

IN SEARCH OF EXCITEMENT: UNDERSTANDING BOSTON'S CIVIL WAR "DRAFT RIOT"

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On July 14, 1863, Major Stephen Cabot of the First Battalion of Massachusetts Volunteer Heavy Artillery received a request from Governor John Andrew for troops to enter the city of Boston for the purpose of suppressing a riot. Major Cabot was ordered to the city after a mob attacked a conscription officer in the North End of the city. The crowd had gathered in front of a police station and Cabot was told that, "the mob [was] beating police, and that there was every appearance of serious trouble during the coming night."¹ City authorities believed the crowd was uncontrollable and so Cabot and 166 other men left for Boston shortly after the request was made. The Governor directed Cabot to take instruction from Mayor Frederic Lincoln who ordered a detachment of men to the armory on the corner of Union and Marshall Streets. Cabot took the rest of his command to the Cooper Street armory.

When the Major entered the North End he was followed by a crowd that made no serious attack against him.² Once Cabot and his men were inside of the armory, he had the doors and shutters closed in hopes that mob would leave if they could not see the soldiers. He believed that the mob in the street would soon launch a much larger assault.

Around 7:30 p.m., Cabot received news that the mob was abusing another soldier down the street, he ordered a group of twenty men to rescue him. In the process of the rescue, the mob attacked the soldiers and hurled stones at them. Cabot sent out more men in hopes that a greater military presence would prevent the need for firing at the swarm of people. Cabot says however, that during "the excitement a few shots were fired over the heads of the mob..." and that "during this rescue the mob [was] very furious, and some of [his] men were severely hurt by stones..." The mob believed that the shots fired over their heads were blanks and so they became "more bold and aggressive."³ Cabot noted that once the doors were shut, a full out attack had begun. Cabot felt that it he had to fire to keep the mob back. He fired from inside the armory and noted that after, "nothing was to be seen if the mob, except those who had paid the penalty for lawlessness."⁴ Cabot felt that he and his men were in great danger and that he had no other options.

Scholars usually label the events Major Cabot described as Boston's "Civil War Draft Riot." The disturbance occurred immediately following a much larger and destructive riot started in New York City. The Draft Riot in New York has gained much more fame and attention than Boston's and historians have struggled to untangle their analysis of the events in the two cities, relying too heavily on voices like Cabot's, who felt under assault. This essay investigates a wider range of sources from those who witnessed and participated in the melee, to argue that rather than a smaller, less violent version of the New York riot, the events in Boston on July 14 should be seen differently. The event in Boston should not be seen as a political protest but as a group of rowdy people in search of excitement.

¹ Stephen Cabot, *Report of the "Draft Riot" in Boston, July 14th, 1863*, (Boston Veteran Association of Co. A, 1st Battalion of Massachusetts Volunteer Heavy Artillery), 1.

² *Ibid.*, 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

A general sketch of the day's events begin with David Howe, a conscription officer, whose job it was to give notice to the men whose names had been drawn in the draft. It was reported that Howe had stopped to talk with a woman about the conscription who then hit him. Residents from the neighborhood entered the streets to witness the commotion. These people soon joined the woman in assaulting the officer.⁵ Police were informed of the altercation and Officer Wilkins left Station One to retrieve Howe. Wilkins succeeded in getting Howe away from the crowd but while the officer was escorting the conscription officer back to his residence the crowd once again assaulted him. He was badly beaten this time but was still able to escape the crowd.⁶ After Howe evaded the crowd for a second time, more police officers were ordered into the North End. On the way to the station house, several officers were assaulted "by bricks and other missiles..." but other than these minor acts, there were no other acts of violence reported at this time. City officials then called upon Captain E. J. Jones from the Eleventh Battery to guard the Cooper Street armory in case further trouble should occur.⁷ It was at this point Major Stephen Cabot received his orders to enter the city. After the mob fled the scene of the armory, they attacked gun stores in the area of Dock Square and Faneuil Hall. Men plundered these stores and were able to escape with a collection of weapons. According to the *Boston Courier* "Not less than one hundred guns, nearly as many pistols, and three or four dozen bowie-knives, valued at some three thousand dollars," were taken from the store of Thomas P. Barnes.⁸ The mob was stopped when they attempted to break into the store of William Reed and Son and several men were arrested. At this point, more police officers from around the city as well as the Light Dragoons were ordered into the area. The reinforcements successfully cleared the streets and those in the crowd returned to their homes.⁹

