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Timothy J. Gilfoyle

Loyola University Chicago, tgilfoy@luc.edu

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THE URBAN GEOGRAPHY OF COMMERCIAL SEX Prostitution in New York City, 1790-1860

TIMOTHY J. GILFOYLE
Empire State College

To many nineteenth-century Americans, New York City was the sexual opprobrium of the nation. Prostitution, Dr. William Sanger despondently observed in 1858, “boldly strides through our most thronged and elegant thoroughfares. . . . It is in your squares and in your suburban retreats and summer resorts; it is in your theatres, your opera, your hotels, . . . slowly but steadily extending the poison.”¹ Sanger’s avid indictment was hardly unprecedented. In the 1830s, the lawyer George Templeton Strong complained that the city’s prostitutes were so numerous and visible that New York was infested with a “whorearchy.”² These observers were simply commenting upon a tradition of commercialized carnality that distinguished Manhattan as early as the seventeenth century and that remained strong into the 1880s. From its earliest days when prostitutes were found promenading along the Battery to the recent closing of Plato’s Retreat on charges of prostitution and “unsafe sex,” Gotham has always been considered the most sinful of America’s large cities.

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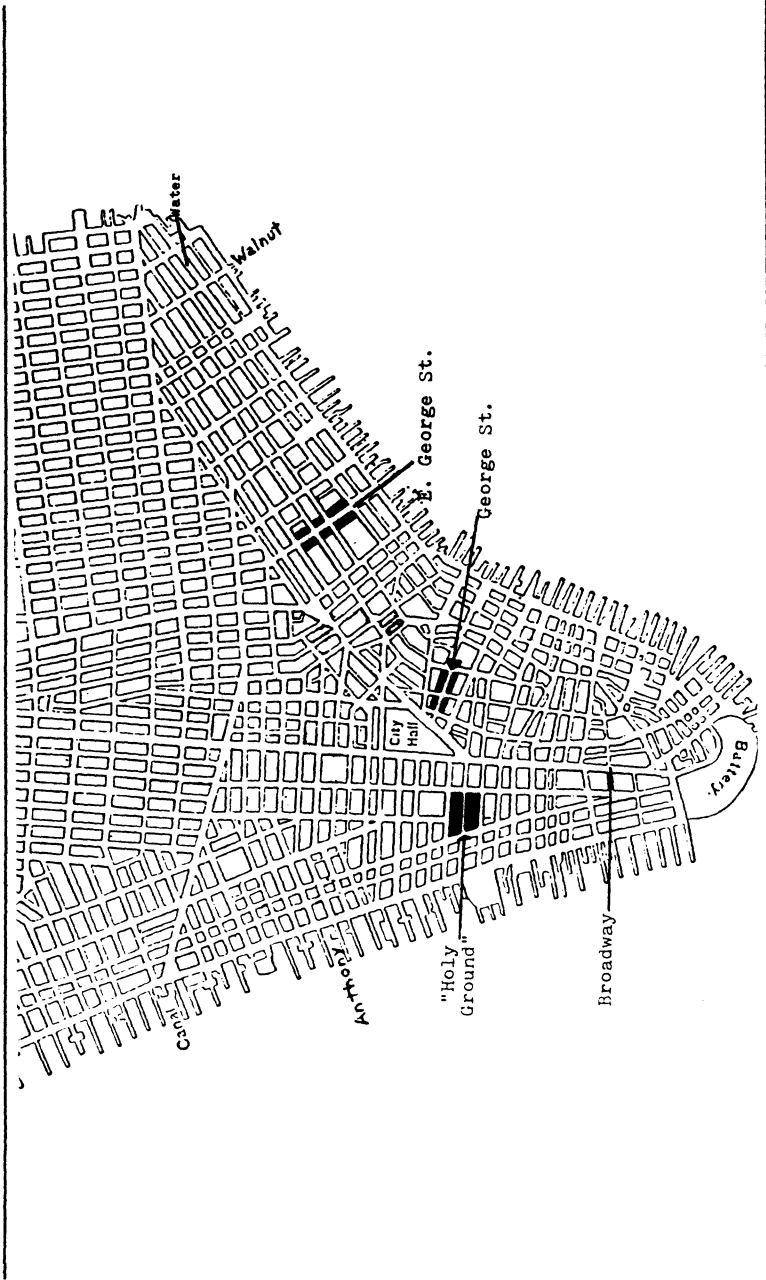
Despite the preoccupation (some might say obsession) with nineteenth-century vice by clerics, reformers, and police officials and the more recent analyses of social historians, the geographical evolution of prostitution in New York has never been the subject of sustained inquiry. Where exactly did the nineteenth-century male go in search of such illicit sex? Did the city systematically segregate the sex trade from the presumably more legitimate forms of pecuniary gain? How and why did red-light districts move? Most scholars have examined prostitution sociologically and usually in the period following the Civil War.³ Antebellum investigations have concentrated on antiprostitution reform movements and the rise of prostitution in conjunction with the changing labor market in New York. Only a few accounts explain prostitution in terms of its spatial development and its role in neighborhood formation.⁴ This essay attempts to define and explain why the specific physical and spatial pattern of prostitution—its moral geography—changed and evolved in New York's most significant period of growth, from 1790 to 1860.

Geographically, prostitution in New York passed through three distinct phases in this period.⁵ From 1790 to 1820, commercial sex was confined to three specific areas. Then from 1820 to 1850, prostitution "suburbanized," spreading throughout most neighborhoods in the city, while several new zones of concentration appeared with substantial amounts of prostitution. Although these concentrated areas of vice were significant, the combination of segregation and dispersal was unique. Finally, between 1850 and 1920, prostitution was once again segregated in specific parts of the city. This physical pattern was unusual because, unlike most other urban activities, prostitution was more segregated from 1790 to 1820 than in the early industrial city thereafter.⁶ Instead of being confined to poor, undesirable parts of the city, some prostitutes followed the middle class and the wealthy in their movement uptown, lived in "respectable" neighborhoods, and were attached to institutions such as the hotel and theater that serviced the growing middle class.

