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LOW LIFE & HIGH JINKS: RACE, ETHNICITY, AND POLITICS IN EDWARD
HARRIGAN'S MULLIGAN GUARD PLAYS, 1879-1883

by

SEAN PATRICK BOYLE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Dissertation Director:
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To understand the nuances, contradictions, and levels of agency in immigrant and African-American working class communities, this thesis examines the musical theater of Edward Harrigan, an American playwright whose plays were novel for their sympathetic portrayals of working-class Irish immigrants. I analyze three of Harrigan's popular plays in his *Mulligan Guard* series, the *Mulligan Guard Ball*, the *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, and *Cordelia's Aspirations*. Due to Harrigan's emphasis on realism, the plays offer insight into the complex racial and ethnic negotiations and political machinations of the working class in Gilded Age New York. I contend that they illustrate contestations over shared urban space between the Irish, Germans, and African Americans, where they engage in dialectic relationships that swayed from friendship to animosity, from collaboration to rivalry. The plays also illuminate working-class perspectives of Tammany's political machine. Juxtaposed against middle-brow representations of the machine in political cartoons by Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler, Harrigan's works show the machine as an important avenue of social mobility rather than as a threat to American republicanism. Harrigan's plays show complexity in interethnic relations

while offering subtle critiques of Tammany's excesses and demonstrate the importance of practical politics over ideology for the working class.

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INTRODUCTION

“We recognize in Mr. Harrigan’s work the spring of a true American comedy, the beginning of things which may be great things.”¹

In the mid-19th century, Edward Harrigan produced revolutionary musical theater that embraced New York’s diverse immigrant culture, offering his audience humorous looks at the joys and conflicts of urban life. Unique among his peers, Harrigan lacked the reformer’s condescension towards the working class. Instead, he showed laboring people’s intricacies, humor, and especially their humanity. His *Mulligan Guard* series of musicals brought him fame, riches, and the adoration of the Irish-American community. The *Mulligan Guard* plays offer insights into working-class New York at a critical junction in American history. Two decades after the horror of the draft riots, which included atrocities such as an Irish mob torching an African-American orphanage, Harrigan illustrated the contentious but often amicable relationships between European immigrants and African Americans. He highlighted the German-Irish rivalry of the 1870s and 1880s and its subsequent decline as new immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe arrived in the city. Lastly, juxtaposed against mainstream political cartoons, the *Mulligan Guard* series offers insight into how the working class viewed the Tammany machine, its operation of patronage, and the personal relationships that developed through it. I argue that Harrigan’s desire for realism, while ultimately skewed by his own experiences, illustrated the complexities of race, ethnicity, and politics in working-class New York.

Two significant biographies of Harrigan exist, each offering unique perspectives on his career and life. E.J. Kahn, Jr.’s 1955 book, *The Merry Partners: The Age and*

¹ William Dean Howells, “Editor’s Study,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, July, 1886, 316.

Stage of Harrigan and Hart, is a history of the theatrical career of Harrigan and his partner Tony Hart. Kahn, Jr.'s long career at *The New Yorker* provides his work with a journalistic edge, more descriptive than analytic. He almost solely focuses on Harrigan and Hart's years as performers rather than their years outside of the theater business. Published twenty five years later, Richard Moody's *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear's Hook to Herald Square* expands the scope on inquiry into Harrigan's childhood and ancestry to his death. Both books are popular press biographies but offer scholars immense background on the playwright and his productions.

Harrigan has been a useful subject for scholars of race, ethnicity, and theater. In *From the Bowery to Broadway: Lew Fields and the Roots of American Popular Theater*, Armond and L. Marc Fields argue Harrigan's importance in elevating "the dialect act from a crude caricature into a disarmingly effective tool for social commentary."²

William H. A. Williams's *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland & the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920* follows the Fields' argument that Harrigan turned away from the crudeness of earlier ethnic descriptions, illustrating that Harrigan was one of the few playwrights and lyricists who presented positive qualities of the Irish people.³ In *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*, Robert C. Toll contends that Harrigan's sympathetic portrayals of the Irish, showing their diversity, humanity, and depth, overshadowed the simplistic and hackneyed portrayals of the Irish in the minstrel shows.⁴ While Harrigan may have elevated the portrayal of the

² Armond Fields and L. Marc Fields, *From the Bowery to Broadway: Lew Fields and the Roots of American Popular Theater*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 50.

³ William H. A. Williams, *'Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland & the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 158.

⁴ Robert C. Toll, *Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 177-178.

Irish, in *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity: Celtic Soul Brothers*, Lauren Onkey argues that his works privileged them and reinforced Irish superiority over African Americans.⁵ As scholars of race and ethnicity have found Harrigan's works to be fruitful, so have historians of theater. Trained as a folklorist, Mick Moloney in "Harrigan, Hart, and Braham: Irish America and the Birth of the American Musical," offers a compelling argument for Harrigan, Tony Hart, and David Braham's influence on the creation of the modern three-part musical.⁶

I build off this existing scholarship and expand the scope of inquiry into Harrigan's works. His portrayals of racial and ethnic negotiations show a complexity that fluctuated between extremes, which belies one-dimensional narratives of interethnic conflict or camaraderie. Scholars have also identified Mulligan's references to Tammany, but I connect his works to historical events and people, and situate his works in context with mainstream depictions of New York's machine politics. In this essay, I analyze three of Harrigan's most popular musicals in his *Mulligan Guard* series. Harrigan's first foray into long-form comedies, the *Mulligan Guard Ball* popularized the Mulligan family and their tumultuous lives in the Lower East Side. *The Mulligan Guard Nominee* highlighted political and racial contestation of urban space, and *Cordelia's Aspirations* focused on immigrant social mobility and community. In the next section, I provide a short biography of Harrigan followed by summaries of his three plays and his theatrical philosophy of realism. In the two subsequent chapters, I analyze Harrigan's depictions of racial and ethnic interactions along with his portrayal of local politics.

⁵ Lauren Onkey, *Blackness and Transatlantic Irish Identity: Celtic Soul Brothers*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 68-69.

⁶ Mick Moloney, "Harrigan, Hart, and Braham: Irish America and the Birth of the American Musical," in *Irish Theater in America: Essays on Irish Theatrical Diaspora*, ed. John Harrington (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

Biography

“Win I am a man; I don’t give a damn; But will be an actor.”

-Edward Harrigan, childhood poem.⁷

Edward “Ned” Harrigan’s was born on October 26th, 1844, in the Corlear’s Hook section of New York City. Known for its shipping industry, it was likely more known for its prevalence of thievery and prostitution.⁸ By the time of Harrigan’s birth, Corlear’s Hook was home to some of the poorest New Yorkers and the most destitute and widespread prostitution in the city.⁹ Though not from privilege, Harrigan began life more advantageously than most residents of the Hook. His father, William Harrigan, was a Canadian immigrant whose father emigrated to New Foundland from Cork, Ireland. William Harrigan worked his way up the nautical ladder until abandoning the sea, settling down with his wife, and taking a job as a caulker in New York.¹⁰ Edward Harrigan’s mother, Ellen Harrigan *née* Rogers, was from a nautical family and met her husband while working at her family’s boardinghouse in Norfolk.

While Harrigan’s father was a rather stern working man, his mother inspired his theatrical career. The *New York Evening Post* quotes Harrigan, in his 1911 obituary, responding to a question of where he first learned show business, “it was from her that I learned most of my Negro business and old songs. She had a capital dialect and could

⁷ E.J. Kahn, Jr., *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart*, (New York: Random House, 1955), 111.

⁸ John Russell Bartlett’s *Dictionary of Americanism: A Glossary of Words and Phrases Usually Regarded as Peculiar to the United States*, published in 1859, claimed the slang word for a prostitute, *hooker*, originated from Corlear’s Hook association with prostitution. The Oxford English Dictionary lists *hooker*’s first usage in the 1840s, which fits the timeframe and lends credence to the theory.

⁹ Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1994), 52.

¹⁰ E.J. Kahn, Jr.’s *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart* and Richard Moody’s *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear’s Hook to Herald Square* offer invaluable biographical information from interviews with Harrigan’s family, especially of Harrigan’s early years.

dance and sing ‘Jim Crow’ as well as I ever saw it done.”¹¹ Harrigan’s youth was largely similar to other Irish-American New Yorkers in that the city became more of his educator than did his proper schooling. Harrigan spent much of his childhood exploring the Lower East Side and running errands for locals. He left school at fourteen, but was a passionate reader of poetry and prose.¹² Though his mother encouraged young Ned’s interest in theater by performing minstrel acts at home, Harrigan’s father had little time for dramatic distractions and wanted his son to learn the caulking trade and work as a longshoreman. Edward acquiesced to his father’s wishes and by his late teens began working at the city’s docks, sealing ships’ hulls.

While he initially chose a working man’s future, his interest in minstrelsy, singing, and theater had not declined. Harrigan’s parents divorced in the early 1860s, and his mother moved away to Staten Island. William Harrigan hastily remarried a stern widow who had little interest in her stepchildren.¹³ In 1862, after clashing with his father over a work accident, Harrigan grabbed his banjo, boarded a ship headed towards New Orleans, and joined the crew as a steward. After a brief return to New York, he registered with a ship heading to San Francisco via the Panama Canal. While his interest in theater began in New York, Harrigan commenced his career in the city by the bay.

Upon arriving in San Francisco in 1867, Harrigan continued his vocation as a dock worker, but he also began performing, at first as an amateur and later as a professional, in variety shows, showcasing his singing and acting abilities. After a few short months, Harrigan began working professionally in theaters around the city for the

¹¹ Harrigan obituary, *New York Evening Post*, June 6, 1911, quoted in Richard Moody, *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear’s Hook to Herald Square*, 11.

¹² Kahn, Jr., 110.

¹³ Moody, 14.

next three years. He performed a wide range of roles including blackface, whiteface, and as a woman. He sang songs, and occasionally wrote short skits.¹⁴ In 1870, he teamed up with fellow performers Sam Rickey and Otto Burbank and toured the country as the California Comedians. While in Chicago, Harrigan met Anthony Hart, ten years his junior who had an accomplished falsetto that allowed him to play feminine parts in productions. Richard Moody remarks on Hart, “his female impersonation seemed to come naturally, without any swishy, sissy swing.”¹⁵ Hart’s expertise in mimicking femininity provided a lucrative theatrical foil to Harrigan’s masculine roles. They toured the nation as Harrigan & Hart, performing comedic skits that Harrigan wrote. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* later commented on the duo, “Harrigan and Hart possess something of a kaleidoscopic combination of talent, and the power of their talent is not confined to burlesquing. On the contrary, here and there are expressed pathos and sincere feeling, which is all the more contrasted by the comic delineation of funny characters.”¹⁶

While Hart was Harrigan’s partner on stage, David Braham became more instrumental in Harrigan and Hart’s productions as Harrigan’s creative colleague in 1871. Braham led the orchestra at the Theatre Comique in New York and was a talented composer. Harrigan’s talents laid in his comical writing, less so in musical composition, which is where Braham excelled. Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, Braham and his brothers were the preeminent orchestra leaders in musical theater.¹⁷ Harrigan entered into a partnership with Braham to write music to match his lyrics for his variety

¹⁴ Kahn, Jr., 119.

¹⁵ Moody, 34.

¹⁶ “Greenlaw Operahouse,” *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, January 21, 1876.

¹⁷ Moody, 37.

sketches. This began a lifelong relationship between the two that further developed in 1876 when Harrigan married Braham's daughter Annie.