It is believed that these events were in response to the new Conscription Act. In March of 1863 the Union passed the federal Conscription Act; enrolment was low and the act sought to raise troops for the army. Union numbers on the field were decreasing due to desertion and shortly, those who volunteered for three years of service in 1861 would be relieved. The Conscription Act called for all unmarried men between twenty and thirty five to report for military service. According to the law, men could be exempt if they hired a substitute or were able to pay a three-hundred dollar fee. The conscription did not apply to African Americans as they were not considered citizens of the United States.¹⁰ It is easy to see how the Conscription Act would upset the poor; it seemed that the burden of the war was now falling onto their shoulders. Women were also upset about the Enrolment Act, as it threatened to remove the primary provider from the family. Many resorted to rioting in New York City in protest of this new law but the same cannot be said for the events in Boston on July 14, 1863.

During this same time, a riot occurred in the streets of New York City. The riot began in New York on July 13 when a group of firemen, no longer exempt from military service under the new conscript law,

⁵ A Plain Man. *The Boston Riot, July 14, 1863. A Plain Statement of Facts* (A Plain Man Boston 1863), 4.

⁶ *Boston Courier*, July 15, 1863. As quoted in Edward Everett, *The Rebellion Record: a diary of American events, with documents, narratives, illustrative incidents, poetry, etc., Volume Seven* (New York: G.P. Putnam 1864), 436-438.

⁷ *Boston Post*, July 15, 1863. As quoted in Edward Everett. *The Rebellion Record: a diary of American events, with documents, narratives, illustrative incidents, poetry, etc., Volume Seven* (New York: G.P. Putnam 1864), 435-436.

⁸ *Boston Courier*, July 15, 1863.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, (New York: Oxford University Press 1990), 6-8.

burst into the Ninth District's office, smashed the selection wheel and set the building on fire.¹¹ As the day progressed, men began to leave their places of occupation and had just about stopped business in the city. Mobs soon gathered in front of buildings with strong political symbolism, such as General George B. McClellan's house. Others threatened Horace Greeley, editor of the *Tribune*, Republican Party champion and abolitionist.¹² Employees of the Iron Works said that their main aim was to impede the draft in the city but their cause was soon mixed with acts of thievery and the destruction of lines of communication.¹³ As the day progressed, the protesters began to grow in number and they also started to destroy government property. By the middle of the afternoon, the rioters attacked police officers and looted the homes of the wealthy. By three in the afternoon, the mob had even attacked an African American boy. Early Monday evening, the mob returned to the office of the *Tribune* and they stormed, looted, and burned the building. It was reported that some of the rioters carried signs that read, "No Draft" and "Independent." Later in the evening, some of the rioter burned an orphan asylum and others moved to tenements and attacked black men and boys.¹⁴

Some of the Irish longshoremen used the riot as an attempt to bring the "white-only" policy of their employment to the entire community. These men instigated the first race-based attacks of the riot not too far from the piers.¹⁵ On Tuesday, the day after the riot began, William Williams, an African American sailor, was beaten by a white longshoreman. After the initial beating, other members from the neighborhood approached the sailor to beat his body or stab his chest. On the following Wednesday night, "Dock laborers" had beaten and almost drowned Charles Jackson who is described as a "black workingman." A young black shoemaker was given chase and captured by several white men. The shoemaker was beaten, stoned, and then hanged. The rioters then burned the house in which he attempted to hide.¹⁶ The riot in New York took on extreme tones of racial violence and African Americans were not safe in the city.

Historians have paid more attention to the events in New York than those in Boston. The riot in New York lasted several days, while the one that occurred in Boston was short lived, lasting only several hours. The riot in New York City was also a much larger event involving class and race-based attacks. The only thing the two events had in common was timing. The riot in New York broke out on July 13, 1863 and the riot in Boston on July 14. Some historians have attempted to make sense of the riot in Boston but their depictions do not seem to tell the entire story.

Jack Tager's, *Boston Riots*, gives only quick mention to the draft. He believes the riot was deeply rooted in the politics and the social standing of the Irish in Boston at the time. Tager states that the event was, "the first major riot mounted by the Irish to lash out at their Yankee oppressors...Feeling in imminent danger and powerless to protect themselves, the Irish, in 1863, resorted to direct action."¹⁷ However, Boston's Irish and natives had a long history of tension including the Broad Street Riot also covered in

¹¹ Ibid., 18.

¹² Ibid., 19.

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶ Ibid., 28

¹⁷ Jack Tager, *Boston Riots*, (Boston: Northeastern University Press 2001.), 134.