Colonial New York was preeminently a seaport, and prostitution flourished in the streets and taverns close to the docks. New

York, remarked John Watt in the 1760s, was “the worst School for Youth of any of his Majesty’s Dominions, Ignorance, Vanity, Dress, and Dissipation, being the reigning Characteristics of their insipid Lives.”⁷ For much of the eighteenth century, “courtesans” promenaded along the Battery after nightfall. On the eve of the Revolution, over 500 “ladies of pleasure [kept] lodgings contiguous within the consecrated liberties of St. Paul’s [Chapel].” A few blocks north, at the entrance to King’s College (later Columbia University), Robert M’Robert claimed that dozens of prostitutes provided “a temptation to the youth that have occasion to pass so often that way.” The often-quoted traveller Hector St. John de Crevecoeur repeated similar concerns when he saw the “dissipations and pleasures” near the College. After Isaac Bangs visited the area in 1776, he “thought nothing could exceed (the prostitutes) for impudence and immodesty.” The more he became acquainted with them, he concluded, “the more they excelled in their Brutality.” A final haunt was at the foot of Broad Street in the temporary houses replacing those destroyed in the fire of 1776. Nicknamed “Canvass-town” and “Topsail Town” after the material used as roofs, the buildings “afforded cheap and convenient lodgings for the frail sisterhood, who plied their trade most briskly in the vicinity of the shipping and the barracks.”⁸

By the turn of the nineteenth century, prostitution in New York was concentrated along specific streets (Map 1). The Frenchman Moreau de St. Mery derogatorily remarked in 1794 that “whole sections of the streets are given over to streetwalkers for the plying of their profession.” Women “of every color can be found in the streets, particularly after ten o’clock at night, soliciting men and proudly flaunting their licentiousness in the most shameless manner.” After 1800, residents and early neighborhood associations deplored the proliferating houses of ill-fame on East George Street, as well as “certain houses in George and Charlotte Streets frequented at unreasonable hours by idle Negroes and other dissolute persons.” The district attorney verified that prostitution was increasingly found on certain streets. Between 1790 and 1809, New York’s chief prosecutor indicted 195 establishments for prostitution, two-thirds (sixty-five percent) of them near the East



Map 1: Major Areas of Prostitution, 1790-1819

River docks (hereafter East Dock), and an astonishing twenty-six percent located on East George and George streets.⁹

Another district of deviance was the irreligious "Holy Ground" behind St. Paul's Chapel. In the two blocks along Church, Vessey, and Barclay streets, the city's most expensive "houses of debauchery" prospered on land owned by the Episcopal Church and adjacent to Columbia College. More than a score of residents complained to the Common Council in 1802 about the "idle and disorderly loose women" on Barclay Street who behaved "in such a manner as [was] too indecent to relate." As the city's northernmost passage between the East and Hudson rivers, Barclay Street was "a thoroughfare of considerable import for sailors and people of that class from the ship yards and who frequently . . . behave with great incivillity [sic]."¹⁰

Prior to 1820, then, prostitution was confined and well-ordered. Vice in preindustrial New York was concentrated in three specific, delineated areas. Two were in the heart of the growing metropolis and the other on its outermost fringe.¹¹ George Street was in a north-central location, just off the City Common (later City Hall Park), two short blocks from the Park Theatre and four blocks from the East River wharves. Nearby, the exclusive prostitution in the "Holy Ground" was only a block from the Hudson River. In contrast to these centrally located districts, East George Street was on the outer, northeast fringe of the city in the midst of a neighborhood devoted to the shipping, dock, and marine industries. An 1812 report on immorality acknowledged that "droves of youth" indeed resorted to the outskirts of the city to commit their depredations.¹²

Compared with its later evolution, prostitution was an orderly, controlled urban enterprise, restricted to a few blocks, and physically linked to the city's waterfront commerce. In this segregated, concentrated world of illicit sexuality, prostitution was a private, isolated affair. Little streetwalking occurred outside the informal, spatially defined areas of prostitution. For the most part, the visible activities and solicitation of prostitutes and their clients took place inside the brothel and saloon, or on a small, remote street away from the glaring public eye. Spatially,

commercial sex was autonomous, secluded, and limited to fringe areas of the city. In such an environment, prostitutes did not compete with their neighbors for urban turf.

After 1820, prostitution moved from the waterfront to the residential neighborhood. The expansion of vice produced a spatial revolution as these entrepreneurs of sex moved into previously untouched and unavailable neighborhoods. A new sexual tableau emerged as the geography of prostitution broke its earlier physical confines and followed a vigorous citywide growth that paralleled the expansion of New York's built-up area. For the first time, prostitutes competed with ordinary residents for the use and control of certain streets and public areas. As various forms of urban space—houses, streets, parks—were suddenly in short supply, people had to compete for them. The Committee for Suppressing Immorality complained in 1812 that “the vast number of Brothels, and houses of Seduction now kept in the City [were] alarming.” By midcentury, a consensus of observers despairingly admitted that the “most unlicensed debauch is witnessed in every hold and corner of the city—in the great thoroughfares, in the public institutions of the metropolis—even in the temple dedicated to Almighty God.”¹³ Its unprecedented proliferation made prostitution an integrated public activity, dramatically altering the social fabric of Gotham.