The majority of Harrigan's skits, songs, and plays developed from themes and scenes from his childhood. Harrigan owed his success and his inspiration to the Lower East Side, where he set the majority of his plays and where he became a cultural icon. He wrote and produced short variety skits and melodramas, but his greatest success was with long form comedic plays, personified by his *Mulligan Guard* series.¹⁸ The characters in his works were largely based on racial and ethnic stereotypes, though the Irish received a wider range of characters than African Americans and ethnic whites.¹⁹ Harrigan's affection towards fellow Irish Americans is apparent in his works and this led to a less hackneyed presentation of them. His stories often revolve around comedic interactions between the Irish, Germans, African Americans, and to a lesser extent Jews that regularly climaxed in free-for-alls.

Harrigan's greatest success began in 1879 with his performance of *Mulligan Guard Ball*, a follow-up to a shorter non-extant skit from years prior. The play was a rousing success, running for 153 performances, which Richard Moody argues was an astonishingly long run on Broadway at the time.²⁰ Indeed, fourteen of Harrigan's plays ran would later go on to run over one hundred times each.²¹ In the following two years, Harrigan wrote and performed six new installments of the beloved Mulligan series and numerous spin-offs that continued the exploits of the protagonists from *Mulligan Guard Ball*, Dan and Cordelia Mulligan. Hart's enjoyment of their success was short-lived

¹⁸ Alicia Kae Koger, "An Edward Harrigan Biography: Part I. Playscripts," in *19th Century Theatre* 19, no. 1, (Summer, 1991), 29-44.

¹⁹ Howells, 315-316.

²⁰ Moody, 87.

²¹ Koger, 29.

though, as he fell out with Harrigan, suffered from debilitating illnesses, and died of complications from syphilis in 1891.

By the 1890s, with the change in immigration patterns from Ireland and Germany towards Poland, Russia, and Italy, Harrigan's stock characters no longer fit the ethnic makeup of the urban milieu. Harrigan had occasional successful revivals but they were fleeting as his newer plays failed to draw an audience. With his career on the decline, Harrigan stopped performing in 1909 after a sudden illness and died two years later. Though his songs and plays were extraordinarily popular in the 1880s, enough to be referenced by Rudyard Kipling in his novel *Kim*, by the time of Harrigan's death he was merely a faded memory to all but the most fervent of his Irish-American supporters.

Mulligan Guard Ball – 1879

Living in Mulligan's Alley, a section of the Lower East Side of New York City, a local Saloon owner named Dan Mulligan is organizing a ball for the former and present members of the Mulligan Guard. The Guard is a fraternal organization dedicated to target shooting. Mulligan's primary job is as a common laborer at a coal plant. He just recently was able to obtain a mortgage on a saloon and a couple tenements. Dan's son, Tommy, wants to marry Kitty Lochmuller, the daughter of a German butcher and Irishwoman. Dan protests the intended marriage as he will not suffer any German blood in his family. The owner of the facility where Mulligan's ball will be, accidentally double booked the room with an African American target company's ball. Tommy Mulligan arranges with Kitty Lochmuller to secretly marry during the ball. The Irish Mulligan Guard begin their celebration at the hall but the Skidmore Guard appear and they almost come to blows over rights to the space. The hall's owner apologizes and offers the

Skidmore Guard the upstairs room and both groups are happy with the resolution until the second level's floor collapses and a great melee erupts between both groups. The play ends with Tommy and Kitty announcing their marriage. Dan and his wife Cordelia, along with Kitty's father, reluctantly accept their children's decision.

Mulligan Guard Nominee – 1880

Dan Mulligan and Gustavus Lochmuller run as opponents in an election for Alderman. Mulligan courts Irish, Italian, and African American votes. He promises the Skidmore Guard that once elected he will consolidate their group into the New York State National Guard. Lochmuller's Irish wife, Bridget, arrives back from a trip to Ireland with a cryptic note addressed to her local Irish women's group, the Nightingales. Undercover British investigators, fearing Bridget Lochmuller is a messenger for Irish Nationalists attempting to acquire firearms, infiltrate Mulligan Alley and its largely Irish inhabitants. Mulligan easily wins the election over Lochmuller and the British agents fear an expansive subversive network in New York. An important member of the Nightingales, Cordelia Mulligan loses the encoded note from Ireland when her black servant steals it. The British investigators eventually find the note and confront the Mulligan's and the Nightingales with its contents. What they ostensibly thought was proof of providing weapons to Irish Nationalists in Canada was actually a list of clothing that the women were to steal from their husbands to send to Irish revolutionaries in Ontario. The play ends in a melee between the characters as the British realize the women were doing nothing illegal.

Cordelia's Aspirations – 1883

The Mulligans have now acquired considerable wealth through Dan's real estate purchases but still live in the working-class neighborhood of Mulligan's Alley. Cordelia Mulligan arrives back from a trip to Europe with her brother Planxty, and three sisters. Under the leadership of Planxty, Cordelia's sisters lie about their wealth when they are actually quite poor. Cordelia desires to live the high life like her siblings and plans to move from Mulligan's Alley to Madison Avenue. All of Dan and Cordelia's property is in her name and Dan reluctantly acquiesces to her and decides to sell his house and move uptown. Planxty creates a scheme to make Cordelia believe Dan was unfaithful to get her to sign her property over to him. Upon hearing of Dan's supposed infidelity, Cordelia drinks what she thought was rat poison, but was actually whiskey and gets drunk. Planxty brings a local lawyer with and has Cordelia sign her property away to him. Unbeknownst to Planxty, the lawyer was friends with Dan Mulligan and wrote Dan's name on the paperwork instead. Cordelia's sister betrays Planxty and admits to the ruse. Cordelia begs Dan for his forgiveness. Dan embraces his wife, with their property in his name now, and throws Planxty out of the house.

Realism

In his *Mulligan Guard* series of plays, Edward Harrigan strove to create a realistic depiction of working-class life in the tenements, saloons, and halls of downtown New York City. He described his scenery as "a series of photographs of life to-day in the Empire City. As examples, the barroom in one of the Mulligan series was copied from a saloon in Roosevelt Street, the opium den in Investigation from a 'joint' in Pell Street, and the 'dive' in Waddy Googan from an establishment in the neighborhood of the

Bowery.”²² The men and women who populated the plays were formulations of the Irish, African Americans, and Germans who lived in the city. Harrigan noted that “Though I use types and never individuals, I try to be as realistic as possible. Not only must the costuming and accessories be correct, but the speech or dialect, the personal ‘make-up,’ the vices and virtues, habits and customs, must be equally accurate in their similarity to the facts.”²³

Harrigan’s self-professed realism has been a contentious topic for scholars. Richard Moody claims that Harrigan was the first playwright to have deep working-class characters “set against a true-to-life panorama of New York’s Lower East Side.”²⁴ Mick Moloney asserts Harrigan’s characters were “highly realistic,” though he believes the playwright ignored some of the more egregious aspects of working class life.²⁵ In line with these more traditional accounts, William H. A. Williams maintains Harrigan’s realistic depiction of characters and setting, but notes realism had little influence on his plots.²⁶ Two scholars dispute Harrigan’s profession of realism. James H. Dormon argues that instead of portraying descriptive reality, Harrigan formed caricatures based on stereotypes that became ascriptive reality “in the form of the ‘ethnic cultures of the mind.’”²⁷ Lauren Onkey builds off of Dormon’s argument and argues that Harrigan idealized his Irish characters and demonized his Black ones.²⁸ Though Dormon and Onkey highlight the dangers of taking depictions too literally, I argue that Harrigan’s did

²² Edward Harrigan, “American Playwrights on the American Drama,” *Harper’s Weekly*, February 2, 1889, 98.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Moody, 99.

²⁵ Moloney, 9-11.

²⁶ Williams, 160.

²⁷ James H. Dormon, “Ethnic Cultures of the Mind: The Harrigan-Hart Mosaic,” *American Studies* 33 no. 2 (1992): 22.

²⁸ Onkey, 68-70.

portray the urban milieu more accurately than his contemporaries, even though his depictions clearly favored the Irish. Harrigan's works are not exact replications of racial and ethnic relations but are a qualified realism that offers insight into the nuanced relationships and bidirectional power structures in working-class New York.

Harrigan described his works as having a "peculiar polyglot character," emanating from their variety of ethnic characters.²⁹ Instead of relying on one ethnic group, he created a panoramic view of working-class New York. Though Harrigan had German characters and smaller roles for Italians and Jews, he largely focused on the Irish and African Americans. He defended his choice, saying "if I have given undue prominence to the Irish and negro, it is because they form about the most salient features of Gotham humanity, and also because they are the two races who care the most for song and dance."³⁰ Appealing to the downtrodden with his characters was risky, as he was unsure they would fill his theater seats. E.J. Kahn, Jr. remarked, "Harrigan was in the habit of deploring, half-jestingly, that they wouldn't come to his theatre because the incidents he showed on stage were indistinguishable from what they experienced at home."³¹ His fears subsided, as the "low-life" crowd flocked to his productions in the early to mid-1880s. In Harrigan's plays, Mick Moloney argues, "urban America was seeing itself comprehensively represented on the popular stage for the first time."³²

Harrigan's choice of characters made him unique in Gilded Age theater. He was not the first American playwright to depict the poor, but he was the first popular entertainment that sympathized with them. He explained why he chose them rather than

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Kahn, Jr., 13.

³² Moloney, 9.

traditional bourgeois characters, “polite society, wealth, and culture possess little or no color and picturesque. The chief use I make of them is as a foil to the poor, the workers, and the great middle class.”³³ The Victorian bourgeoisie, with an emphasis on restraint and moderation, offered theater patrons boring characters. The working class’s “trials and troubles, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are more varied and more numerous than those of the Upper Ten.”³⁴ Instead of what Harrigan saw as unrealistic dispassion, his characters emanated all the emotions and vitality of real life.

In using these characters, Harrigan disputed bourgeois circumscribed perceptions of the poor as belligerent brutes. He argued that though human nature “is most virile and aggressive among those who know only poverty and ignorance. It is also then the most humorous and odd.”³⁵ Harrigan noted that the mainstream’s view of the poor as violent, debauched, and criminal became a stereotype that did not show their humor and depth as dramatic characters. He argues that a “true realist” above all “will portray the fact that right-doing, kindness, and good-nature are in the majority” of the working class.³⁶ Harrigan’s personal experiences growing up in Corlear’s Hook gave him insight into the general nature of the community that middle-class culture ignored, which focused instead on salacious criminality. Appealing to readers to look beyond superficial depictions of the working class, Harrigan stated, “though there are shams everywhere to be pricked and ridiculed, and humbugs to be exposed and laughed out of existence, these are only

³³ Harrigan, “American Playwrights on the American Dream,” 98.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

incidents which, though they appear and disappear incessantly, are not parts of the real humanity beneath.”³⁷

Some critics apparently took umbrage with Harrigan’s mundane world. In 1888, *Life* magazine satirized their position in a humor piece, complaining that Harrigan’s “plots do not depend upon innate depravity and feminine weakness, as they should if Mr. Harrigan were a worthy disciple in the French school of drama.”³⁸ He also does not offer lush, exotic scenery but “insists on confining his works to types and scenes familiar to us all.”³⁹ The piece concludes, bemoaning the type of characters that Harrigan continually uses:

“Another fatal defect in Mr. Harrigan as a dramatist is the vulgar station in life occupied by his characters...What has the New York theatre going public to do with vulgar hackmen, gamblers, police sergeants, and the like? The characters may be accurate reproductions of the real thing, but they are beneath notice-and yet, all kinds of New York people pay to go see them, and seem to be amused by the characteristic talk Mr. Harrigan puts in their mouths.”⁴⁰

Life’s satire sheds light on criticism of Harrigan’s works. With characters too familiar and too ordinary, Harrigan’s plays did not fit into traditional concepts of theater. The absence of theatrical indulgences reinforces Harrigan’s contention that his works tried to depict a realist view of working-class New York.