Tager's study. In the summer of 1837 a company of volunteer firemen got into a pushing match with a group of Irish men taking part in a funeral procession. The fight turned into a riot involving over fifteen thousand people. It was reported that one of the firemen ran to another firehouse yelling, "The Irish have risen upon us, and are going to kill us."¹⁸ Events like the Broad Street Riot highlight the long standing Irish and nativist tensions in Boston during the nineteenth century and make it difficult to suggest the draft riot could be significant on these grounds.

Tager speculates that Boston's Irish resorted to rioting because they were angry about the draft. He concludes that the events show, "that many of the Irish felt oppressed by the Yankees and believed that they had no political influence, and that the war did not pertain to them."¹⁹ He believes that the riot was the Irish population's attempt to gain weapons to prevent the draft from happening.²⁰ A review of the events from that day however does not support this conclusion. The Irish moved to the armory only when the soldiers marched there through their neighborhood and furthermore, they only attacked gun stores after being fired upon.

His short chapter makes it seem that the Irish were devastated by the draft. He says that the conscription, "had a particularly devastating affect upon the Irish working classes," but this does not seem to be accurate.²¹ Tyler Anbinder conducted a study on immigrants and the conscription. His findings indicate the draft had an amazingly small effect on Boston's Irish population. For Boston's wards 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 9, 828 Irish immigrants were called upon for service. 24% of them failed to report and 74% claimed some type on exemption. Less than 1% was actually held to service. In wards 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12, 701 Irish immigrants were called upon and 97% claimed an exemption. And once again, less than 1% were held to service.²² These numbers do not support Tager's argument. Clearly, it is improbable to imply that Boston's Irish population was deeply affected by the 1863 conscription.

Tager mentions that it is difficult to measure how much successes the rioters felt but the City of Boston did not come anywhere near filling their quota of men. He hints that one reason might be the rioting.²³ The rioters in fact had virtually no effect on the conscription in Boston. The *Boston Transcript* reported on July 15 that, "the business appertaining to the draft in the 3rd and 4th districts is proceeding without any interruption."²⁴ The draft was resumed and continued immediately after the mob gathered in the streets of the North End. Anbinder's study of the conscription also indicates that many who were called to serve could claim a medical exemption. In Boston, a medical exemption could be granted for "Crooked toes" or, he says, "even a single disabled toe was enough to earn one an exemption." One man was even excused for having, "tender feet." Others were able to avoid service because they were ruled not tall or strong enough. Even claims of "varicose veins, 'chronic diarrhea,' odd skin growths...and 'excessive

¹⁸ Ibid.,121.

¹⁹ Ibid., 139.

²⁰ Ibid., 138.

²¹ Ibid.,134.

²² Tyler Anbinder, "Which Poor Man's Fight? Immigrants and the Federal Conscription of 1863." *Civil War History* 52; 4. (December 2006), 349-350.

²³ Tager.,138.

²⁴ *Boston Transcript*, July 15, 1863.

stammering” were enough to get one out of service.²⁵ In short, it was not very difficult to avoid the Union conscription, all one needed to do was claim a simple medical exemption. In Anbinder’s research he found that “55 percent of all exemptions in 1863, [were] for ‘physical disability’... and that 40 percent of all draftees who reported for examination were able to procure a medical exemption.”²⁶ In the city of Boston, natives were almost just as likely to claim some sort of exemption as the Irish.²⁷ In the city, the conscription had a minimal effect on the population. However, Jack Tager is not the only historian to misinterpret the Boston “draft riot.”

William Hanna also struggles to make sense of July 14, 1863. He believes that the Irish population in Boston did not support the Conscription Act because they could not pay the commutation fee or hire substitutes and so they “would be called upon to give their lives in support of a policy they wholeheartedly opposed. Thus, political alienation and smoldering anger, when added to poverty and despair, made the teeming streets of the North End ripe for civil disorder.”²⁸ The Irish did not agree with President Lincoln or his policies and when they were called upon to fight in the war, and Hanna, like Tager, maintains that they would not join willingly. There is however no evidence from this event to support this claim.