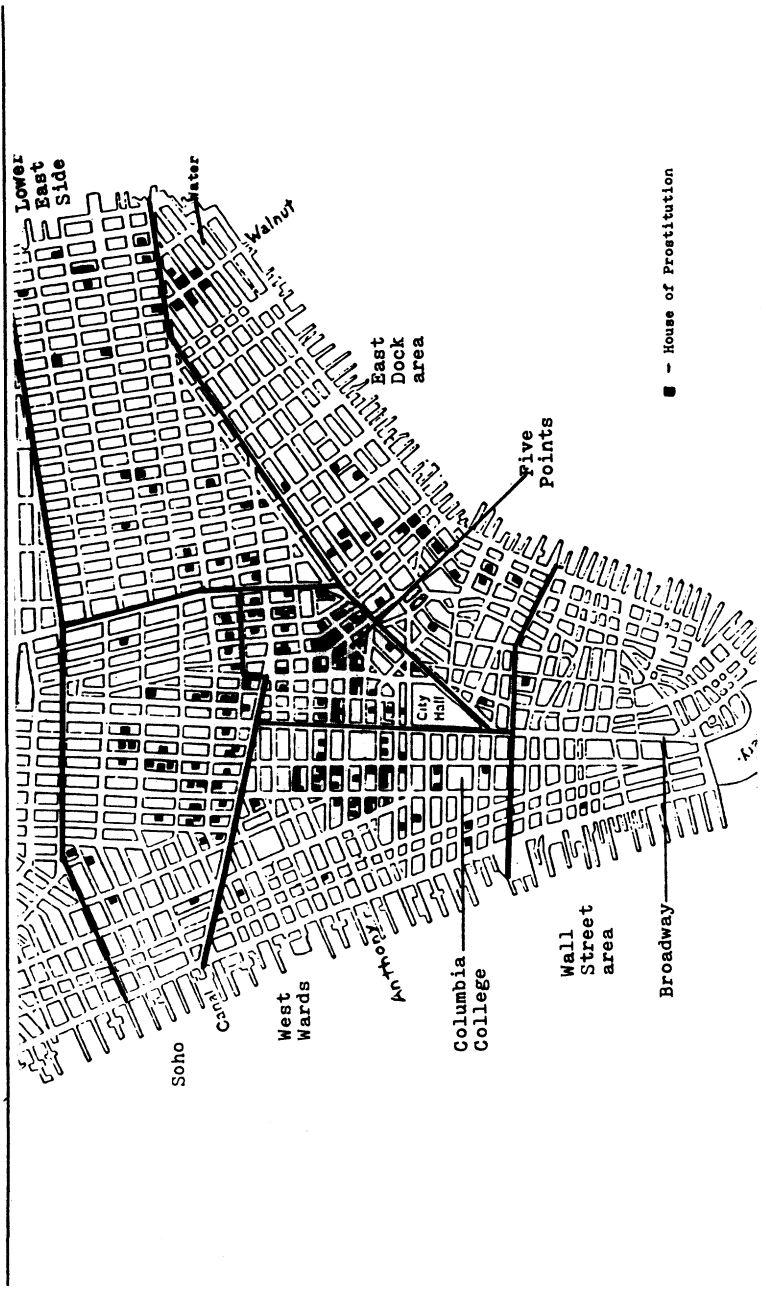
Areas of the city previously unaffected were suddenly confronted with the ubiquitous and sleazy vitality of prostitution. The conspicuous growth of commercial sex was so spasmodic and threatening to the emerging middle-class “cult of domesticity” that many residents clamored for government intervention. Gotham's physical expansion simply did not match its population growth. “The public show of extravagance, audacity, and licentiousness of the women of the town, demands the corrective interposition of the magistrates,” insisted one newspaper in 1820. Citizens were so “scandalized and public opinion [so] outraged,” that police officers for the first time were ordered to report all prostitutes found on Broadway and the city's other major arteries.¹⁴ For the next century, the competition between practitioners of deviant sexuality and their opponents was a landmark

of urban life. As New York grew, so did commercialized sex.

The prodigious physical dispersal of prostitution after 1820 can be illustrated several ways. First, "bawdy houses" were found in all of the city's major neighborhoods. In the 1820s, prostitutes were living at the northern edge of the city on 13th Street, and two decades later on West 20th and 21st streets.¹⁵ At the opposite end of the city, streetwalking on the Battery, the oldest and southernmost portion of Manhattan, continued (Map 2).¹⁶ By the 1820s, the East Dock area, Five Points, and West Wards each had from twenty-six percent to thirty percent of the city's prostitution (Table 1). Five Points contained the most brothels, but its concentration of vice was unimpressive compared with the East Dock area from 1790 to 1820, or Soho after 1850. The only known underground guidebook from the period, *Prostitution Exposed, or a Moral Reform Directory*, detailed the spread of prostitution throughout Manhattan. Authored by the pseudonymous pornographer "Butt Ender" in 1839, *Prostitution Exposed* revealed that Five Points, the West Wards, and the Lower East Side, respectively, contained thirty-one percent, twenty-five percent, and twenty percent of the city's best-known and most alluring brothels.¹⁷ No single area enjoyed a monopoly on the expensive and well-frequented habitats of sex.

Block-by-block persistence of the "social evil" was a third example of prostitution's dispersal. Blocks with documented houses of prostitution in at least three of the four decades from 1820 to 1860 were in Soho, the West Wards, Five Points, Corlears Hook, and Water Street (Map 3). Prostitutes did not confine themselves to a few specific areas and move when neighborhood opposition grew too intense, but persisted and anchored themselves in most city neighborhoods. Finally, houses of prostitution followed a citywide pattern of decreasing physical density during the antebellum period.

A comparison of the total number of city blocks with blocks having prostitution in the three decades from 1820 to 1849 reveals that the ratio of addresses to blocks declined from 2.28-1 in the 1820s to 1.95-1 in the 1830s. Although the ratio increased to 2.20-1 by midcentury, it remained below the level of the 1820s



Map 2. Houses of Prostitution, 1830-1839

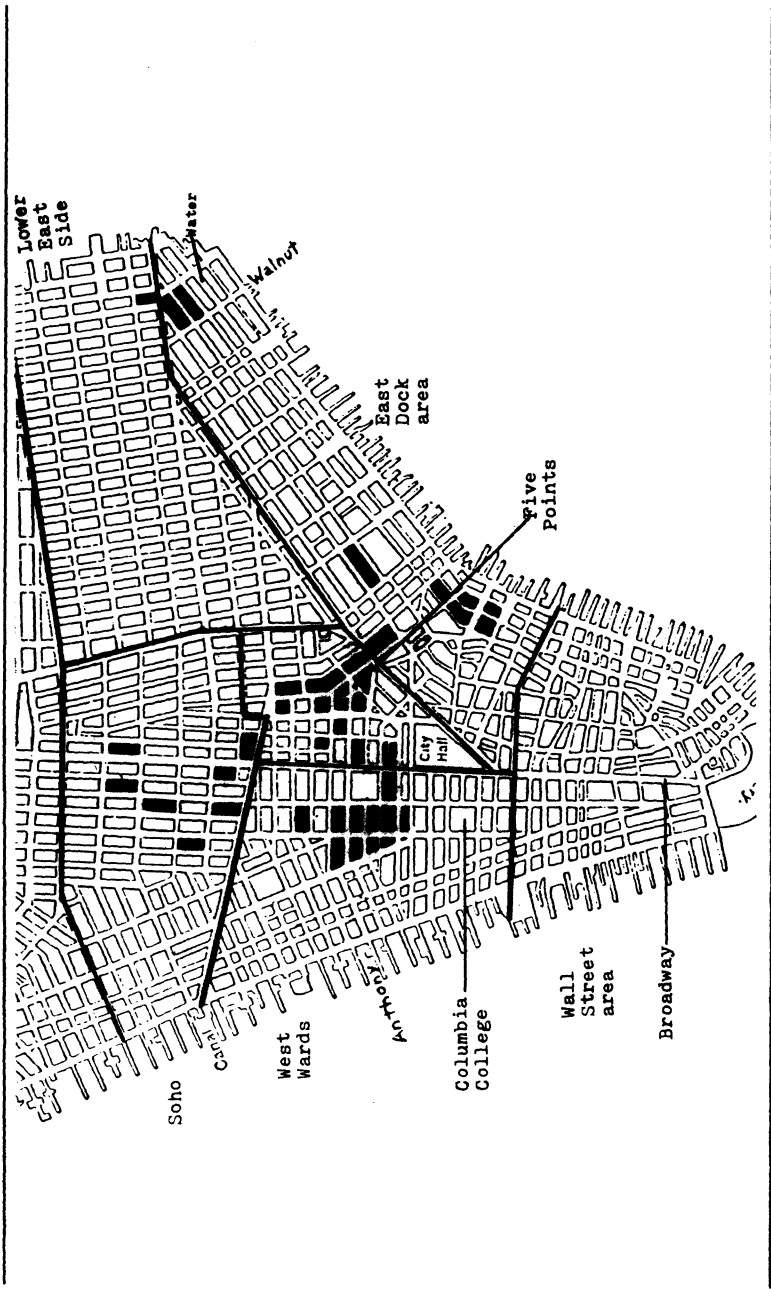
TABLE 1
Location of Houses of Prostitution by Neighborhood,
1790-1869 (by percentage)