While Harrigan’s theatrical productions evinced a realism that was not often found on the American stage, they did obscure some of the darker sides of working-class life. As any artistic expression of reality that strives for authenticity, Harrigan’s works fall short. Moloney notes that while Harrigan embraced realism, he mitigated it by

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “Drama: An Alleged Dramatist,” *Life*, October 4, 1888, 192.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

avoiding the most egregious aspects of urban life, the violence and disease.⁴¹ Harrigan does not show the high rates of infant mortality or adult disease that afflicted the area, but he does incorporate ethnic and racial violence in his *Mulligan Guard* plays. He tempers the violence though through humor that obscures the imminent threat of hostility that perennially simmered in New York.

⁴¹ Moloney, 10.

CHAPTER ONE – RACE AND ETHNICITY IN HARRIGAN’S *MULLIGAN GUARD* PLAYS.

In the *Mulligan Guard* series, Harrigan depicted complex and interrelated personal networks of various ethnicities and races. Though Harrigan’s works are fiction, they can inform scholars of the ethnic and racial tensions, rivalries, and friendships that developed in working-class neighborhoods of New York City. He did not present a cheerful utopian vision of race relations, obfuscating interracial disputes, xenophobia, and racism, but instead he aimed to mirror the interactions he saw in the city. The plays contain these tensions but also illustrate relationships between Irish, German, and African-American characters that showed friendships, exchanges, and cooperation. Punctuated by occasional brawls, these ethnic groups, living in close quarters, developed personal affections and camaraderie that could transcend their perceived differences. While undoubtedly the two groups clashed, both physically and verbally, with Europeans holding the dominant position, their relationships were more nuanced than a simple caricature. My study shows a dialectic between friendship and rivalry, between cooperation and violence, that formed the intricate connections between working-class immigrants and African-Americans in Gilded Age New York.

Minstrelsy

Minstrelsy, more than any other theatrical influence, was fundamental to Harrigan’s career on stage. From a young age, Harrigan learned to minstrel walk from his mother and caricatures of African Americans became a staple of his routine. His use of minstrelsy was typical of his time, as blackface caught Americans’ and Europeans’ fascination in the 19th century like no other form of entertainment. A uniquely American cultural product, minstrelsy remained for fifty years in the mid-nineteenth century, the

most popular form of entertainment in the United States.¹ The Irish became substantive parts of American minstrelsy due to their musical heritage and their legacy in British theater as low comedy caricatures.² Eric Lott argues that Harrigan was the “classic expression” of the Irish-Black overlap that developed in the minstrel show.³

Blackface developed in the United States in the early 19th century and its popularity rested on whites’ conflicted identities. George Rawick argues that in the early American republic, racism grew fervently among nascent capitalists because blackness represented the life that they had to give up but still desired.⁴ The racist created a black foil to his bourgeois existence, forming a “pornography of his former life...in order to insure that he will not slip back into the old ways or act out half-suppressed fantasies, he must see a tremendous difference between his reformed self and those whom he formerly resembled.”⁵ David Roediger builds upon this idea in his book the *Wages of Whiteness* to help explain why blackface exploded in popularity during the 1830s and how it related to white identity. He argues that the white working class personified their preindustrial identity that they were conflicted about, both despising and desiring it, in blackface performances.⁶ Roediger notes that this coincided with the segregation of white and black gatherings in the northern cities by local municipalities, thus creating a grotesque white working-class construct of blackness.⁷

¹ Toll.

² Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 95.

³ Ibid.

⁴ George P. Rawick, *From Sundown to Sunup: The Making of the Black Community*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1972), 132.

⁵ Rawick, quoted in David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (New York: Verso, 2007), 95.

⁶ Ibid., 97.

⁷ Ibid., 104.

Minstrel acts relied on exaggeration and extremes to please their audiences. White men used burnt cork to blacken their faces and created larger-than-life eyes and mouths. Some minstrel troupes would perform effervescent comedy skits accompanied by songs and dances, while others aimed to tug at their audiences heart strings with maudlin sentimentality. Blackface performer Stephen Foster wrote numerous minstrel songs that evoked romantic love sans lust, gratified slaves, and familial love. Toll contends that songs like these “created an idealized world that had all the virtues that Northern society seemed to lack.”⁸ In line with Roediger, Toll contends that blackface expressed more about whiteness than blackness.

For the next four decades, minstrel shows grew in popularity from their origins as a working-man’s culture to their acclaim across class boundaries. Robert C. Toll called early minstrelsy the “common man’s culture.”⁹ Up until the Civil War, New York City was the stronghold of minstrelsy, with its popularity high in the northeast.¹⁰ Traditional minstrel shows declined by the late 1870s, with only one minstrel group still touring.¹¹ Armond and L. Marc Fields argue that even with its decline, minstrelsy survived as a strong influence in vaudeville, as Blues survived in Rock and Roll and Jazz.¹² The vestiges, working-class theater with songs, comedy, and light-hearted unpretentious skits followed through in Harrigan’s *Mulligan’s Guard* series.

In the following sections I will analyze the three *Mulligan Guard* plays and their depictions of interactions between the races and ethnicities that form the Lower East Side of New York. Other scholars have found Harrigan’s depictions of inter-ethnic relations

⁸ Toll, 37.

⁹ Ibid., 3-4.

¹⁰ Ibid., 32.

¹¹ Fields and Fields, 26.

¹² Ibid., 27.

as a fruitful topic of study. Alicia Kae Koger argues the Irish, German, and African-American characters in Harrigan's plays lived as "relative equals."¹³ William H. A. Williams does not argue for equality, but does contend that Harrigan was the first writer to acknowledge a sense of community existed even among ethnic and racial tensions.¹⁴ Mick Moloney postulates that the interethnic conflict in the plays could have been cathartic for "audiences experiencing the day-to-day stress of adjusting to new neighbors in unfamiliar surroundings."¹⁵ Lauren Onkey contends that Harrigan's plays show a continuous threat of interracial violence that set boundaries and circumscribed African Americans as inferiors.¹⁶ My work builds off of Williams's nuanced view of ethnic relations in Harrigan's works. Using a dialectic framework, the *Mulligan Guard* plays provide insight into the complex and often contradictory relationships at work between the Irish, Germans, and African Americans.

Irish, Germans, and Italians

The relationship between Dan Mulligan and Gustavus Lochmuller is at the heart of the *Mulligan Guard* series. It evolves through the three plays in this study, from outright hostility to solidarity. Throughout there is a tense bond between the two even while at odds over family issues or politics. They mirrored the larger interactions in the city between the Irish and the Germans, which were by far the two most populous immigrant groups in the city during the 1880s, making up about 40% of the population. Irishmen competed with Germans for labor, especially after the liberalizing of trade

¹³ Alicia Kae Koger, "A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan's Comedy," Ph.D. dissertation, (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984), 170.

¹⁴ Williams, 164.

¹⁵ Moloney, 9.

¹⁶ Onkey, 70.

licensing in the 1850s.¹⁷ In addition to economics, they also competed spiritually. The Irish quickly dominated the American Catholic Church, spurring resentment from Germans who felt the Irish sought to extinguish their culture.¹⁸ Mulligan and Lochmuller personify the rivalry and friendships that the Irish and Germans fostered, a dialectic that is acted out on the theatrical stage.

Harrigan's first foray into three-act long musical comedies, the *Mulligan Guard Ball*, features a contentious relationship between Mulligan and his neighbor Lochmuller. Mulligan is frequently belligerent with the German butcher throughout the play, constantly threatening him with violence. Mulligan's complicated dynamic with Lochmuller largely rests on Mulligan's son Tommy's desire to marry Lochmuller's daughter, Kitty. In the play, Dan tells Tommy that he is friends with Lochmuller but intermarriage with his family was beyond the pale:

MULLIGAN. Lochmuller's a friend of mine.

...

MULLIGAN. I sour on no one Tommy but before I'd see you throw yourself away in a dutch family I'd tie a stone around me feet and anchor off the Battery. And I'm not too ould but what I could lick any Dutchman.¹⁹

Mulligan's complicated rapport with Lochmuller is evident in this passage. They are friends but there is underlying hostility that overflows when Tommy tells his father that he wants to marry Kitty. Mulligan's temper rapidly spurs him to threats. Later in the

¹⁷ Bruce Nelson, *Irish Nationalists and the Making of the Irish Race*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 70.

¹⁸ Marvin R. O'Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church*, (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988), 221-223.

¹⁹ Harrigan's characters uses the common term "Dutch" instead of "German" to describe German speaking people, derived from the anglicization of *Deutsch*, Edward Harrigan, "Mulligan Guard's Ball," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, act 1, 21-22.

play he opines, “Before I’d allow my boy to marry a dutch girl, I’d lick every dutchmen.”²⁰

Though she did not share Mulligan’s penchant for fisticuffs, Cordelia Mulligan also expressed dismay at the thought Tommy would marry a German. Cordelia sternly addresses her son, “Tommy, understand me. The name of Mulligan will never be varnished wid the name of Lochmuller. The divil (sic) a drop of dutch blood will ever enter the family and I want you to understand.”²¹ For Dan Mulligan to allow Tommy’s marriage to a German-Irish woman, he had to establish his dominance over all German men. Cordelia’s opposition was less gendered, but equally as forceful, under no circumstances could intermarriage with Germans taint their bloodline.

Kitty Lochmuller’s parents also had strong feelings about her proposed marriage to Tommy. After Dan Mulligan’s outburst against the idea of marriage, Lochmuller mounted a defense of his daughter. Lochmuller declares, “Mister Mulligan, I’m nothing but a german, and you have insulted my Katrina. So now make up your words good.”²² Tommy then tries to quell the situation as Lochmuller and Mulligan prepare to fight:

MULLIGAN. But I can lick him.
LOCHMULLER. Maybe, I’m not afraid.²³

Mulligan again tries to ensure his family’s ethnic purity through fighting and Lochmuller appears willing to reciprocate. Unlike the Irish characters who demeaned the Germans, Lochmuller only defends his daughter’s honor and does not criticize the Irish, possibly provoking sympathy from the audience for the less belligerent German. While he does

²⁰ Ibid., act 1, 95.

²¹ Ibid., act 1, 20.

²² Ibid., act 1, 22.

²³ Ibid., act 1, 24.

not want Kitty to marry an Irishman, he avoids denigrating them. Instead he advocates that Kitty marries a German singer, Mr. Kline.

Lochmuller's wife, Bridget, disagrees with her husband's choice for suitor, providing a warning to interethnic couples. Bridget is an Irishwoman who fears that her daughter could make the same mistake she did when she married Lochmuller. She tells her husband, "I'd never allow my daughter to marry a Dutchman. Her mother threw herself away on a German Butcher when she could have married an Irish Sholdier."^(sic)²⁴ Unlike Gustavus's critique of the proposed betrothal, Bridget has no problem ironically disparaging Irish-German marriages even though she married a German. Through these characters Harrigan illustrates that intermarriages, even between friendly families, could be anathema for Irish and Germans. Notwithstanding the cultural aversion toward exogamic marriage, Harrigan concludes his play with Tommy and Kitty surprising their parents by announcing they got married. Love, specifically interethnic love, in the end won over cultural rivalry. Tommy and Kitty's parents accepted the marriage, happy for their children, enshrining the continual dialectic in the Irish-German relationship. Though interethnic love was contentious, it could also wed, literally and figuratively, the two groups together.