Hanna’s argument seems to turn to the timing of the events in Boston. He does not believe that this started out as a draft riot at all, but it began when the Irish population in the North End felt it necessary to try and save one of their neighbors from the police. However, by the evening, the excitement grew and began to take on, “political overtones” against the draft.²⁹ The problem with this analysis is that just at the time the event supposedly became more political according to Hanna some of the rioters “were shown to be under the influence of alcohol before and during the riot...”³⁰ The excitement grew when a number of soldiers entered the neighborhood. Up until that point, there were no other acts of violence connected with this event. At one point, however, two officers who had left the station were followed by a crowd comprised mostly of boys. These boys were yelling, “exclamations designed to keep the melee going,” but the crowd was slowly losing members and by the late afternoon some believed the trouble was over.³¹ This was not the case as a mob gathered in front of the Cooper Street armory around 7:30 p.m. This mob was comprised of, “young ruffians [who were] shouting insults and pro-Confederate slogans...”³² These slogans were most likely directed at the soldiers and not the Union. The residents of the North End were agitated by the occupation of their neighborhood by such a strong force. The Irish must have felt upset when they saw these men march down their streets. Hanna establishes this event in a way that makes it seem the riot was inevitable due to the position of the Irish in Boston society but throughout his work he continuously overstates the political motivation of the riot.

A better interpretation of the riot shows it as a group of people just looking for excitement. Youngsters were shouting exclamations to keep the excitement going and more intoxicated people

²⁵ Anbinder, 353.

²⁶ Ibid., 353.

²⁷ Ibid., 349-350.

²⁸ William Hanna, “The Boston Draft Riot,” *Civil War History* 36: 3 (September 1990), 263.

²⁹ Ibid., 263

³⁰ Ibid., 272.

³¹ Ibid., 272.

³² Ibid 267.

entered the area as the night progressed. People were looking for amusement. Hanna attempts to understand the riot in conjunction with New York but he is not successful as he mentions several times that many in the crowd were not connected to the neighborhood. Looking at several newspapers from the time it is understandable why some modern historians have related the two events.

The Liberator, Boston's abolitionist newspaper, clearly connected local events with those in New York. The paper labeled the events in New York and Boston collectively as, "frantic and demonic" and that the real cause of both riots was, "brutal hatred of the colored race, and, consequently, of all efforts for the abolition of slavery..."³³ but there were no attacks on African Americans in Boston during the riot. *The Liberator* believed that the two events were closely interwoven. The newspaper had a specific agenda which was to promote the end of slavery and establish the position of African Americans within a greater community. By connecting the riot in Boston with the horrific events in New York City they made a clear message. They felt that African Americans were treated terribly in the North and this poor treatment needed to cease. Some felt that the riots were a direct attack against Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, *The Liberator* therefore had the duty of presenting these events as wholeheartedly wrong. It was successful in doing that in Boston by connecting it with the riot in New York.

In Boston, *The Liberator* offered more coverage of the events in New York City than in Boston. This was most likely because of the horrific attacks on African Americans in New York City. *The Liberator* claims that the riots in New York City were part of a larger Copperhead conspiracy and meant to start a revolution; the draft was just an excuse to get this revolution started.³⁴ *The Liberator* believed that these riots were meant to disfranchise the African American population in the North. The paper argued that Copperheads wanted to stage a riot, take control of it, and then turn that riot into a revolution. If this revolution went according to plan, New York would be removed from the Union, which would be a crippling blow to the North. The paper believed there was clear evidence to show that the riot was meant to be a rebellion. However, it was not successful because the riot fell out of control and "into the hand of ruffians, who meant to sack and burn the city, partly from love of plunder and partly from natural depravity."³⁵ They felt this goal could have been attained if those who were just looking for adventure did not get involved. *The Liberator* was not the only paper that connected the two riots.

The *Boston Evening Transcript* also linked the events in Boston with New York. On July 21 the paper reported that "robbery and destruction, anarchy and a universal phrenzied[sic] panic, to divert our attention from the South, and call of our victorious armies-these were the true objects to be obtained, even if New York and Boston were entirely laid in ashes."³⁶ The article continues to say that, "no one of us knew exactly how much those threats to turn New York and Boston into howling deserts could be backed by force."³⁷ This article was printed almost a week after the riot in Boston and certainly long enough after the events unfolded to present a more accurate account. *The Liberator* and the *Transcript* supported the emancipation of all slaves and used the riot in Boston as a medium to call for the institution's end by connecting the two events. In its time it may have successfully done that but in retrospect it draws

³³ *The Liberator*. July 17, 1863.

³⁴ *The Liberator*. July 31, 1863.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ *Boston Evening transcript*. July 21, 1863.

³⁷ Ibid.

connections that do not exist.

However, *The Liberator's* as well as the *Transcript's* view of the riots do not stand up. The riot in New York City looked very different from the events in Boston. The riot in New York may have been sparked by the draft but it quickly escalated to a protest against race and class. These types of attacks did not happen in Boston. It seems, the only similarity between the two is the timing. It cannot be concluded that the riot in Boston was based on race or class.