Years	Number of Addresses	East Dock	Five Points	West Wards	Wall Street	Soho	Other
1790-1809	182	65	6	21	7	0	.5
1810-1819	245	55	15	22	5	0	4
1820-1829	253	30	30	26	2	8	4
1830-1839	271	17	35	20	0	16	11
1840-1849	207	19	36	28	4	11	3
1850-1859	336	8	32	12	2	41	7
1860-1869	99	10	12	8	5	45	19

SOURCES: New York District Attorney Indictment papers, Court of General Sessions, 1790-1869; New York Police Court papers, 1820-1860; *National Police Gazette*, 1845-1880; Stephen Allen papers, Court Minutes, 1819, and Tavern Complaints, 1822; Butt Ender, *Prostitution Exposed; or a Moral Reform Directory* (New York, 1839); Free Lovyer (sic), *Directory of the Seraglios in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and all the Principle Cities of the Union* (New York, 1857 and 1859); Charles DeKock, *Guide to the Harems, or Directory to the Laides of Fashion in New York and Various Other Cities* (New York, 1855); William H. Bell (policeman) *Diary*, 1850-1851; House of Refuge papers; *Sun*; *Herald*; *Tribune*.

NOTE: Addresses are based on whether a single location was cited one or more times for prostitution violations by an source. If the same address was cited more than once or by another source, it was counted only one time. Percentages have been rounded.

(Table 2).¹⁸ The low ratio of houses to blocks indicates a decreasing density rate and an increasing dispersion of the “whorearchy” throughout the city, just the opposite of a city with carefully marked and functionally segregated red-light districts. Compared with medieval German cities with zones lasting centuries, Paris with brothels in the same area since the Middle Ages, San Francisco with its more than seventy-five-year-old Tenderloin, or even American frontier towns with brothels on the



Map 3. Blocks with Prostitution in Three or More Decades, 1820-1859

edge of the settlement, the moral geography of prostitution in antebellum New York was ill-defined and constantly changing.¹⁹ Whether north or south, new neighborhood or old, prostitutes openly lived and candidly worked in all parts of antebellum New York.

The moral geography of New York that emerged from 1820 to 1850, however, was spatially more complicated and uneven than this description of suburbanized, physically dispersed prostitution. A closer examination of the neighborhoods of vice reveal a variety of nuances in their spatial and geographical patterns. While the tentacles of commercial sex extended over the whole body of New York, they held a tighter grip on certain parts. Some neighborhoods became strongholds of prostitution. Indeed, a hierarchy of prostitution zones appeared with four different forms of concentration: (1) a large cluster, (2) a ribbon development, (3) small clusters, and (4) fluctuating zones of streetwalking prostitutes (Map 4). Where prostitutes congregated, lived, and worked in large numbers, the spatial pattern of their settlement fell into one of these categories.

The primary zone was the large cluster development centered around Paradise Square in Five Points, the most notorious slum in the Western Hemisphere. Five Points offered the most congenial environment for every form of social deviance. If "ever immorality and licentiousness were presented in more disgusting forms," proclaimed the *Sun*, "we confess we have never yet beheld them."²⁰ From 1830 to 1839, twenty-seven of the forty-three blocks (sixty-three percent) surrounding Paradise Square housed prostitutes at least one time. Sexual favors were especially abundant on the blockfront bounded by Anthony, Leonard, Orange, and Centre streets. In each of the four decades from 1820 to 1860, there were at least seventeen domiciles of sex reported on this single block. And at least one adjoining block contained ten or more similar establishments. Finally, all institutionalized forms of prostitution were found in Five Points: brothels, saloons, theaters, dance halls, hotels, and cheap lodging houses.

A secondary zone was the long ribbon development in the West Wards extending along Church and Chapel streets, continuing

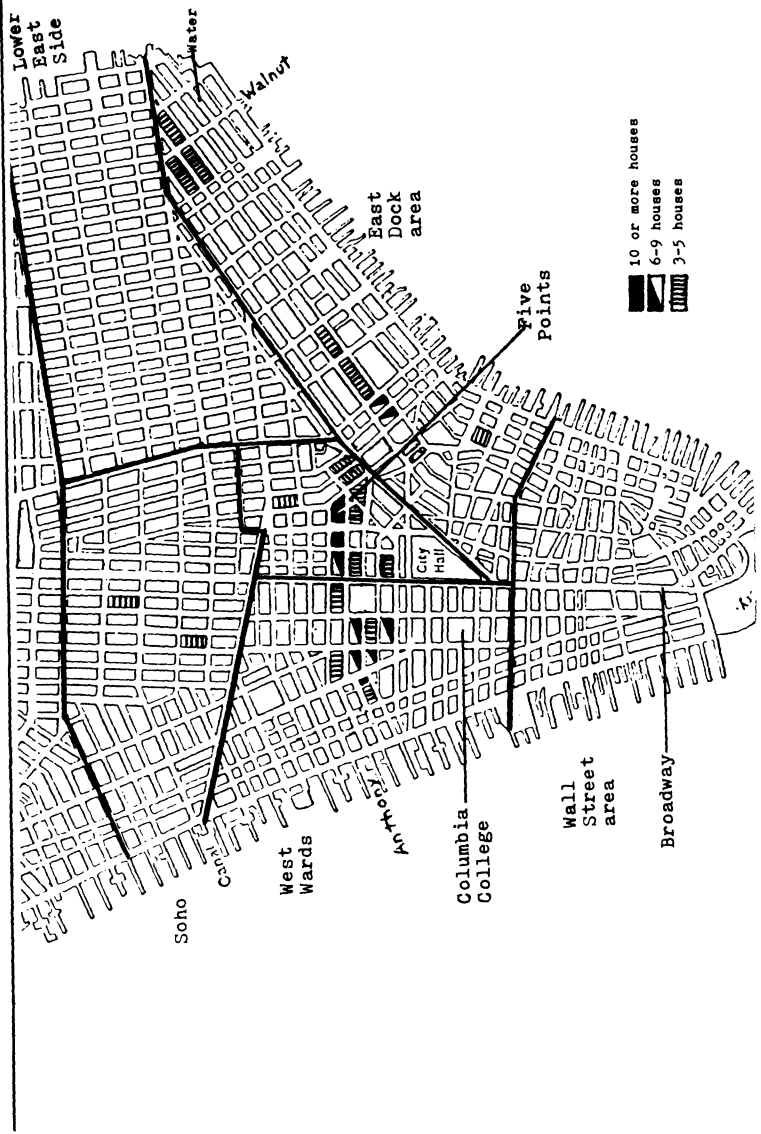
TABLE 2
Physical Concentration of Prostitution, 1820-1859