Tommy and Kitty's parents' initial resistance to exogamic marriage aligns with the marriage trends of Irish and German immigrants in the late 19th century. According to John R. Logan and Hyoung-jin Shin's analysis of the 1880 national census, intermarriages between the Irish and the Germans were rare. While the Irish were more likely to marry outside of their ethnicity than Germans, their marriage rate to Germans

²⁴ Ibid, act 2, 48.

was much lower than other groups, only 3.5% for Irish men and 3.2% for Irish women.²⁵ German women married Irish men at a rate of 1.5%.²⁶ Both groups were over twice as likely to marry a “native white.”²⁷ Irish and Germans’ reluctance to intermarry suggests cultural aversion between the two groups. Harrigan’s storyline provides useful insight into the contested relationship between the two ethnic groups. While they interacted, even showed platonic affection towards each other, intermarriage for the Irish and Germans remained a tempestuous issue in the Gilded Age.

The physical threats that abounded throughout the *Mulligan Guard Ball*, dissipate by a later installment in the series, the *Mulligan Guard Nominee*. Mulligan’s rivalry with Lochmuller evolved from physical violence to political competition. As the years passed in Mulligan Alley, Mulligan and Lochmuller’s relationship softened. Though Lochmuller was still Mulligan’s foil, their disputes were less visceral as they contested for the office of Alderman. Harrigan’s plot device moved from matters of Irish-German intimacy to Irish-German political rivalry. When the Nightingales try to entice Mulligan to join the Irish nationalists in Canada, he quips that he’s “fighting the dutch in America.”²⁸ Though an immigrant himself, Mulligan views Lochmuller as a foreign intruder, declaring, “Lochmuller is a carpet bagger,” unwanted and disruptive to the community.²⁹ Mulligan easily defeats Lochmuller, which would have resonated with Harrigan’s audience.

²⁵ John R. Logan and Hyoung-jin Shin, “Immigrant Incorporation in American Cities: Contextual Determinants of Irish, German, and British Intermarriage in 1880,” *International Migration Review* 46, no. 3 (2012), 710-739.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Edward Harrigan, “The Mulligan Guard Nominee,” Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library, 36.

²⁹ Ibid., act 1, 41.

Harrigan's play echoed the political aspect of the Irish-German relationship. Much like Lochmuller's failure to win political office, Germans had little success compared to the Irish in coalescing political power. Steven P. Erie contends that Germans lacked the Irish's social unity, with deep religious and regional divisions.³⁰ In addition, the Irish were more than twice as likely to be unskilled labor in 1870, making political participation a useful tool for social mobility.³¹ Thus in urban environments, the Irish were significantly more effective in securing political office than the Germans. In *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Harrigan illustrates this trend, at a time when Irish political power was at a peak. William Russell Grace was mayor of New York City while fellow Irishman, John Kelly, ran the city's largest political organization, Tammany Hall.

While Mulligan's physicality subsided in this entry, the Irish women's vitriol against Germans continued unabated. During a meeting of their Irish nationalist support group, the Nightingales, Cordelia Mulligan proposes incorporating a German woman into the fold:

CORDELIA. Mrs. Schwartz, a German lady, would like to join the Nightingales.
 OMNES. (indignantly) A German lady!
 BRIDGET. 'Twas the Germans caused the famine in Ireland, would ye admit a traitoress among ye?
 Mrs. DUBLIN. Never, by gorry, never.³²

The Nightingales' exasperated response highlighted the continued animosity between the two ethnic groups, but Harrigan's farcical language has another implication. By having Bridget Lochmuller condemn the Germans in such a preposterous and hypocritical manner, Harrigan illuminated the irrationality of the Irish-German rivalry. As in the

³⁰ Steven P Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 32.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 30.

Mulligan Guard Ball with Tommy and Kitty's marriage, Harrigan showed the largely Irish, though still multiethnic, audience that interethnic conflict was foolish. Harrigan's expert use of wit, humor, and absurdity made this soft critique possible.

By *Cordelia's Aspirations*, four years after Harrigan's first Mulligan play, the animosity subsided between the Germans and the Irish as Mulligan and Lochmuller ascended the social ladder. Mulligan finds a compatriot in Lochmuller, another immigrant who rose from the lowest rung in New York to become a self-made success. They both moved uptown, leaving behind their old ethnic neighborhood for high society. Like Lochmuller, Mulligan had reservations about his new social status and longed for the comforts, familiarity, and friendships of the people in Mulligan Alley. Lochmuller was the owner of the largest butcher shop in the city, and his wife admonished him for not looking the part. She chides him for not wearing gloves, "you must wear them in the office. You are not a common butcher now."³³ Likewise, Cordelia tells Dan, after her trip to France, that they must move out of their neighborhood:

CORDELIA. We must move. Twill never do for me to live in Mulligan Alley now. MULLIGAN. Do you want me to move out of it.

CORDELIA. Certainly, it is beneath my station.

MULLIGAN. When I move out of Mulligan Alley it will be feet first, but we won't quarrel about that. You're my bonny wee little wife.

CORDELIA. Yes, Daniel. I'm determine (sic) to make a great learned man of you.³⁴

Mulligan and Lochmuller feel out of place in bourgeois society, preferring the charms and comforts of Mulligans Alley.

³³ Edward Harrigan, "Cordelia's Aspirations," Edward Harrigan Papers, 1871-1984, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library, act 1, 32.

³⁴ Ibid., act 1, 23.

After both men moved to Madison Avenue to placate their wives, they developed a close bond that was absent in Harrigan's previous plays. At a festive party, a jaded Mulligan spoke with Lochmuller:

MULLIGAN. How do you like living uptown?

LOCHMULLER. (disgustedly) I've got to like it.

MULLIGAN. (mournfully) They're all strangers to me.³⁵

Lamenting his loss of community, Mulligan found rapport with Lochmuller after disliking the French wine at the party:

LOCHMULLER. When it's all over we go out and get a glass of beer together.

MULLIGAN. (looks to Lochmuller and puts up two fingers, as much to say we will get two beers.)

In contrast to the pugilism and political rivalry in previous plays, Mulligan and Lochmuller developed solidarity through their social mobility. When juxtaposed against Anglo-Saxon high society, they found commonalities that they overlooked in their previous provincial disputes.

Mulligan and Lochmuller's complicated relationship was indicative of their cultural ties to their homelands. However, their offspring, born and raised in the United States, elided obvious cultural antagonism and forged an inclusive, American identity. Lochmuller's son sought to affect a peace between his father and Mulligan with an offering of sausages in the *Mulligan Guard Ball*.³⁶ Harrigan positioned Lochmuller's American-born son as a conciliator between Irish and German, himself literally a product of Irish-German "cooperation." Tommy and Kitty represented the new generation of ethnic whites, to whom ethnicity is less of a boundary to love. A study of Irish intermarriage in the decades following Harrigan's plays show a three-fold increase in

³⁵ Ibid., act 2, 24.

³⁶ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 42.

intermarriage from first generation to second generation immigrants.³⁷ Though still uncommon, second-generation Irish immigrants were more apt to associate, and marry other European descended people.

Harrigan diverges from his ideal realism in the gendered depictions of Mulligan and Lochmuller. He instilled the masculine traits of strength, duty, and bravery into Dan Mulligan. Harrigan once said that “Dan’s strong Anglo-Celtic courage never leaves him. He stands for Irish manhood in its strength.”³⁸ Mulligan’s aggressiveness is apparent through *Mulligan Guard Ball*, with his constituent threats aimed at Lochmuller. Giving instructions on which songs to play to a band leader for the Mulligan Guard’s ball, Mulligan says, “And if you play a dutch tune at the Ball, I’ll lick you.”³⁹ Mulligan’s penchant for virile expressions of manhood became threatened in *Cordelia’s Aspirations*.

When Mulligan acquiesced to Cordelia’s demands to move uptown, away from his working-class friends, he despaired but did not want to lose his wife. Near the end of the play after he moved to Madison Avenue, Mulligan speaks with his close friend McSweeney:

McSWEENEY. Your friends would like to see you back in Mulligan Alley.
MULLIGAN. I’d go back but for Cordelia.
McSWEENEY. Is she wearing your trousers?
MULLIGAN (with energy) No sir! No woman can wear my trousers.
McSWEENEY. Home rule for ever.⁴⁰

The characters then launch into the song, “I’ll Wear the Trousers, Oh!” whose chorus is:

³⁷ Julius Drachsler, *Intermarriage in New York City: A Statistical Study of the Amalgamation of European Peoples*, (New York: Columbia University, 1921), 218.

³⁸ Edward Harrigan, “Holding the Mirror up to Nature,” *Pearson’s Magazine* 10, (November 1903), 504.

³⁹ Harrigan, “Mulligan Guard’s Ball,” act 2, 40.

⁴⁰ Harrigan, “Cordelia’s Aspirations,” act 3, 44.

I'll wear the trousers, trousers, oh! I'll wear the trousers, oh!
 So every man do all ye can to wear the trousers, oh!⁴¹

While earlier in the play, Mulligan followed his wife's demands and forsook Mulligan Alley, Harrigan shows that he came to his senses by the end. Mulligan restored the "natural order" by reasserting his dominance over his wife. McSweeney was able to shock Mulligan by questioning his masculinity. Appalled at the idea that he was no longer in control of his marriage, he confronts Cordelia, "I'm tired of this sham and delusion. If you haven't the sense, I'll teach you. This is my property."⁴² Cordelia apologizes to him and with the family's property in Mulligan's name, they agree to move back to Mulligan's Alley. Mulligan reestablishes not only his control over his wife but his control over property.

In contrast to Mulligan's relationship with his wife, Lochmuller had difficulty in expressing control over Bridget. Lochmuller's German heritage lacked the "Anglo-Celtic courage" that Harrigan seemingly prized. In the plays, Lochmuller was a stereotypical henpecked husband, who had no control over his wife. Harrigan also portrayed him as passive while his wife was strong and aggressive. In *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Lochmuller arrived at Castle Garden to pick up Bridget after her trip to Ireland. Upon seeing her on the dock, Lochmuller asks her about her health:

LOCHMULLER. Vas you sick much?

BRIDGET. I lost ten pounds.

LOCHMULLER. (aside) I'm glad. She can't hit me so hard now.⁴³

Bridget and Lochmuller then argue whether to take a carriage back home:

⁴¹ Edward Harrigan and David Braham, *Collected Songs 1. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson, (Madison: American Musicology Society, 1997), 133.

⁴² Harrigan, "Cordelia's Aspirations," act 3, 47.

⁴³ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 5.

BRIDGET. Yes – yes, I’ll have a hack or I’ll have a hack at you with this. (with valise)

LOCHMULLER. Yes – yes (aside) de ocean trip don’t make her weaken.⁴⁴

Lochmuller lacks Mulligan’s vigor and strength, especially when juxtaposed against his wife. While Mulligan establishes his patriarchal dominance over Cordelia, Harrigan endows Bridget with the traits of strength and leadership that Lochmuller lacks.

Mulligan resolved his real estate folly by taking control over his and Cordelia’s properties, while at the end of *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, Bridget was still in possession of all the Lochmuller’s properties. Harrigan deviated from his dedication to realism in his gendered depictions of the Irish and Germans.