Even from examining the events of the first day of rioting in New York it is clear that many were against the draft and the Republican Party. The New York events also display how some people viewed African Americans and their place in society. These feelings were not clearly expressed during Boston's riot and when anti-Yankee feelings emerged, they were targeted at police men and not larger political or governmental symbols. Boston's riot was also without out aggression aimed towards African Americans. It is possible that the riot in Boston was not racially motivated because of the size of the African American population in the city. A review of the 1860 census shows that in Suffolk County, Massachusetts, the total population consisted of 192,700 people. Of those people, 190,279 were white, 1,086 were listed as "Free colored males," 1,312 as "Free colored females," and the country listed a total of 1,224 "Native born black persons." When adding the number of "Free colored males" with that of "Free colored females" one finds that Suffolk County had a colored population of less than one percent. In New York County, the census reported a total population of 813,669 persons. 801,088 were listed as white, 5,468 as "Free colored males," 7,106 as "Free colored females," and 9,242 as "Native born black persons." When adding the total free population of African American males and females we find that New York County had an African American population of more than one and a half percent.³⁸ The raw numbers show that there was a much higher population of African Americans living in New York City at the time. Since the numbers are larger, they presented a greater threat to the workforce of that city than that of the workforce of Boston.

There is no evidence to support the claim that the riot in Boston was directed towards the disenfranchisement of African American's in the North or in support of the Confederacy. There is also no evidence which would suggest the riot in Boston had any objective at all. Boston's events were also without a leader, even though newspapers were quick to name them. The *Post* reported that while the mob was burglarizing gun stores in the area of Dock Square and Faneuil Hall they were stopped Officer Dunn. It continues to say that, "in the melee a man named James Campbell, the ringleader, was shot in the head and one arm. He was arrested and taken to Station Two, where his wounds were attended..."³⁹ To put a leader with a name and a face to the riot makes it appear more organized that it really was.

James Campbell was one of at least twelve men to be arrested for his part in the riot on July 14. Five men had been accused of the willful murder of William Currier, who was found dead inside the Cooper Street armory shortly after the order was given to fire. The state of Massachusetts wished to have these men convicted under Chapter 166 of the Massachusetts General Statutes, "which stated that any member of a mob of thirty or more persons would be held liable for willful murder if their riotous behavior caused the death of a citizen."⁴⁰ James Campbell was the first of the men arrested to go to trial. The prosecution

³⁸ University of Virginia Library. Historical Census Browser. County level results for 1860, Massachusetts and New York. Accessed November 15, 2010. <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/php/start.php?year=V1860>

³⁹ *The Boston Post*, July 15, 1863.

⁴⁰ William Hanna, "A Trial from the Boston Draft Riot" *The Lincoln Herald* 99 (Spring 1997), 45.

had to prove that he did take part in the riot and that the death of William Currier was caused by the actions of the mob in front of the armory. The court ruled that Currier's death could have possibly been a result of the shots fired from within the armory and therefore could not find the defendant guilty. However, Campbell was arrested right after this ruling on riot related charges. He was granted bail and was believed to have fled the city. However, John McGrath, a second defendant, was found guilty of riot and assault but without a weapon. It was ruled that he serve ten years hard labor.⁴¹

The trials of these men show that the state was desperate to associate a name with the riot. Doing so would make it seem more organized than it really was. In the wake of the New York riot in which there are names attached, Boston wanted to prosecute the guilty parties. In retrospect, the Boston riot was leaderless and unorganized. In New York, there were clear targets and goals but that was not the case in Boston.

In the reports regarding the Boston riot in the *New York Times*, no connection was made to events in New York City. One of the only occurrences when the New York and Boston events were mentioned together was in a republication of an article from the *Courier*. The *Courier* reported that "but for the promptness of the measures to suppress it, would have probably proved as disastrous as that in New-York."⁴² An earlier article, a report from Boston on the night of the riot, printed on July 16 in the *New York Times*, stated that, "quite a disturbance, but hardly amounting to a riot, occurred in the north part of the city this afternoon."⁴³ The New York paper had larger events to report in their own city. Compared to New York, the events in Boston were incredibly miniscule.