Years	No. of Plottable Addresses	No. of Blocks	Ratio
1820-1829	210	92	2.28:1
1830-1839	253	130	1.95:1
1840-1849	198	90	2.20:1
1850-1859	323	130	2.48:1

SOURCES: See Table 1.

north where Chapel became Laurens Street and was nicknamed "Rotton Row." This neighborhood, despite having some of the most expensive brothels, never achieved the sexual density and concentration of Five Points. On the eastern side of Manhattan, two small tertiary zones of illicit carnality thrived. Clustered around the wild, lively, and dangerous saloons and cheap boardinghouses on Water and Cherry streets in the Fourth Ward and Walnut Street in Corlears Hook, these areas also lacked the amount and scale of prostitution of Five Points. Finally, those areas of public streetwalking, infrequently mentioned and less physically defined as more institutionalized forms of sex, were fluctuating zones of prostitution that changed in location and intensity throughout the period. At least four such areas existed from 1820 to 1850. Broadway from City Hall Park to beyond Canal was notorious for the variety and beauty of its streetwalkers. Working in conjunction with the brothels and hotels in the West Wards, Five Points, and Soho, women collected in groups of five or six on numerous corners along New York's most famous avenue. During the 1830s, the "Female Rialto" at the foot of Rivington Street and "Slamm's Row" along Delancey Street were major zones of streetwalkers. Finally, the Battery remained a consistent nighttime resort for ladies of the night.²¹

After 1850, the moral geography of New York underwent a spatial reorganization. The deconcentrated structure of prostitution gave way to the emergence of a new primary center, Soho (Map 5). With forty percent of the prostitution, Soho became the

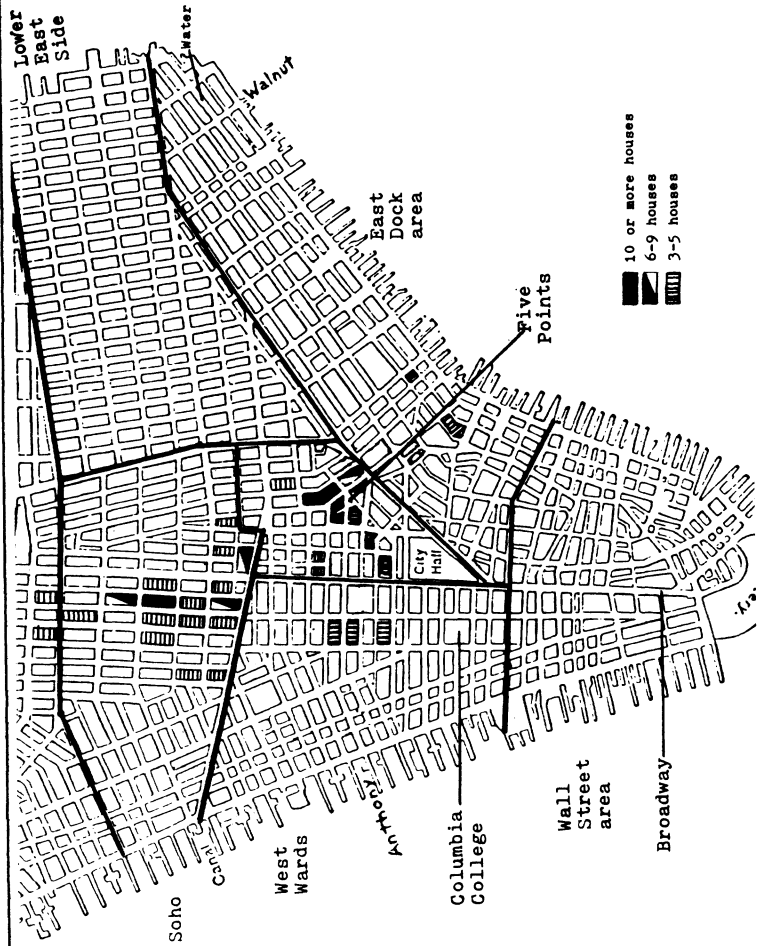


Map 4: Blocks with Multiple Houses of Prostitution, 1820-1829

first large-scale, truly exclusive red-light district in New York's history, and the leading brothel guides emphasized its importance. Charles DeKock's *Guide to the Harems* located sixty-one of the best-known brothels and houses of assignation in Soho, seventy-five percent of the city's total, while the *Directory of the Seraglios* in New York put seventy-four of the 102 leading houses of carnality there. Only a few houses were listed in Five Points. Furthermore, other tertiary zones of concentration declined in importance. The West Wards had less than a quarter of the leading brothels in the city, while Corlears Hook was not even mentioned.²²

Why did the moral geography of New York follow this unique pattern? First, rapid population growth left New York unprepared to deal with myriad social problems, prostitution being only one of them. Between 1800 and 1820, the city's population increased 205 percent, passing the 100,000 mark. In the next thirty years, the populace ballooned a staggering 417 percent as New York became the first American city to pass the half-million figure. A large portion of this population was young, single, and foreign born. J.D.B. DeBow reported that there was "among the immigrants a larger proportion of females of the productive age than among the natives." And by no means did men and women arrive in equal numbers. In 1844-1845, four males arrived in New York for every three females. By 1851-1852, that proportion had increased to three to two. Among the whole populace, especially women between twenty and thirty in age, a similar imbalance occurred. In 1840, for every 100 males, there were 127 females. By 1860, the ratio was nearly the same, 100 to 125.²³ Demographically, the rise of prostitution was a product of new sources of supply and demand.