As members of the first great wave of European immigration, Harrigan’s Irish and German characters competed with each other, often fiercely, but they found common ground with their contempt of “new” immigrants. Through his plays, Harrigan references Italians sparingly, but in significant passages. His characters situate Italians on the bottom of New York’s social hierarchy, and speak disparagingly of them. In *Mulligan Guard Ball*, Lochmuller the butcher visits Dan Mulligan, carrying with him links of sausages. Mulligan unknowingly sits on the sausages, causing Lochmuller to exclaim “Oh dots nothing. Dem is second hand bolognas. I sell dem to Italians.”⁴⁵ For Harrigan’s working-class audience, Italians represented a class beneath them, too poor to even afford clean sausages. Not one to create one-dimensional stereotypes, Harrigan added a second. Italians were not only extremely poor, but also violent. At his political rally, Mulligan introduced a group of Italians led by Pedro Giovanni to his skeptical Irish supporters:

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ Harrigan, “Mulligan Guard’s Ball,” act 1, 26.

McSWEENEY. Dan, I'm opposed to the Italians.

McSWEENEY. (to Pedro) You're one of the crowd that hate me, Come out here.

PEDRO. (draws dagger) No touch me – I'm Pedro Giovanni (sic). I vote for Mister Mulligan.⁴⁶

The only Italian character in the three plays, Pedro Giovanni is a traditional caricature of an Italian immigrant. Quick to draw his stiletto, Giovanni immediately clashed with McSweeney over an ethnic rivalry.

In *Cordelia's Aspirations*, Harrigan used Italians and Russian Jews as class foils to his ambitious characters. Early in the play, a local Irishwoman asked Mulligan which ship his wife arrived on:

ANNIE. The barge that brought up the last load of Italians?

MULLIGAN. What do you take her for, a La zaronna? She cum first-class.⁴⁷

For the nascent and aspiring middle class, Italians represented an ethnic group beneath their own station. Harrigan also utilized Eastern-European Jews in a similar fashion. When a group of African Americans arrived to the city, a local black leader could not afford to house them. Mulligan tells them they will have to stay at the Castle Garden immigration building, "You'll have to sleep in the Garden with the rest of the Russian jews."⁴⁸ Later in the play, in front of Cordelia's siblings, Mulligan reads from a newspaper:

MULLIGAN. Three hundred Italians arrived from Italy yesterday. They were transported by Pedro Giovanni in a drenching rain to Mulligan Alley.

CORDELIA. Give me that paper. Would you disgrace me?⁴⁹

For Cordelia, having her bourgeois brother and sisters know that large numbers of Italians moved into their neighborhood was abhorrent. For the upwardly mobile

⁴⁶ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 73-74.

⁴⁷ Harrigan, "Cordelia's Aspirations," act 1, 12.

⁴⁸ Ibid., act 1, 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., act 3, 35.

Mulligan family, they had to remove themselves from being associated with the lowest class of people.

Enmity towards Italians did not rest with the Irish and Germans, but included Harrigan's African American characters. After a German and Irish brawl at Mulligan's political rally, a police officer escorted the African American characters Palestine Puter and Rebecca Allop to the police station. Rebecca tells the officer, "Frough me in de sewer. I ain't fit to live, dragged frough de streets like an Italian."⁵⁰ Following in Harrigan's realist premise, this line suggests that African Americans in New York held similarly contemptuous views of Italians. Harrigan could also be using these characters to present an opinion that he knew his largely Irish crowd would agree with. By 1880, Italians accounted for only 1% of New York City's population, but they had quadrupled in number in the previous decade.⁵¹ At the time of Harrigan's productions, Italians began to immigrate in higher numbers, becoming more visible to the city's Irish, German, and African-American population.

European Immigrant interactions with African Americans

In an article describing his theatrical mindset, Harrigan defended his choice of working-class characters; "the average gentleman is so stereotyped that he has no value except in those plays where he is a pawn on the chess-board of melodramatic vice or tragic sin. He does very well in *Camille* and *Forget-me-not*, but I can't imagine him at home in a happy tenement-house or enjoying himself at a colored ball."⁵² The upper classes could not enjoy themselves at an African-American ball but Harrigan could insert

⁵⁰ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," *Edward Harrigan Papers*, c. 1870-1908, act 2, 89.

⁵¹ Samuel Baily, *Immigrants in the Lands of Promise: Italians in Buenos Aires and New York*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 58.

⁵² *Ibid*, 98.

working-class ethnic whites into the environment and be true to his setting. Though there was tension, and violence could erupt quickly, ethnic whites could enjoy themselves in the company of African Americans, form friendships, and integrate into the local economy. By 1870, the Irish accounted for about 21% of New York City's population, with African Americans at only slightly over 1%.⁵³ After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the African-American population declined precipitously in the largely Irish Sixth Ward, including the notorious five-points neighborhood. In *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, the inhabitants of Mulligan's ward are estimated at three thousand, with eight hundred African-American men of voting age. While the proportion of Irish to African Americans in the city was actually much lower than in Harrigan's fictional neighborhood, Graham Hodges argues Black citizens had prominent positions "in the district's picaresque street life."⁵⁴

Harrigan's overrepresentation of African American characters may speak to their visibility or to his desire to incorporate traditional minstrel theatrics to his plays. Harrigan's roots in minstrelsy and its popularity influenced his Black characters. Being urban comedies, the *Mulligan Guard* series frequently used the dandy archetype, an urban Black man who put on the veneer of a white gentleman. White audiences found great humor in this saturnalian reversal, as the African American continuously failed to mimic respectability. Regardless of Harrigan's intent, European immigrants and African Americans did interact and contest urban space. Through these cultural exchanges in the *Mulligan Guard* scripts, white ethnics expressed their superiority, often calling African

⁵³ Graham Hodges, "Desirable Companions and Lovers: Irish and African Americans in the Sixth Ward, 1830-1870," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 110.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 110.

Americans “nagur” and “nigger,” but more complex dynamics developed that eschew a simplistic narrative of Irish oppressors and Black victims without agency. Lauren Onkey disputes what she calls, “Harrigan’s reputation for realistic egalitarianism,” and contends that minstrel show caricatures abounded in his plays.⁵⁵ While Onkey is certainly correct that minstrelsy influenced Harrigan’s depictions, she obscures their nuances. Clearly Harrigan was more sympathetic to the Irish and used harmful Black stereotypes, but he provided them with more depth and agency than contemporary entertainers. By contesting arguments that overemphasize Harrigan’s “egalitarianism,” Onkey instead oversimplifies Harrigan’s treatment of African Americans.⁵⁶

While the Irish often held African Americans in contempt, Harrigan’s black characters were not meek and feckless. They fired back at Irish insults, appealing to their heritage in America and cleanliness compared to European immigrants. Upon seeing Mulligan and McSweeney on the street, Palestine Puter remarked, “I don’t see why de Government can’t quarantine dem people. Dey land too sudden. Dar aint enough fumigation.”⁵⁷ Though Puter’s dialogue was meant as a joke, it would have ringed true to Harrigan’s audience. Cormac Ó Gráda has noted that in the decades before Harrigan’s plays, the Irish accounted for 71% of all the admissions to New York City’s public hospitals.⁵⁸ Given their size, they represented a far higher percentage of the sick than other ethnic groups in the city. Also using humor, Harrigan’s African-American characters relished the opportunity for the Irish to go back to Europe. In *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Rebecca Allop tells Puter that “we’ll soon have an Irish exodus. Dey’re

⁵⁵ Onkey, 69.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Harrigan, “Mulligan Guard’s Ball,” act 1, 41.

⁵⁸ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland’s Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006), 166.

hollering for Home Rule and dey ought to go home and rule it.”⁵⁹ Through comedy, Harrigan used Rebecca and Puter to relay this dynamic of the Irish-African American relationship. They contested space, with Rebecca feeling she had a legitimate right to the city while the Irish were unwanted foreigners. Harrigan had his African American characters use a discourse of sickness and cleanliness to situate themselves in a higher social status.

In *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, two African-American women voice their discontent with Mrs. Dublin, a cantankerous Irish woman. Angry that her son is in jail, Mrs. Dublin prowls the docks after Mulligan’s election, looking for the Alderman elect. She runs into an equally angry Caroline, fuming over her strained relationship with Simpson Primrose:

Mrs. DUBLIN. Is that the boat.

CAROLINE. The boat for Ireland is on de udder wharfs.⁶⁰

As with Rebecca Allop’s one liner, Caroline uses humor to express her hope that the Irish leave America, a continual topic for Harrigan’s Black characters. Their thoughts echoed nativist rhetoric, yet the Irish were a legitimate threat to northern African Americans in the city, competing for some of the same jobs. Harrigan provides his female Black characters with enough wit and backbone, couched in anti-Irish language, to push back against a belligerent Irish woman. After Mrs. Dublin finds her way onto the ship, she tries to force her way into Mulligan’s room, but Rebecca refuses to let her into the cabin:

REBECCA. Paddy, paddy, tae a clod. Up de ladder wid a hod.

Mrs. DUBLIN. Come down here to me.

REBECCA. You come up here to me.

Mrs. DUBLIN. Monkey, monkey in a cell.

REBECCA. Eat de Irish, never tell.

⁵⁹ Harrigan, “The Mulligan Guard Nominee,” Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 15.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 115.

Mrs. DUBLIN. You're a thorn in my bosom.

REBECCA. Yes, I'm a black thorn and you open dis door and I'll fill you full of briar.

Mrs. DUBLIN. Woolly head, flat nose, tunnel mouth. I don't know what is it? Came up from the south.⁶¹

Both women throw racial and ethnic insults at each other, likely to the crowd's delight.

When confrontations occurred in the plays between Irish and Black characters, they quickly degenerated into racial and anti-immigrant invectives. But instead of a one-sided affair, Harrigan gave his Black characters a fair amount of resistance, critiquing and disparaging the Irish.

The most dominant pejorative stereotype of the Irish in the *Mulligan Guard* series is the Irishman's penchant for alcohol. By 1880, 80% of licensed saloons in the nation were owned by first-generation immigrants, and likely even more unlicensed ones.⁶² The saloon became an integral part of the Irish immigrant's life in the United States. Harrigan incorporated this aspect of Irish life into his character's lives. In the final two plays, Mulligan is the owner and operator of the Wee Drop Saloon, which becomes a general meeting places for the Irish community. When Mulligan went to draw a bath at Simpson Primrose's barbershop, Primrose tells him, "You'll find alcohol for rubbing purposes, de last Irishman took a bath dar drank it."⁶³ Though Harrigan was reluctant to cast aspersions on the Irish, he did write humorous episodes where Black characters lampooned the Irish's love of alcohol.

Through the quarrels and insults, Harrigan nodded towards the possibility of Irish and African-American sexual relations in his plays. After Rebecca Allop's arrest in *Mulligan Guard Nominee* for the melee at Harrigan's political event, she stumbled into

⁶¹ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 136

⁶² Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition*, (New York: Scribner, 2010), 26.

⁶³ Harrigan, "Mulligan Guard's Ball," act 1, 58.

her arresting officer. He apologizes for her ignoble arrest and makes a suggestive remark:

REBECCA. Your sorrow wouldn't weight mud.
 OFFICER. You're sarcastic ain't you.
 REBECCA. I am.
 OFFICER. Yes.
 REBECCA. Dat's my nature. Dars a broad gulf 'tween you and me.
 OFFICER. Why don't you swim over.
 REBECCA. Dars breakers ahead. You think you're handsome, don't you?
 OFFICER. Yes – I'm a lally cooler.
 REBECCA. You'd make a good spike to tie a scow to.⁶⁴

Harrigan again uses humor and word play to emphasize issues in working-class New York, this time highlighting Irish-Black sexuality. Rebecca rebukes the police officer's advances, reversing the racial ideology of the licentious black woman.

