On top of the two men who contributed to the beating, six others were arrested for being present. (Death of a Police Officer)

Group violence towards police was very common. The combination of the rowdy nature of working class gangs with the need for men to prove themselves to their peers resulted in numerous cases of gang violence towards authority figures. It was common for working class people to enter the streets to protest the harsh working conditions of businesses or the actions of local government. Police officers would be summoned to restore order to the neighborhood which often promoted violent actions from the strikers. Feeling

their masculinity being questioned, working class men would start to riot. One such riot occurred on July 21, 1857, discussed in an article in The New York Herald, titled "The Seventeenth Ward Riots." Police were needed to separate a large crowd gathered on the sidewalk in the Seventeenth Ward. Officers gave orders to disperse which only fueled the angry crowd. Young men shouted "hurrah" in the face of officers to assert their masculinity. Witnesses observed men standing on roofs. The officers were surrounded from all sides. Feeling threatened, police officers attempted to restore order by firing a few shots from their colt revolvers in hopes of dispersing the crowd. Tensions were so high that the warning shots had no effect. Men threw rocks at officers forcing them to retaliate with even more shots. Reinforcements were needed and the riot was stopped once a large group of officers used their clubs and pistols to scatter the crowd. Small riots similar to the Seventeenth Ward Riot were common during the mid-nineteenth century. Once authorities tried to disperse crowds of working class men they would stop their protest and focus on harassing officers. (The Seventeenth Ward Riot)

By 1850, Police officers were becoming targets for violence. This violence against officers was so prevalent that by the early 1850s policemen strenuously opposed the introduction of a uniform. During this time, uniforms were only worn by servants. Officers wanted to retain their self-respect and blend into society. Figure 5.1 illustrates these flamboyant early uniforms. Blue uniforms stood out and brought much unwanted attention to a lone police officer with limited back up. The appearance of uniforms can be compared to the proper dress of the middle class which would further promote attacks against officers. Policemen would dress in mufti with hopes of staying out of sight from rowdy groups of working class men. At first policemen were only issued clubs but many took to carrying their own revolvers for increased protection. Officers hoped that pistols would act as a deterrent for the outright beating of police officers and by 1857; they were authorized to carry them. (Richardson, 113)

An example of gang violence against the police and one that illustrates the importance of the pistol can be seen in the beating of Officer John McArthur on December 22, 1859. On that day, Michael Daly, James Coulo, James Fletcher, James Cassidy, and John Burns attacked officer McArthur on Broad Street during the late hours of the night. As the five men approached McArthur, Mike Daly outstretched his hand in order to



greet him. Instead of shaking his hand Daly pushed McArthur's hand away and the remaining four men surrounded him. This action can be seen as Daly trying to make a mockery of the police officer's role in the community. At first Daly extended a hand symbolizing respect for authority, only to trick the officer to put emphasis on how hated the police were. Daly proceeded to knock McArthur down. McArthur, believing they could not recognize his uniform in the dark, shouted, "I am an officer!" McArthur chose to identify his position of authority as a representation of his masculinity. In response, the men laughed and one man said, "An officer hey? You son of a bitch!" At this point someone struck McArthur in the back of the head while others repeatedly kicked his body. Not until McArthur jumped up and unholstered his pistol did the gang disperse. (The People vs. Mike Daly) This was an outright crime against a figure of authority. The only explanation for the actions of the five men is by challenging the officer's masculinity they were reinforcing their own manhood.

These violent altercations between New York City Police Officers and working class men changed the way officers viewed society. Social class was the primary reason for their problems. The negative relationship between the two groups increased violence on the city streets. Policemen were cast out of the working class society due to their enforcement of middle class ideals and appearance. While banished from working class society, officers were unable to move up to the middle class, only earning \$600 a year in 1850. (Richardson, 66) With no social mobility and continued abuse from citizens, police officers developed a sense of animosity towards working class men.