While a surplus of males in the city provided a ready clientele for prostitutes, gender discrimination in the "free market" gave young women few opportunities for economic advancement. Prostitution was, in large part, based on the impoverishment of the working-class female population. In 1833, the *New York Sun* admitted that low pay was



Map 5: Blocks with Multiple Houses of Prostitution, 1850-1859

a grievance of the very first magnitude, and pregnant with the most mighty ills of society. . . . This unjust arrangement of remuneration for services performed diminishes the importance of women in society—renders them helpless and dependent—destroys in the lower walks of life much of the inducements to marriage—and of course in the same degree increases the temptation to licentiousness.²⁴

More important, however, was the continual stream of transient males in and out of the city. In 1835, approximately 22,000 crewmen aboard ships entered Manhattan. By 1860, the number tripled. From 1840 to 1855, sixty-eight percent of the 3,298,000 immigrants arriving in the United States came via New York City. And by the 1880s, James MacCabe estimated that there were more than 70,000 “strangers from distant parts of the country temporarily sojourning in New York at all periods of the year.”²⁵ Prostitutes gravitated toward this variable population. From 1820 to 1860, the most significant proportions of houses of prostitution were located in the vicinity of three institutions accommodating this mobile group: the hotel, the theater, and the transit station. Paradise Square in Five Points, for example, was ideally located. Its center on Anthony Street was virtually equidistant from the working-class saloons and theaters on the Bowery and the middle- and upper-class clientele frequenting Broadway’s hotels and restaurants.²⁶ West of Broadway were the major ferry terminuses on the Hudson River at Canal, Barclay, and Cortlandt streets. Only one or two blocks from Broadway, the houses on Church and Chapel streets also enjoyed the advantage of being directly behind the first major hotels ever constructed in New York. During the 1830s, at least thirty-four houses of prostitution (thirteen percent) were within 2.5 blocks of a hotel. By the next decade the figure nearly tripled to ninety-six (forty-six percent). Some, such as Mary Benson’s brothel at 100 Church Street, were reputed to be the favorite resort of patrons from the Astor House and American Hotel.²⁷ Finally, the tertiary zones clustered around Water and Walnut streets were at major ferry nodes along the East River. From 1840 to 1849, alone,

eighty-two percent of all the prostitution found along the East River was within 2.5 blocks of a ferry station.²⁸

As the leading urban leisure institution, theaters also attracted prostitutes who openly plied their trade in the infamous "third tier." When morally sanitized theaters banned blatant sexuality by mid-century, prostitutes simply moved their business to the adjacent streets. During the 1820s, only eleven percent of the houses of prostitution in the city were within 2.5 blocks of a theater. But in the next two decades the numbers rose to thirty-three percent and forty-two percent, respectively. Some brothels specifically catered to theaters. Sarah McGindy's and Mrs. Newman's brothel in Theater Alley behind Park Row serviced performers and patrons alike in the neighboring Park Theater. Sarah Brady's establishment on Church Street and Mrs. Bowen's on Leonard Street each advertised its proximity to the National Theater.²⁹

A final factor influencing the way prostitutes used and controlled urban space was the state and the law enforcement power of the municipality. Because New York did not adopt a professional police force until 1845, law enforcement entailed few preventive responsibilities and tended to be reactive. Only when residents complained about noise and disorderly conduct did the watch suppress prostitution. This lenient approach continued even after the creation of a professional force. Compared with its predecessor in London, New York's police force was amateurish, decentralized, and undisciplined, and it operated before 1860 in an environment of legal toleration of prostitution.³⁰

These trends intensified after 1850, and partly explain why prostitution became more segregated. From 1850 to 1859, seventy-nine percent of the prostitution that stayed in the Fifth Ward was located within 2.5 blocks of a major hotel. Farther north in Soho, a similar tendency emerged, as seventy-three percent of its brothels were equally close to the large "monster" hotels appearing on Broadway after 1850. Theaters, with fifty-four percent of all the city's brothels within 2.5 blocks, remained a major force in determining the moral geography of Gotham.

Even reformers in Five Points blamed the theater for aiding the spread of prostitution. "Struggling on into early womanhood, with a fearfully precocious development of passion, but without one sentiment of decency or shame to screen and protect her, . . . we can only hope to neutralize the attraction of the bar-room or the theater by rendering more attractive the domestic hearth."³¹ This geographical reorganization was further spurred by industrial expansion south of Canal Street, forcing the primary and secondary zones of concentration north to Soho as real estate values escalated. Finally, evangelical reformers became more of a presence in Five Points after 1850. In 1854, the Five Points House of Industry was established in the very heart of the neighborhood. Land purchases by these reformers removed sympathetic landlords who previously catered to prostitutes.³²

The movement of prostitutes into the emerging, newly settled residential neighborhoods of New York and their locational attachment to institutions servicing the middle class indicates that just as the class structure of antebellum New York was redefined by industrialization, so was prostitution. By the 1860s, James MacCabe admitted that the leading first-class houses of prostitution—fully furnished, renting for \$1,000 per month, often unknown to their immediate neighbors—were in the best city neighborhoods.³³ When the middle classes abandoned downtown, prostitutes followed them. Increasingly, it appears that the class structure among prostitutes mirrored the clients they serviced, many of whom were wealthy or middle class. While most prostitutes stayed in the city's slums, significant numbers moved uptown. Commercial vice was no longer segregated in riverfront districts; it was found in the enclaves and retreats of middle-class neighborhoods.

The moral geography of New York was convulsively rearranged from 1790 to 1860. After enjoying a period of concentration and isolation in the early nineteenth century, sexual chaos followed in the second quarter of the century. Unlike older European cities or even American cities later in the century, clearly marked red-light districts did not develop in New York. By 1830, resident and visitor alike needed only a ten- or fifteen-minute walk from their

domicile before confronting a prostitute or “house of ill-fame.” Linked to leading economic and leisure-time institutions, the vulgar reality of prostitution was integrated into the public life of the city. From the ramshackle rookeries of Five Points to the exclusive mansions on Park Place, New Yorkers shared their immediate residential space with the female merchants of commercialized sex. Dr. Sanger’s observation connecting it with the most refined theaters, operas, and hotels was no hyperbole. Prostitution, for a short time, transcended the emerging spatial divisions of the city and was a daily fact of life experienced by all classes. Many deplored this new urban vision, but its vivid truth proclaimed antebellum New York “a wide-open town” of illicit revelry and public sexuality.