Even with the tension and acrimony between white ethnics and African Americans, Harrigan illustrated their coexistence in the urban space. In *Mulligan Guard Ball*, Dan Mulligan's barber is an African-American, Simpson Primrose. Speaking of Primrose's barbershop, Mulligan tells guests at his home, "I shave there when my razors dull."⁶⁵ As immigrants poured into the city in the decades prior to Harrigan's plays, politicians began opening up trades to the Irish, Germans, and African-Americans. These jobs were largely lower status, such as carters and barbers. In 1860, in the heavily Irish Sixth Ward, nine of the twenty-nine barbers were African Americans.⁶⁶ Disproportionate to their numbers, African Americans held a steady section of this interracial trade. In the third scene of Act one, Mulligan visited Primrose's barbershop, in which "the characters are types of New York, low life."⁶⁷ Though the proprietor is black, the customers are

⁶⁴ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, c. 1870-1908, 111.

⁶⁵ Harrigan, "Mulligan Guard's Ball," act 1, 8.

⁶⁶ Hodges, 118.

⁶⁷ Harrigan, "Mulligan Guard's Ball," act 1, 48

various ethnicities. As Dan waited to get his shave, Lochmuller arrived and they quibbled over who was first in the queue. The two discussed boxing with Lochmuller opining, “do you suppose a German would fight mit a nigger.”⁶⁸ Outraged, Simpson declares, “Hold on. You see dis razor.”⁶⁹ Lochmuller recants saying he misspoke, “I meant dat a colored man could whip any German in de world.”⁷⁰ Though obvious racial and ethnic tensions existed between the three men, they shared urban space. Rather than being circumscribed within a singular cultural sphere, Irish and Germans were patrons of black establishments. The large number of African-American barbers in Irish neighborhoods suggests Harrigan’s scene was not uncommon.

The climax of the *Mulligan Guard Ball* is the ball scene, where Mulligan’s Irish brethren assembled for a fraternal party. When the Skidmore Guard arrived, believing they rented the hall for their own ball, tempers flared. Mulligan exclaims “what do you coons want here?”⁷¹ After arguing back and forth over rights to the building, Mulligan’s companions yell “kill the niggers.”⁷² The owner of the building defused the situation by offering the top floor to the Skidmore Guard for their ball. Content with the resolution, Captain Primrose tells Mulligan:

SIMPSON. We’ve always been on speaking terms wid de Mulligan Guards and as we are gwine up stairs to have our pleasure, we want to be friendly members...three cheers for de Mulligan Guards.
MULLIGAN. Three cheers for the Skidmore Guards.
ENSEMBLE. Hurrah, Hurrah, Hurrah.⁷³

⁶⁸ Ibid., act 1, 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., act 2, 66.

⁷² Ibid., act 2, 68.

⁷³ Ibid., act 2, 71-72

Ready for violence, both the Mulligan Guard and the Skidmore Guard accept the resolution with cheers. This dialectic is inherent in all of the exchanges between the Irish and African Americans in the series. It creates this contested relationship that can be rancorous one moment and quickly shift to harmonious the next.

As German-Irish relations relaxed over the course of the *Mulligan Guard* series, so did relations between the Irish and African Americans. Racial tension continued in *Cordelia's Aspirations* but abated compared to Harrigan's earlier plays. Early in the play, Mulligan encounters a handful of poor African Americans at the dock. Feeling sympathetic he tells the local grocer to prepare them some food:

MULLIGAN. (to the man behind counter) Mike, cut the boys up some sandwiches.

OMNES. Do you mean it?

MULLIGAN. Certainly I mean it.

UNCLE TOM. A real Irish heart.

TOPSY. Heaven bless the Irish.

OMNES. Amen.⁷⁴

This scene illustrates a number of characteristics of Irish-Black relations. Mulligan is the paternal character, offering charity to poor and feckless black men, a continuation of white paternal sensibilities. His newfound wealth allowed him to be a patron to the lower classes while promoting the charitable nature of the Irish. While certainly better than hostility and antagonism, it tied a beneficent view of the Irish to a racialized ideology of protectiveness.

Later in the play, Mulligan treated Rebecca Allop not as a subordinate or dependent, but largely as an equal. Derisively, Mulligan's brother-in-law Planxty opined that Mulligan "knows every nagur in the city."⁷⁵ While hyperbolic, Mulligan did indeed

⁷⁴ Harrigan, "Cordelia's Aspirations," act 1, 18-19

⁷⁵ Ibid.

have connections with a number of African-American characters throughout the *Mulligan Guard* plays. Rebecca had a number of positions in the plays but in *Cordelia's Aspirations* she was Cordelia Mulligan's handmaiden. After returning from France with Cordelia, Rebecca joined the Mulligans when they moved uptown. After the guests had filed out of the Mulligan's house warming party, Rebecca finds Dan Mulligan sitting by himself:

REBECCA. Are you all alone, Mr. Mulligan? Where's your partner?

MULLIGAN. My partner wint down stairs wid Planxty.

REBECCA. Dat don't seem to be the proper corollary, but you shan't be slighted. I'll escort you.

MULLIGAN. All right, show me the way. (links arms with Rebecca)⁷⁶

Later in the play after suffering through a family dinner with Cordelia's relatives, Mulligan joins his friends for a round of drinks. Mulligan offers a glass to McSweeney, but he declines, telling Mulligan that he prefers drinking out of a cup:

MULLIGAN. Suit yourself, Mac. Join us Rebecca.

REBECCA Were three of a kind.

McSWEENEY. Cheer up. Here's to Dan Mulligan and his friends in mulligan alley.

REBECCA. And his colored friends.⁷⁷

Juxtaposed against his elegant dinner with Cordelia and her posh siblings, Mulligan drinks beer with his true working-class friends. Mulligan is uncomfortable and clumsy around Planxty and his sisters, but feels right at home with McSweeney and Rebecca. He reestablishes his bond with his former neighborhood by partaking in alcoholic drinks with his Irish and African American friends.

Mulligan's complicated relationship with African Americans and Germans conveyed the nuanced communities that developed during the Gilded Age in New York.

⁷⁶ Ibid., act 2, 28.

⁷⁷ Ibid., act 3, 42.

Harrigan's Irish characters may have fought and quarreled with their neighbors, but through the animosity friendships and affinity developed. The *Mulligan Guard* plays elucidate the dialectical interactions of the urban locale, where straightforward analyses of "equality" or "conflict" obscure working-class life's complexities.

CHAPTER TWO – HARRIGAN VS. THE REFORMERS, DEPICTIONS OF THE MACHINE IN POPULAR CULTURE.

In the 1880s, decades before exposés of urban corruption, exploitation, and poverty such as *The Shame of the Cities* by Lincoln Steffens, and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, competing cultural messages about urban machines developed in the pages of magazines and on the theatrical stage. Milton L. Rakove described the 20th century, Chicago political machine as a "hydra-headed monster" that incorporated "elements of every major political, economic, racial, ethnic, religious, governmental, and paramilitary power group within the city."¹ New York City's boss system in the 1870s and 1880s, under the aegis of Tammany Hall, offered a similar comprehensive permeation of the city's social, cultural, political, and economic systems. Two German immigrants, Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler, headed a campaign against Tammany Hall, its leaders and its supporters, through their political cartoons in popular magazines. Irish-American entertainer Edward Harrigan also depicted the city's machine politics, but through musical theater instead of illustrations. In contrast to Nast's and Keppler's cartoons, Harrigan's works avoided condemning Tammany and presented a working-class viewpoint of the machine.

Undoubtedly class differences influenced these cultural productions, but as significant to their representations of machine politics were the authors' ethnic backgrounds. Nast and Keppler were Germans, representing a middle-brow, mainstream opinion of New York's politics. They became intellectual conduits for hegemonic ideals of government, race, and class. In the production of political satire, Germans, instead of Anglo-Saxons, dominated critiques of New York's machine politics. The leading

¹ Rakove *Don't Make No Waves, Don't Back No Losers*, 3.

opponents of Tammany in the realm of political satire were Germans who adopted American republican ideology. They saw the New York machine as a threat to good governance that reform-minded politicians had to extinguish before the conflagration engulfed the entire country. Whether their actions against Tammany and its Irish supporters were a tool of “Americanization,” or becoming “white,” is outside the scope of this thesis but it does suggest a more nuanced interpretation of nativist backlash against poor urban Irish immigrants.² Though the working-class German characters in Harrigan’s plays lived in relative equality with the Irish, Nast and Keppler’s middle-class values created a gulf between the two ethnicities that is clear in their depictions of machine politics and the Irish. The German and “Anglo-Saxon” middle-class backlash against Tammany offered sharp criticisms and racial stereotypes, spreading a culture of fear about the demise of good governance.

These views dominated the mainstream political culture and influenced public opinion, but Harrigan presented a competing view in the entertainment industry. As David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and other scholars of whiteness have argued, the Irish formulated their identity as “white” by contrasting themselves against African Americans.³ Harrigan was Irish, but presented a more complex view of both the Irish-dominated machine in New York and the Irish-American construction of a particular racial identity vis-à-vis African Americans. In Harrigan’s view, the machine could be authoritarian and coercive, but it also was a crucial benefactor in settling the ethnic poor in the United States. This thesis is less concerned with arguments over how significant or

² I use Irish in the context of this thesis as shorthand for Irish Catholic.

³ Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, (New York: Routledge, 2008).

corrupt Tammany's welfare system was, and more with how a discursive construction of machine politics emerged from Harrigan's works.

Mainstream Popular Representations of NYC's Political Machine

Drawing for *Harper's Weekly*, Thomas Nast became the United States' most famous political cartoonist. While known as the man who popularized the image of Santa Claus and the elephant as the symbol of the Republican Party, his most significant contributions to history were his graphic harangues against William "Boss" Tweed and Tammany Hall. Due to rising political tensions within Germany, Nast's family immigrated to the United States in 1846. His family moved to New York and lived on William Street, where he encountered a diverse working-class community along with the crimes and vices associated with the neighborhood.⁴ Nast grew up in a largely German-speaking community of emigrants but was close to the Irish dominated five-points neighborhood. Fiona Deans Halloran states that "no child on William Street could be ignorant of the dangers surrounding him."⁵ This "danger," Irish and Catholic, embedded in Nast as child became a staple of his political cartoons. The Irish became the pawns behind King Tweed and his court at Tammany Hall, bent on the destruction of American republican government. Halloran contends that "the vicious, unrelenting quality of Nast's attacks on the Irish suggests something far more personal than an artistic choice about symbolism and hypocrisy."⁶ Nast's youthful interactions with poor Irish Catholics likely colored his interpretation of machine politics.

⁴ Fiona Deans Halloran, *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoons*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 8.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

But for a brief period in the early 1860s, Nast drew his most famous cartoons for *Harper's Weekly* from 1859 to 1886. By the Civil War, the magazine had become the nation's most popular journal.⁷ Part of the *Harper's* publishing empire that including *Harper's Monthly*, the magazine originated in 1857 and adopted a more liberal outlook on society during the Civil War. Historians often credit its political allegiance to the Republican Party to Nast's growing influence during the War.⁸ With a purported circulation of 115,000 in July 1861 that grew to 160,000 by 1872, *Harper's Weekly* overtook *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* as the most read magazine in the United States.⁹ Nast quickly became the magazine's star attraction where his cartoons held sway over public opinion. The self-appointed, "Journal of Civilization," *Harper's Weekly* became the perfect launching pad for Nast's critiques of politics and society.