Policemen saw the young working class men as threats to their safety and realized they needed to act. Primarily wielding clubs, police officers were soon abusing their authority and unjustly beating any suspects they encountered. Historian Marilyn Johnson explains, "Revolutionary traditions of antiauthoritarianism and individual liberty had made Americans less responsive to police authority to begin with...As citizens flagrantly defied police authority, officers attempted to command respect through the use of coercion or force." (Johnson, 15) As officers felt they were being denied the respect they deserved, they used their position of power as an excuse to take it. By violently beating a rebellious man officers asserted their own type of masculinity.

To add to the notion of police brutality, officers

felt that the judicial and penitentiary systems were flawed during the mid-nineteenth century. The number of magistrates had not been changed since 1845, and by the mid-1850s New York City had seen enormous population growth. (Richardson, 74) Criminal courts were overburdened. Officers believed the justice system was ill suited to handle certain criminals and executed their own style of justice which came at the end of their club. Policemen took punishment into their own hands and arbitrarily doled out "curbside justice." Historian Eric Monkkenen argues, "given the arrested felon's likelihood of acquittal, one can see why Police officers justify violence during an arrest as a substitute for the punishment an offender may not receive." (Monkkenen, 166) Although morally questionable, the corruption of police is understandable because as men, they had a need to protect their masculinity which was being challenged by the violent actions of the working class.

An examination of the trial of officers John Hurley and William Foster provides further understanding of this concept. On April 30, 1859 officers Hurley and Foster entered the store of George Ely on Sixth Avenue. The officers stated that they were checking Ely's paperwork to make sure he had paid his fees to the city. Ely states that the officers were acting very harsh and upon satisfying them by presenting his documents he nicely asked them to leave. Taking this as an insult to their authority, the officers walked to the rear of the store and took fifteen dollars from his money drawer for their "troubles." In a fit of rage, Ely put his hands on Officer Foster and tried to stop him. The officers responded with force. Although the shop owner had no intentions of beating the officers, the underlying feelings of animosity within the officers surfaced and they responded with aggression. Ely was thrown violently out of his store and onto the curb and was later placed under arrest. After Ely asked to be allowed to walk on his own free will and explained he would give them his full cooperation, the officers denied his request and dragged him through the street. As the officers brought him to the magistrate, Officer Foster struck him violently three times in the face drawing blood from his lip and eye. (The People vs. John Hurley and William Foster) Ultimately the two officers were brought to justice for their actions but many incidents of police brutality went unnoticed. The events which took place throughout this altercation displays the attitude police officers had towards working class citizens of the city. The use of the club can be seen as a reminder of a policeman's authority and masculinity.

The introduction of a police force encouraged men to display their masculinity in many violent ways. Men had their own views about how their neighborhood should be run. They settled disputes in their own ways and felt entitled to treat the streets as their playground. It became common for men to challenge police officers in order to assert their own masculinity. Attacks against police were carried out in order to defend the unwritten rules of working class neighborhoods. Policemen felt that once their authority was questioned, their masculinity was being undermined. Efforts by officers to reclaim their masculinity combined with the flawed justice system created an aggressive attitude carried amongst police. They asserted their authority and protected themselves with police brutality. The class separation between the working class and police officers ultimately led to increased violence in the streets. Masculinity was the driving force behind malicious attacks against officer and the brutal use of clubs by the police against suspected criminals. The end result was a cycle of violence between men which led to death on both sides of the class spectrum.

As the nineteenth century progressed the American man revolutionized the concept of masculinity. The new definition created an unwritten code for men to live by. The value of reputation had reached an all-time high. In order to be considered a man one would have to prove themselves to the community in which they lived. The unique social qualities of New York City created a manly culture that impacted men throughout the city. Men had to drink and dance with their peers, while modeling themselves after working class heroes such as Mose. The types of clothes men wore and the way they acted dominated the physical aspects of their reputations. If a man wanted to feel a sense of brotherhood with his neighbors he would be compelled to join a volunteer fire company. Firemen's masculinity was challenged as they battled fires and brawled with rival companies to determine which engine had the toughest members. An abundance of weapons coupled with new methods of combat promoted violence amongst men. By the mid-nineteenth century the new presence of authority figures created a new layer of violence to an already violent society. The meaning of honor had transformed and men had become self-absorbed with the masculine traditions of the working class.

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