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1. William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution* (New York, 1858, reprint 1937), 29, 593-599.

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3. Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-18* (Baltimore, 1982); Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Marion S. Goldman, *Gold Diggers and Silver Miners: Prostitution and Social Life on the Comstock Lode* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1981); Anne Katherine M. Butler, “The Tarnished Frontier: Prostitution in the Trans-Mississippi West, 1865-90” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland, 1979); Yuji Ichioka, “Ameyuki-san: Japanese Prostitutes in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Amerasia Journal* 4 (1977), 1-17; James R. McGovern, “‘Sporting Life on the Line’: Prostitution in Progressive Era Pensacola,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 54 (1975), 131-41; Al Rose, *Storyville, New Orleans* (University, AL, 1974); Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge, England, 1980).

4. Mary Christine Stansell, “Women of the Laboring Poor in New York City, 1820-1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1979); Larry H. Whiteaker, “Moral Reform and Prostitution in New York City, 1830-1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1977); Carroll Smith Rosenberg, “Beauty, the Beast, and the Militant Woman: A Case Study in Sex Roles and Social Stress in Jacksonian America,” *American Quarterly* 23 (1971), 562-584. Spatial examinations include Richard Symanski, *The Immoral Landscape: Female Prostitution in Western Societies* (Toronto, 1981); Neil Larry Shumsky and Larry M. Springer, “San Francisco’s Zone of Prostitution, 1880-1934,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 7 (1981), 71-89; and John C. Schneider, “Public Order and the Geography of the City: Crime, Violence, and the Police in Detroit, 1845-75,” *Journal of Urban History* 4 (1978), 183-203.

5. To trace the spatial evolution of prostitution, I plotted addresses of houses of prostitution from 1790 to 1870. The addresses were in the following: New York City District Attorney Indictment papers, Court of General Sessions; and the New York City Police Court papers, New York City Municipal Archives and Records Center (hereafter referred to as DA papers and PC papers, respectively); *National Police Gazette*, 1845-1880; Stephen Allen papers, Court Minutes, 1819, and Tavern Complaints, 1822, New-York Historical Society (NYHS hereafter); Butt Ender, *Prostitution Exposed; or a Moral Reform Directory* (New York, 1839); and Charles DeKock, *Guide to the Harems, or Directory to the Ladies of Fashion in New York and Various Other Cities* (New York, 1855), both in possession of Prof. Leo Hershkowitz, Queens College, City University of New York; Free Lovyer (sic), *Directory of the Seraglios in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and all the Principle Cities of the Union* (New York, 1857 and 1859); William H. Bell (policeman), Diary, 1850-1851, NYHS; House of Refuge papers, New York State Library; *Sun*; *Herald*; *Tribune*. The wide variety of sources allowed me to examine prostitution over a long period of time and not just when it was suppressed with frequent arrests. Using police and court records, I included only places and names accused of the specific disorderly conduct charge of prostitution (frequently written as "whorring"). Other disorderly charges—quarreling, disturbing the peace, operating an unlicensed saloon—were ignored. Although some of these establishments were, quite likely, haunts for prostitutes, the lack of certainty led me to reject their inclusion. In addition, not all houses of prostitution appeared in the police and court records. The following maps and tables, therefore, are a cautious measure and probably *underestimate* the amount of prostitution in New York. This is further substantiated in *McDowall's Journal*, May 1833, which listed 59 streets with houses of prostitution, 19 of which never appeared in any other records for that decade; and in several municipal reports which listed more than 300 houses of prostitution in 1845. See *Documents of the Board of Aldermen* (New York, 1846), XII, 384 (document 21), 542 (document 33).

6. The development and evolution of functional segregation and the more clearly spatially defined city has been a favored topic among urban historians. See David Ward, "The Emergence of Central Immigrant Ghettos in American Cities, 1840-1920," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 58 (1968), 343-359; Olivier Zunz, *The Changing Face of Inequality: Urbanization, Industrial Development, and Immigrants in Detroit, 1880-1920* (Chicago, 1982), 15-177; Elizabeth Blackmar, "Rewalking the 'Walking City': Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1840," *Radical History Review* 21 (1979), 131-148; John C. Schneider, *Detroit and the Problem of Order, 1830-80* (Lincoln, NB, 1980); Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968) 11-17, 50-61, 169-200.

7. Quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt* (New York, 1977), 318.

8. William A. Duer, *Reminiscences of an Old New Yorker* (New York, 1867), 10; I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1910*, 5 vols. (New York, 1912), IV, 581, 862; V, 1194, 1204, 1343; Edward Bangs, ed., *Journal of Lt. Isaac Bangs, 1776* (Cambridge, Mass., 1890), 29. For the de Crevecoeur quote, see *Magazine of American History* 2 (1878), 749.

9. *Moreau de St. Mery's American Journey, 1793-1798*, translated and edited by Kenneth and Anna M. Roberts (Garden City, NY, 1947), 156, 173. For petitions, see *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784-1831*, 30 vols. (New York, 1917) (hereafter MCC), III, 393 (November 21, 1803); V, 192 (July 11, 1808), 266 (September 19, 1808). George Street, later renamed Spruce Street, was the dividing line

between the Second and Fourth wards. East George Street was in the Seventh Ward and later renamed Market Street. Charlotte Street was a block east and renamed Pike Street. Another fifteen percent of the indictments were in the Seventh Ward, many of which were probably on or in the vicinity of East George Street.

10. *Moreau de St. Mère*, 156; Stokes, *Iconography*, IV, 862; Petition of 23 residents to Common Council, September 21, 1802, Common Council papers, box 30, New York City Municipal Archives and Records Center (hereafter NYCMA); MCC, V, 603 (July 10, 1809). In order to illustrate and measure the physical movement of prostitution over time, I divided the city into neighborhoods based upon their ward numbers and physical separation by major thoroughfares. Since neighborhoods and their perceived boundaries change, this is an admittedly imperfect method. Nevertheless, it is the best means of breaking down the physical city into constant parts and then measuring geographical change over time. The neighborhoods and their boundaries are: Wall Street area—south of Fulton Street (First Ward and parts of the Second and Fourth wards); West wards—north of Fulton Street, west of Broadway to Hudson River, south of Canal Street (most of the Third and all of the Fifth wards); East Dock area—north of Fulton Street, east of Chatham Street, Park Row, and East Broadway to East River, south of Canal and Grand streets (most of the Fourth and Seventh wards); Five Points—area bounded by Broadway, Canal Street, Centre Street, Hester Street, Bowery, Chatham Street, Park Row (all of the Sixth and part of the Fourteenth wards); Soho—area bounded by Canal Street, Centre Street, Hester Street, Bowery, Houston Street, Hudson River (all of the Eighth and most of the Fourteenth wards); Lower East Side—Bowery, Houston Street, East River, Grand Street, and East Broadway (all of the Tenth and Thirteenth and part of the Eleventh wards).