It seems that the *New York Times* was well aware that the events in Boston looked nothing like those which occurred in New York City. On July 18, the *Times* noted that they received communications from cities across the country and the draft was continuing if not concluded in some of them. The article wonders, "How is this? Are there no poor men except in New-York? Has every drafted man '\$300' exemption money, except in this poverty-stricken city? Is the Conscription equal and fair in all other cities, and only a hardship and a tyranny here?"⁴⁴ Poverty was in every major city, it did not just affect New York, and not every conscript had the \$300 fee. Many of the men who were drafted claimed exemptions. In Boston, the event was sparked when a woman got into an argument with a draft marshal. The events then only grew out of excitement as a reaction to being fired upon from inside the Cooper Street armory. If such a strong military presence had not been established there might have been more damage within the city however, that was not the case.

In reports about the riot in the *Pilot*, Boston's Irish Catholic newspaper of the time, there was no connection made to those in New York. While *The Liberator* claimed that the mob consisted of "the lowest and most brutal of the Irish population" and had the agenda of protecting African Americans, the *Pilot* took a different stance.⁴⁵ This newspaper attempted to quiet the race issue and portray Irish Americans as a loyal, religious group.

In New York, Irish workers feared that African Americans would be in competition with them for

⁴¹ Ibid., 49.

⁴² *New York Times*. July 18, 1863.

⁴³ *New York Times*, July 16, 1863.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, July 18, 1863.

⁴⁵ *The Liberator*. July 24, 1863.

work. On July 18, 1863 the *Pilot* printed an article claiming that “if some prefer to employ the black as laborers, domestics, etc., let them do so. They have a perfect right to do so as they please in this respect, and no white man as a right to interfere in the matter.” The article adds, “for our part, we could wish that the black man was employed for all the drudgery in our cities and manufacturing towns, thereby driving the Irish laborer where his services will be rewarded-The GREAT WEST-where he can secure from the tenants of the Know-Nothing, and where he can bring up his children in the faith of his father’s without molestation.”⁴⁶ The Irish Catholics were not only disliked by abolitionist and African Americans during this period, the Know-Nothing party, a nativist movement, believed that Irish Catholics had inundated the country. The Irish Catholics were given a bad reputation and it was only fitting that *The Liberator* attacked this class of people.

The *Pilot* had the responsibility to portray the Irish as loyal compassionate people to combat their terrible distinction. On August 1, 1863, the paper reprinted a letter written to the editor of the *New York Times* entitled, “How Catholics Regard the Late Riot.” The author claimed that “Irish-Americans, even if in the humblest class, bring with them not on particle of prejudice against the colored race. They acquire it here...” and that “practical Catholics...One who attends his church, hearkens to the voice of his Pastor and performs his duties faithfully and regularly...would ever cheerfully sacrifice his life in maintenance of all just authority.” He felt that, “Those so-called Catholics, who disturb the public peace are Catholics only in name....” He concluded that “If our public men would bear in mind these facts, the genuine Catholic people would undoubtedly have no case to complain of criticisms which are unjust and exasperating to a powerful element of our population, ever unswervingly loyal and ever obedient to authority.”⁴⁷ The author felt that the Irish in America had no hatred toward African Americans when they first arrived and if they did now it was gained out of popular American sentiment. The author also concluded that the acts of violence perpetrated in the streets of New York City were not committed by true Catholics. The paper wanted to portray the Irish as law abiding citizens in an attempt to escape some of the blame for the rioting. The *Pilot* attempted to shift opinions about Irish Catholics like those held by Emma Sellev Adams.

Adams remembers the melee in, “A Remembrance of the Boston Draft Riot.” She recalled that the riot being initiated by a woman who was upset at a conscription officer and whom had shouted out of her window to her husband, “to ‘protect himself from the draft.”⁴⁸ Men leaving the gas-house for dinner quickly assembled and chased the officer. After he escaped, the crowd began to beat police officers in the streets. Later, the mob realized they did not have weapons and so they began to attack gun stores.⁴⁹ The mob was growing in size and in the evening began to attack the Cooper Street armory where soldiers had been sent to protect its inventory.⁵⁰ The mob was finally dispersed when the soldiers fired into the crowd.

Adams recalls a few nights later, seeing, “two men wearing large cape-coats,” and being handed a gun which was quickly hidden in their coats. She says that she, “later learned...there was a meeting of

⁴⁶ *The Pilot*, July 18, 1863.

⁴⁷ *The Pilot*, August 1, 1863.