In his cartoons, Nast exhibited little sympathy for the Irish, as he frequently depicted Irishmen as brutes, drunkards, and apes. Though ostensibly supportive of anti-racist policies, his works frequently descended into racial tropes of African Americans and more prominently, the Irish. In "The Ignorant Vote—Honors are Easy," which appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on December 9, 1876, a rural black man sits on one side and an urban Irishman drawn as an ape balances out the right side.¹⁰ Inscribed on the African-American side is "south" and "black" while "north" and "white" are on the Irish side. Nast drew the black farmer as a human, but he drew the Irishman as an ape, a frequently used representation for the Irish and Roman Catholic leaders. Similarly, Nast

⁷ Eric Feltman, "Harper's Weekly," *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War: A Political, Social, and Military*, ed. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 931.

⁸ William J. Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 75.

⁹ Advertisement, *Harper's Weekly*, July 13, 1861, 447, *American Newspaper Directory, Volume 4*, (New York: Geo P. Rowell & Co., 1872), 823.

¹⁰ Thomas Nast, "The Ignorant Vote—Honors are Easy," *Harper's Weekly*, December 9, 1876.

depicts the Irish as an ape with a blackjack waiting to inflict violence against a Chinese immigrant in “The Chinese Question.”¹¹ In the cartoon, Nast has a white woman, presumably Lady Liberty, shielding a Chinese immigrant from an unruly mob. Posters in the background decry the Chinese as barbarians juxtaposed against a gang donning weapons, led by an Irishman. Nast’s fierce critiques of slavery and defense of Chinese immigrants was at odds with his vehement diatribes against the Irish. His personal devils were not Chinese labor competition or Black freedom, but the Irish threat to the American Republic.

Nast’s concept of “good governance” was in line with other Anglo-Saxon reformers of the late 19th century. His cartoons indicate a faith in a pure republic form of government that eschewed the aristocracy of the Old World while also repudiating the uncouth masses. This fear of threats to the Republic from above and below combined with a racialized discourse in what Beryl Satter called *evolutionary* republicanism.¹² She argues that some Progressive reformers of the 1890s believed “political corruption and economic exploitation would be overcome not by challenging the wage system, but by evolving a more virtuous race.”¹³ Though Nast’s republicanism was more nuanced than a dichotomy of pure Anglo-Saxons contra the corrupt rest, it draws on this intellectual strand to highlight the Irish threat to republicanism. The Irish were a menace from below, who lacked the proper racial attributes for representative democracy.

The real and imagined bogey man of the liberal middle class in New York was Tammany Hall. Ironically, Tammany Hall originated in the late 18th century as a social

¹¹ Thomas Nast, “The Chinese Question,” *Harper’s Weekly*, February 18, 1871.

¹² Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity, and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 185.

¹³ *Ibid.*

club established to promote American nationalism. Less than a century later, it would be anathema to conservatives who feared its threat to American political tradition. Named after a mythical Delaware Chief, Tamamend, who according to legend carved out Niagara Falls, Tammany shifted its emphasis under its leader, John Pintard, in the early 1790s.¹⁴ It reformulated as a restraint on the rising influence of New York's elites, a petty-bourgeois check on the bourgeoisie. Owing to their namesake, and following in European-American tradition, Tammany incorporated symbols of "Indianness," including naming their leaders sachems. Tammany quickly moved into politics and clashed with New York's long-serving Governor, George Clinton, complaining of his aristocratic tendencies. While Clinton courted Irish voters in the 1810s, Tammany took a nativist approach against increased Irish immigration.¹⁵

Tammany's traditional support came from tradesmen, but with increased capitalist development creating more wage workers, the Hall changed with the times. By the early 1830s, they were firm supporters of Andrew Jackson and the Democratic Party, drawing support from the city's Irish immigrants. In the next few decades, Tammany consolidated their control over New York politics and the Democratic Party with their ever expanding support base of Irish immigrants. Eric Foner described Tammany Hall as "a 'miniature, private welfare state' for New York City's poor."¹⁶ Through patronage for votes, Tammany provided jobs, insurance, and assisted immigrants in settling in the city. In 1867, the Tammany society moved into a lavish new hall on 14th street, which would

¹⁴ Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 314.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 511.

¹⁶ Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 165.

host the Democratic national convention a year later. Under the aegis of William “Boss” Tweed during the 1860s, Tammany was at its height of power and influence.

Beginning in 1870 and culminating during the summer of 1871, the *New York Times* published a series of exposés of Boss Tweed and his governance of Tammany Hall. On July 8, 1871, they reported on fraud and embezzlement of city funds in the rental of real estate for the National Guard. The *Times* argued that “the National Guard of this State was organized for the protection of our citizens, but under the baneful influence of the Ring it is made, as far as regards the First Division, an engine of political power, and a source of pecuniary profit to the soulless vampires who now control this City.”¹⁷ The soulless vampires in their article were Boss Tweed and his partner in the furniture business, Jas. H. Ingersoll. Ingersoll also owned an arms manufacturer, which rented armories, stables, and other properties to the National Guard for princely sums. The paper claimed that the 6th regiment rented the top floor of Tammany Hall for \$35,000 a year when it was only worth \$4,000.¹⁸ Adding to the *Times*’ distress was that many of these buildings were empty and unoccupied. The paper decried this as graft and saw Tammany Hall’s corruption of New York City’s politics and its embezzlement of taxpayer funds as intrinsic both to the nature of the political machine and to the Irish who supported it. In response to these articles, the paper proclaimed that “no one can doubt that public feeling has been stirred to its depths by the disgraceful surrender of our City to the Irish mob.”¹⁹ The paper was keenly aware of the Irish base for Tammany and Tweed, and saw the political machine as theft from taxpayers that enriched its leaders. Fearing its influence on the Presidential election of 1872 and echoing Nast’s evolutionary

¹⁷ “More Ring Villainy,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 1871, 4.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “The Betrayal of Public Liberties,” *The New York Times*, July 12, 1871, 4.

republican warnings, the *Times* opined that “the people will never consent to see the liberties of the whole country handed over to the tender mercies of the Irish Catholics.”²⁰

Like the *New York Times*, Nash saw the Irish as the personification of the evils of New York’s boss system. Following the paper’s reporting, Nast launched a concerted campaign against Tweed and Tammany Hall. As early as 1867, Nast produced cartoons criticizing Tammany’s control over local politics, but he intensified his attacks against the machine in tandem with the *Times*’ exposés. Slightly over a week before the midterm elections in 1870, *Harper’s Weekly* published Nast’s cartoon entitled, “The Power Behind the Throne.”²¹ The cartoon features the city’s mayor, John T. Hoffman, clad in European regalia with Sovereign’s orb in hand, sitting on a throne surrounded by his court with their weapons drawn. On his left, an apish and presumably Irish soldier, garbed in formal attire and holding a pike, stands in defense of the crown. The power, figuratively and literally behind Hoffman was Tweed, who Nast depicted as leaning on the throne clutching a sword inscribed with the word “power.” Above the picture was the text “The Tammany King-Dom,” and below was “He cannot call his soul his own.”²² Nast’s critique illustrated what he saw as a lack of liberty and democracy in the city’s government. The mayor was not a representative of “the people,” but of the interests of Tammany Hall. His traditionally drawn Irishman-as-ape soldier reinforces the importance of the Irish to Nast’s view of Tammany and its corruption of local government.

The anti-Catholic strand of nativism is also prevalent in Nast’s cartoon. He was fiercely critical of Catholicism, and his critiques ran concomitant with increased nativist

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Thomas Nast, “The Power Behind the Throne,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 29, 1870.

²² Ibid.

backlash against Roman Catholics. Developed from the Know-Nothings, the Order of the American Union formed in 1870 to combat the growing influence of Catholicism in the United States, accumulating forty councils in New York City by 1875.²³ In their polemic, “The Future Conflict: An Address by the Order of the American Union to the American People,” they argued that Catholics, specifically the Irish, would “in time utterly destroy our Republican form of Government.”²⁴ The Irish’s slavish devotion to monarchical authority was incompatible with what nativists believed were America’s founding liberal principles of liberty, individualism, and republicanism. Nast’s depiction of New York City’s government as a Catholic and Irish controlled “monarchy” aligned with the OAU’s fears of the Catholic threat to liberty. For Nast, the Irish represented the worst combination of danger to the republic, the primitive masses with allegiance to aristocratic despots. Not only was Tammany’s corruption detestable to reformers like Nast, but the city’s entire political machine was inimical to American political values.

While most of Nast’s cartoons were intricate, with numbers of characters and metaphors, one his most prominent cartoon of Tweed eschews complexity in favor of an austere, yet powerful depiction. Four months after the height of the *Times*’ articles, *Harper’s Weekly* published Nast’s “The Brains.”²⁵ In the cartoon, the typically rotund Tweed stands with his hands in his pockets and a bag of money as his head. A jeweled pendant hangs around his neck. As Fiona Deans Halloran remarked, “Tweed was bloated on the people’s money, and the question was, indeed, what they would do about it.”²⁶

²³ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New York: Atheneum, 1985), 30.

²⁴ Order of the American Union, “The Future Conflict, an Address by the Order of the American Union to the American People,” 1878, 14.

²⁵ Thomas Nast, “The Brains,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 12, 1871, 92.

²⁶ Halloran, 139.

Nast unambiguously prodded the readers of *Harper's Weekly* to enact change either through law enforcement or through the ballot box. Nast's evocative portrayal of Tammany's influence over the Democratic Party and the city's government was further crystalized in his personification of the Tweed Ring as a tiger.

Published on November 4, 1871, right before local elections, Nast's cartoon, "The Tammany Tiger Loose," illustrated traditional criticisms of Tammany but also included the powerful caricature of the machine as a vicious animal. Nast already had a history of portraying associates of the political machine in New York as animals, with his association of primates with the Irish. His intention was to show the Irish as brutish, dimwitted, and servile, and while the Tammany tiger elicited the same penchant for violence it also was an animal in total control. In the cartoon, the tiger stands on top of Columbia, with his paw pushing her face into the ground. His snarling face looks towards the reader while Tweed and his cronies sit in the Coliseum's stands. They watched in a position of power akin to Nero in the 1st century CE who presided over the feeding of Christians to wild animals. Instead of Christians, Tweed fed the gendered personification of the United States, Columbia, to the bloodthirsty tiger. Nast frequently depicted the States as Uncle Sam during this period, but poignantly chose its white female representation as Columbia, passive and dominated.²⁷ In another plea to the citizens of New York, Nast inscribed "What are you going to do about it?" below his drawing. The timing of the cartoon coincided with a much larger readership of the

²⁷ For example, see "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner," *Harper's Weekly*, November 20, 1869. Note that the inclusive post-War celebration includes Native Americans, African Americans, Germans, Chinese, but no indication of the Irish.

magazine due to its expanded coverage of the October fire that destroyed much of Chicago.²⁸

With Nast's reach, combined with the *New York Times'* investigative reports, Tweed's control of the city's politics crumbled by Election Day, 1871. Fiona Deans Halloran contends that Nast showed, "an artist, fired by indignation and free to express his opinions in the face of opposition, threat, and bribery, could shift the allegiances of the voters."²⁹ Not only could Nast sway voters, but he helped move public opinion against the Tweed Ring. Tweed was eventually convicted on corruption and embezzlement charges in December 1873. He suffered an ignominious fate, as the authorities captured him after he fled the country while on bail and died in prison five years after his conviction. Nast's visual diatribes against the political machine in New York did not end with Tweed's downfall. Tweed's replacement at a weakened Tammany Hall was John Kelly, upon whom Nast focused his continued ire.

A former United States Representative from New York, John Kelly emerged from Tammany's decline after Tweed's ignoble end as the leader of Tammany Hall. An Irish-Catholic Democrat, Kelly built his political base, like Tweed, by working at his local volunteer fire department before being elected Alderman in 1853. He supported Tammany during the 1850s, and gained national political experience in Congress between 1855 and 1858. During which time he acted as a conciliator during the divide over the party's future at the 1856 Democratic National Convention.³⁰ Upon leaving Congress, Kelly won election as sheriff, where according to George J. Lankevich, he

²⁸ Halloran, 142.