11. By 1808, the physical development along Broadway had reached as far north as Anthony Street and the vicinity of the Collect Pond. Further east, the city spread as far as Grand Street on the Bowery and Montgomery Street in the Seventh Ward. In fact, only small parts of the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh wards remained undeveloped. Only the filling of swampland and the Collect slowed their conversion to completely developed real estate. The best description of New York's physical development can be found in U.S. Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Tenth Census of the U.S., 1880, Report on the Social Statistics of Cities*, comp. by George Waring, Jr., 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1886), XVIII, map facing 555; and James Grant Wilson, *Memorial History of New York City* (New York, 1893), III, 208.

12. Locating specific and near-specific addresses was accomplished by matching block numbers with street addresses using the following: Tax Assessment maps, Third Ward (1859); *Record of Assessments*, Fifth Ward (1853), (1819, 1821, 1832, 1834, 1837, 1839, 1859), Third Ward (1839), Eighth Ward (1830), NYCMA; George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of City of New York* (Philadelphia, 1899); *Longworth's American Almanac*, *New York Register*, and *City Directory* (New York, 1828 and 1834) have tables for locating street numbers.

13. MCC, VII, 72 (March 18, 1812); *Fireman's Own*, October 6, 1849, in Charles P. Daly papers, New York Public Library, scrapbook 21, page 69.

14. *Niles' Register*, October 14, 1820.

15. Wilson, *Memorial History of New York City*, III, 208; and Census Office, *Report on the Social Statistics of Cities*, XVIII, 564-565. For maps illustrating a decade-by-decade breakdown of the location of prostitution, see Timothy Gilfoyle, "Prostitution and

the Commercialization of Sex in New York City, 1790-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, in progress), chapter 2.

16. PC papers, box 7451, *Prudden v. Murray*, August 5, 1838; *The Rake*, July 9, 1842, copy in DA papers, *People v. Meighan*, August 8, 1842.

17. Butt Ender, *Prostitution Exposed*, cited 75 addresses. The breakdown by neighborhood was: Five Points—23, West Wards—19, Lower East Side—15, Soho—12, East Dock—5, Wall Street—1.

18. Because of the lack of specific addresses, it is impossible to compute similar ratios from 1790 to 1819. The high percentage in the East Dock area and especially on George and East George streets would seem to indicate, however, that there were higher concentration ratios during this period. Significantly, in the decade 1850-1859, the concentration jumped to 2.46:1, statistical evidence that a new exclusive red-light district in Soho just west of Broadway was beginning to appear.

19. Symanski, *Immoral Landscape*, 38; Robert Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (New York, 1968), 260.

20. *Sun*, May 29, 1834.

21. *Tribune*, March 14, 1855; Butt Ender, *Prostitution Exposed*. "Slamm's Row" was between Norfolk at Essex streets. For the Battery, see note 16.

22. The Water Street area, however, was the exception to this trend, remaining the leading center of waterfront vice throughout the century. See DeKock, *Guide to the Harems*; Free Lovyer (sic), *Directory of the Seraglios*.

23. J. D. B. DeBow, *Statistical View of the U.S.: A Compendium of the Seventh Census* (Washington, DC, 1854), 121-23. On male-female ratios, see Franklin B. Hough, *Statistics on the Population of the City and County of New York* (New York, 1866); and Stansell, "Women of the Laboring Poor," 88. Among whites, the sex ratios were:

	Male	Female	Male (20-30)	Female (20-30)
1830	100	106	100	100
1840	100	108	100	127
1850	100	102	100	108
1860	100	105	100	125

24. *Sun*, March 14, 1833. On female labor in New York, see Stansell, "Women of the Laboring Poor."

25. James D. MacCabe, *New York by Sunlight and Gaslight* (Philadelphia, 1882), 53. On the number of crewman, see Robert Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (New York, 1939), 398; on immigration, see Edward K. Spann, *The New Metropolis: New York, 1840-1857* (New York, 1981), 24.

26. The center of block 166 was approximately 825 feet from Chatham Square, 1100 feet from the Bowery, and 975 feet from Broadway.

27. Butt Ender, *Prostitution Exposed*.

28. Ferry terminuses are found on W. Hooker, *Plan of the City of New York* (New York, 1817); and D. H. Burr, *Map of the City of New York* (New York, 1837), Columbia University Map Collection. On the problem of pimps recruiting innocent girls at steamboat and ferry stations, see *Advocate of Moral Reform*, October 2, 1848.

29. Butt Ender, *Prostitution Exposed*. On the "third tier," see Claudia D. Johnson,

"That Guilty Third Tier: Prostitution in Nineteenth Century American Theaters," in Daniel Walker Howe, ed., *Victorian America* (Philadelphia, 1976), 111-120. The locations of nineteenth century theaters are in Mary C. Henderson, *The City and the Theater: New York Playhouses from Bowling Green to Times Square* (Clifton, NJ, 1973); and George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of New York* (Philadelphia, 1899). Prostitution was also spatially linked to the saloon. The vast numerical expansion of saloons, however, makes similar geographical comparison with houses of prostitution less meaningful than with hotels, theaters, and ferry stations. In 1827, for example, the municipality issued 2305 tavern and excise licenses in the lower eight wards of the city, a plentiful 5.4 saloons on each city block. The Fourth and Sixth wards each had impressive averages of more than seven liquor establishments per block. With such a large and dense quantity of saloons in each ward, most houses of prostitution were likely to be located within one or two blocks. Statistics on excise licenses from 1821 to 1837 are in Documents of the Board of Aldermen (New York, 1837), III, 593. The number of blocks is based upon William Hooker, *Map of the City of New York* (New York, 1831).

30. Wilbur R. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies: Police Authority in New York and London, 1830-70* (Chicago, 1973), 16, 44, 102-103.

31. Five Points House of Industry, *Monthly Record*, May, 1858.

32. Miller, *Cops and Bobbies*, 204; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-70* (Ithaca, 1971), chapter 8.

33. MacCabe, *Secrets*, 208-209, 285-288.