⁴⁸ Emma Sellev Adams, “A Remembrance of the Boston Draft Riot” *The magazine of History with Notes and Queries*. X. (July-December 1909), 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*,38.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*,39.

the rioters that night, but it was dispelled by a Catholic priest..."⁵¹ Adams' recollection of events makes it appear that the mob in Boston was largely comprised of working class men. At his point in the day, many of the men would have been at work and unable to join the protest. In various testimonies, people cited that the crowd primarily consisted of women and children. Patrick Gould testified that he saw a "crowd composed mostly of women and boys."⁵² Ora May Jr. claimed that he witnessed "a large crowd of children...firing bricks." Geo. W. Talbot had testified that he "saw a crowd of youngsters firing bricks...a little girl, 10 or 12 years old, throwing bricks and stones."⁵³ Adams also makes it appear that the main perpetrators of the mischief were Catholic and needed the guidance of a priest to be quelled. The blame for the riot fell heavily on the shoulders of the Irish Catholics.

While Adams may have believed this event to be a clear opposition to the draft perpetrated by working class Irish men, not everyone felt similarly. An anonymous author, claiming to be a "North End mechanic" postulated that the events began early on when a conscription officer got into an argument when he told a woman that her husband was going to be drafted. The argument got out of hand and a crowd consisting of mainly women and children gathered around. Police soon arrived and took some members of the crowd and went to the police station a few streets away. Throughout the day, many more officers crowded into the station, which only fed the curiosity of the crowd outside. "The Plain Man" believed that at this point, had the mayor made an appearance and dispersed the crowd, the excitement would have ended. He also felt that if these officers had orders they could have successfully broken up the crowd but instead they sat idle.⁵⁴ The crowd was interested in what was occurring inside the police station but the officers never acted. The mob had no political motivation and was just waiting for something to happen. "The Plain Man" felt that when the authorities did finally act it was with too much of a heavy hand; he felt innocent women and children, his neighbors, had been unjustly murdered. He believed that the citizens of the North End did nothing wrong.

Mayor Lincoln was associated with the Republican Party and the way in which the anonymous writer criticized him indicates that he most likely aligned himself with the Democratic Party. He believed that if the mayor had acted when more police went to the station on Hanover Street, the events never would have escalated and blood would not have been shed. At one point he wrote "long previous to this His Honor the Mayor had been notified of the existing state of things; but he did not make his appearance. The captain of the station sought for instructions...but neither His Honor the Mayor nor his Chief was to be found." He continued to add that "even at the late period of 7 P.M. had His Honor the Mayor been present to read the Riot Act...order would have been restored."⁵⁵ When he referred to the mayor as "His Honor the Mayor" it is in regards to actions the mayor may or may not have taken that do not appear so honorable to the "Plain Man." The author recalled the Broad Street Riot of 1837 in which he took part. He claimed, "the Hon. S.A. Eliot, Mayor, appeared at the scene of the riot, MOUNTED, in charge of his Police force... The first thing he did was to read the Riot Act, and ordered the rioters to disperse. He suppressed the disturbances

⁵¹ Ibid.,40.

⁵² A Plain Man.,10.

⁵³ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁴ A Plain Man., 4.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 4.

and dispersed the mob in a few hours...under his own eye..."⁵⁶ He added that, "as a *Bostonian*, he feels pride in carrying back his memory to the recollection of the firmness and manly bearing of these noble specimens of true manhood."⁵⁷ Previous mayors had acted properly in similar situations which defined them as strong leaders and better examples of men. To this North End mechanic, Mayor Lincoln was of no comparison to his predecessors.

Mayor Lincoln knew of the events in New York and did not want the city of Boston to fall into a similar state. The mayor wrote that he, "had entire confidence in the character and efficiency of [Boston's] own Police...but [he] believed that the emergency had arisen when it was necessary to call upon a military force to aid them in the support of good order."⁵⁸ He believed that a military presence was needed to prevent a major disaster. Mayor Lincoln said this in an address to the city council in which he called for the treasury to assist the financial burden some of the Massachusetts soldiers faced during the war. He could not come outright and say that the police force was weak but in fact, they were. Before military forces were ordered into the city, the mob attacked police officers in the street. Several officers were sent to the scene of the gathering in front of the police station and en route, "they were confronted by an angry mob of two hundred or more throwing bricks and bottles. At least three police men were seriously injured..."⁵⁹ The police attempted to disperse the mob but they had no success. Emma Sellew Adams in her remembrance of the event recalled a policeman who was, "kicked and pounded" by a group. Adams believed that the mob targeted their violence on police when they could not find the "conscript-man" who was the original victim.⁶⁰ By all accounts the police were unable to hold their own in the streets of Boston on July 14, 1863. According to William Hanna, the residents of the North End assumed that the woman from the earlier dispute had been arrested and their gathering in front of the station house was an attempt to rescue her. Since she was not returned to the crowd from the station house, it is reasonable to suspect that the attacks on the police were displays of their anger for her arrest. In the early stages of this event it was several policemen versus a couple hundred unruly people. A police force was not strong enough to return order to the city like the North End mechanic believed.

Later in the day, troops appeared in the neighborhood and were ordered to guard the armory on Cooper Street. The mob followed these soldiers from the police station to the armory, where they began to cause more trouble. When describing the events of July 14, the "Plain Man" is able to express the feelings and character of the mob better than most other commentators. In doing so, he is able to figure out what was really going on in the city. The author wrote that "the street was left full of noisy, purposeless, men, women and children, without any leading spirit or object."⁶¹ The group had no target, goal, or ambition. These people had left their homes looking for excitement. He believed that the appearance of several police officers could have broken the crowd; instead, none appeared. Had they arrived, the group would have returned to their homes, but they never acted. He continued to add that, "at this time the mob

⁵⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁸ Frederic Lincoln, *Mayor's Communication Respecting the Control of the Recent Riot*. City of Boston. City Document No. 75. (Boston: July 23, 1863), 3.

⁵⁹ Hanna, 264.

⁶⁰ Adams., 38.

⁶¹ A Plain Man, 5.

appeared to have no special grievance or object in view; no allusions to the hardships of the draft were made by them; no wrongs were complained of; no special acts of violence were proposed..."⁶² These people were not gathered in protest of the Conscription Act, they did not hold up anti-draft signs like the rioters in New York, and these men, women, and children did not plan to attack conscription officers, conscriptions offices, or any other symbol of the draft. He wrote that these people were gathered without a purpose and were "prompted more by a love of fun than a desire for serious mischief."⁶³ The mob was looking for a good time. In the eyes of this North End mechanic, the attacks on policemen were rogue and not important. As people passed the crowd in front of the police station they joined in attempting to see what was going on. As the day progressed, nothing happened and so they waited and more people joined. The events of the day do not seem a cry for political justice but rather a group of young people in search of excitement.

Major Cabot felt that he and his men were in danger, so he ordered one of the large guns inside of the armory placed in front of the door to be fired. The mob had scattered and several people were wounded. After this the "Plain Man" said the mob became "infuriated" and began to attack gun stores in search of arms to protect themselves.⁶⁴ The author believed the crowd would not have been there had someone read them a Riot Act and no one would have died.⁶⁵ The "Plain Man" blamed the Mayor and other civil authorities for the events of that night; had they taken prompt action things would not have gotten out of hand. If the mayor had appeared and put an end to the excitement the crowd would have dispersed. If the mob was truly gathered in protest against the draft it would have taken much more than a Riot Act to separate them. The Plain Man believes "that the citizens of Boston are loyal to the Constitution [and] the Union...and there was no intention on their part to resist the draft...It was an accidental gathering without object, with no reference to the draft..." He believed that the crowd was not joined in protest; they supported the government. This North End mechanic added that "the unnecessary call for troops by the Mayor, and the unfortunate appearance in Cooper Street, was the sole cause of the gathering of the mob *there*, as well as the shedding of blood, the rush to the gun stores was a natural consequence after the firing."⁶⁶ The mob followed the soldiers to the armory because that is where the excitement was located. A large military presence was sure to draw a crowd in any neighborhood. People felt threatened by such a large force and could not remain calm. When the attacks on the armory occurred, the conscription officers were nowhere to be found. It is reasonable to conclude that these attacks were in protest against such a large military presence in the Irish neighborhood and to gain weapons to defend themselves from these soldiers. Those who were looking for fun went too far in their search.

By reviewing various newspapers and accounts regarding the events of July 14, 1863 in Boston, it is clear that this "draft riot" looked nothing like the one in New York. In Boston, only one conscription officer was attacked and there were no attacks on African Americans, the wealthy, or Republican symbolism. Historians have been quick to make connections between the two events that do not exist. They have attempted to assess the Boston riot in political terms but politics played only a minor role, if

⁶² Ibid., 5

⁶³ Ibid., 5

⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 8-9.

any at all. The Boston “draft riot” was a gathering without purpose or leadership. It took a turn for the worse when Major Stephen Cabot marched his men through the North End and fired upon the crowd through the closed doors of the armory. While the scholarship of this event has been overshadowed by the riot occurring in New York City, it seems understandably so.

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