²⁹ Ibid., 143.

³⁰ James Fairfax McLaughlin, *"The Life and Times of John Kelly: Tribune of the People."* (New York: The American News Company, 1885), iii.

became known as “Honest” John Kelly.³¹ The exact circumstances behind Kelly’s adoption of this flattering nickname is unclear, but an 1875 lawsuit involving Kelly as the plaintiff had the defendant’s attorney claim that Kelly “has frequently made public proclamation that he was very honest, in consequence whereof he was commonly known as ‘Honest John Kelly.’”³²

Whether self-appointed or not, Kelly’s moniker earned him a certain cachet of honesty in the public’s minds, in contrast to Tweed’s deceptions. During the height of the Tweed Ring, Kelly and a group of reformers opposed Tammany’s excesses. While the police took down Tweed and his associates, Kelly remained insulated against criticism by staying in Europe. After Tammany’s decline in 1871, Kelly was one of the few politicians associated with the machine that had not been tainted by Tweed’s corruption.³³ By 1874, he controlled Tammany Hall and became the boss of New York politics until he died in 1886. During this period he reorganized Tammany into an efficient political society which led historians Alfred Connable and Edward Silberfarb to quip, Kelly “found Tammany a horde and left it an army.”³⁴

Coinciding with Kelly’s rise to Tammany leadership, *Puck* magazine debuted with a laser focus on the machinations of the machine. While *Harper’s Weekly* offered its readership a variety of content, from news, to fiction, to political satire, *Puck* magazine focused solely on humor. Founded in 1877 by Joseph Ferdinand Keppler, *Puck*

³¹ George J. Lankevich, *New York City: A Short History*, (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 108.

³² Nelson Jarvis Waterbury, *John Kelly, plaintiff and respondent against Nelson J. Waterbury, defendant and appellant*, (1875), 84.

³³ Lankevich, 108.

³⁴ Alfred Connable and Edward Silberfarb, *Tigers of Tammany: Nine Men Who Ruled New York* (New York: Holt, 1967), 175.

became the nation's premier satire magazine within seven years of its founding.³⁵ The Viennese born Keppler arrived in the United States in 1867 at the age of twenty-nine upon the urging of his father who emigrated years prior. A cartoonist and actor in his native country, he began his American publishing career with a German language version of *Puck* but his greatest success came with the English version where he focused his satiric venom on American politicians. In 1872 after the rise of Thomas Nast, Keppler devoted his professional energies to becoming the *Harper's Weekly's* illustrator's paramount competitor.³⁶ Like Nast and *Harper's Weekly's*, *Puck* aligned themselves with the Mugwumps and stressed reform of the political system, even if that meant aligning with Democrats, over Republican Party unity. During the first eight years of publication, *Puck* grew its readership and developed sharp, though less extreme, critiques of Tammany and New York's machine politics.

In the September 12th, 1877 cover page cartoon, Keppler drew John Kelly serving New York on a plate to Tammany Hall.³⁷ Dressed as a waiter, Kelly holds a plate where a feminine personification of New York is kneeling, head down, arms folded in resignation. At the dinner table awaits an Indian chief, brandishing a knife and a fork, awaiting his meal. Keppler humanized the city as a woman, defenseless, meek, and civilized, against the insatiable hunger of the savage Tammany Hall. Keppler's gendered presentation of power mirrors Nast's earlier depiction of Columbia pinned down by the Tammany tiger. As women needed protection by men, "civilized" New York required protection from the "savage" vile political bosses. Keppler also drew on discourses of

³⁵ Richard Samuel West, *Satire on Stone: The Political Cartoons of Joseph Keppler*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 1.

³⁶ West, 20.

³⁷ Joseph Keppler, "Kelly's Dainty Dish," *Puck* September 12, 1877, 1.

civilization, with New York as white and civilized contrasted with the savagery of the Indian Tammany Hall. The text that accompanied the cartoon read “HOW THE TAMMANY APPETITE IS APPEASED.”³⁸ Keppler viewed the machine as insatiable, constantly desiring more money, power, and prestige. It was unable to conform to the Victorian ideal of self-restraint. The only way for Tammany to be satiated was for it to devour the entire city of New York.

Compared to Nast’s artistic style, Keppler’s was less grotesque. In “Kelly’s Dainty Dish,” Keppler drew Kelly as a traditional human without creative exaggerations. Nast’s depictions of Kelly as a human followed in a similar vein, but the two artists often diverged in their racial caricatures. Though Keppler used animals to represent people, he did not fall as easily into the racial tropes that Nast seemed to so easily accept. While Nast constantly depicted Irish characters as primates, Keppler more frequently drew them as humans. Keppler did not totally shy away from racial caricatures of the Irish though, as he portrayed John Kelly as a monkey caught in a bear trap by anti-Tammany Republicans.³⁹ As Fiona Deans Halloran noted, the primate-Irish connection in Nast’s works bespoke of a personal animosity.⁴⁰ Memories of a childhood, growing up near the Irish tenements, amidst the crime, poverty, and vice, plausibly colored Nast’s perception of the Irish. Keppler likely only knew of “Irish depravity” from second-hand reports, as he spent his youth in Vienna and did not arrive in New York until he was in his thirties. His moderated uses of Irish racialization in his pursuit of Tammany’s downfall reconciles with his less personal attachment to the city.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Joseph Keppler, “Monkey Kelly,” *Puck*, Oct 2 1877.

⁴⁰ Halloran, 33.

In his cartoons for *Harper's Weekly*, Nast frequently employed graphic representations of “danger” in his depictions of Tammany Hall. The primal threat did not end with the Tammany tiger of the Tweed era but continued during John Kelly’s stewardship of the machine. In his cartoon designated “The web of ruin,” published on November 10, 1877, Nast depicted Kelly as a spider waiting in his web. In the web are two rings, one inscribed with “TAMMANY RING,” and the other with “CANAL RING.”⁴¹ Inside of Kelly’s domain, the corruption of Tweed’s Ring along with the more recent corruption involving kickbacks from Erie Canal operations is still manifested. Considering the Canal Ring was widespread, involving Democratic and Republican state senators, but also largely limited to upstate, Nast’s inclusion of it within the confines of Kelly’s influence appears disingenuous.⁴² No longer did Nast criticize legitimate corruption within Tammany but now he conflated *all* corruption with Tammany Hall. In this cartoon, Kelly represents the “boss” spider, deceitfully luring the New York City “fly” into his lair. Nast continued his repetition of danger, disasters, and threats to the city and its idealistic republican form of government in his cartoons about New York’s political machine. Tammany became the pantomime villain of all illicit governance.

The threat of “danger” also appeared in a Keppler cartoon published in *Puck*, a month after “Kelly’s Dainty Dish.”⁴³ In “John Kelly, Undertaker,” Keppler illustrated a funeral procession, led by Kelly as the driver of the hearse. Lying on the hearse in final repose is “reform.” Keppler again uses a gendered approach that portrayed Tammany’s victims as delicate white women. Instead of a woman representing the city as in “Kelly’s

⁴¹ Thomas Nast, “The web of ruin,” *Harper's Weekly*, November 10, 1877.

⁴² *The Encyclopedia of New York State*, ed. Peter Eisenstadt and Laura-Eve Moss, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005), 255-256.

⁴³ Joseph Keppler, “John Kelly, Undertaker,” *Puck*, October 17, 1877.

Dainty Dish,” this cartoon had a delicate woman lying on the hearse with a sash, embroidered with “reform.” Not a subtle cartoonist, Keppler warns his readers that instead of reforming the machine’s corruption, Kelly would bury attempts to reform New York’s politics. In a similar vein to Nast, Keppler’s *raison d’être* was “good governance,” which meant political authority free of the corrupting influence of money and patronage. They saw the supposed reformer as a threat to *real* reform, since he publically fought with Samuel Tilden, whom helped to bring down the Tweed and Canal Rings.

While Kelly lacked the egregious misappropriations of Tweed, Nast still saw the “reformed” Tammany as little different from the previous administration. In an October 25, 1879 cartoon titled, “The Question After the New York Election—What kind of a Time Did You Have?,” Nast depicted the tumult in the divided Democratic Party of New York.⁴⁴ Initially a partner of Kelly’s in efforts to reform Tweed’s Tammany, former Democratic presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden often clashed with him over control of the party. In defiance of the Democratic Party’s and Tilden’s choice of gubernatorial candidate, Lucius Robinson, Kelly launched his own independent campaign. George Lankevich contends that the Democrats’ abandonment and poor care of the imprisoned Tweed spurred Kelly to punish the party by splitting the Democratic vote, ensuring a Republican victory.⁴⁵ Nast depicted this divide in his cartoon by having Tilden represented as a personified sarcophagus laying on the ground. Kelly stands on top of the coffin on the left while Robinson stands on the right. In Nast’s usual Irish caricature, Kelly is a primate, while Robinson is a parrot, mimicking the voice and instructions of

⁴⁴ Thomas Nast, “The Question After the New York Election—What Kind of a Time Did You Have?,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 25, 1879.

⁴⁵ Lenkevich, 110.

Samuel Tilden. Kelly and Robinson, though opponents, rest on the same base, Samuel Tilden's reformations of the New York Democratic Party. On Tilden's sarcophagus, Nast inscribed "Tilden Reform," accompanied by two dollar signs. Even with Tweed resting uncomfortably in the confines of Ludlow Street Jail, Nast continued his harangues against Tammany Hall, sarcastically mocking Tilden's and Kelly's reform as superficial and insincere.

Nast's distrust of Kelly persisted in his cartoon, "Deep Diplomacy," published on October 28, 1882.⁴⁶ Though years may have passed since the Tweed Ring's fall from grace, Nast still questioned whether "Honest" John Kelly lived up to his moniker. Grover Cleveland, the Democratic nominee for Governor in 1882, was critical of Tammany's influence and was often at odds with Kelly's organization.⁴⁷ Even though Nast was a Republican, he saw Cleveland as a reformer, beholden to the city's political machine and supported his candidacy for Governor and later President.⁴⁸ In the cartoon published weeks before the gubernatorial election, Nast portrayed Kelly as a Native American sitting cross-legged. He holds a peace pipe in one hand and taps the side of his nose with his left-hand index finger, likely signifying that he has a secret or is lying. Kelly may be offering peace before the election but Nast believed he was duplicitous. He reinforces this by showing a garbage bin next to the seated Kelly with "reform" and "promises" sticking out. A poster above Kelly's shoulder touts Cleveland for Governor, and perceptively has Cleveland pointing to the White House in the background. The scroll

⁴⁶ Thomas Nast, "Deep Diplomacy," *Harper's Weekly*, October 28, 1882.

⁴⁷ Allan Nevins, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Courage, Volume 1*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1962), 112.

⁴⁸ Halloran, 262.

underneath the drawing reads “John Kelly: I’ll let them have their way *before* election, but—.”⁴⁹

Nast was correct that Kelly tacitly supported Cleveland’s bid for Governor and would ultimately become his foe after the election. But instead of Kelly’s “deceitfulness” or fear of reform, his [Kelly’s? Nast’s] reasons were centered on policy. One of Tammany’s priorities after the gubernatorial election was the Five-Cent Fare Bill, which would have set a standard fare rate at five cents for use of the newly established elevated railway. The current rate was five cents at peak hours in the morning and evening but ten cents for the remaining hours. Since this adversely affected working-class New Yorkers, Kelly, through politicians loyal to Tammany, tried to pass the Five-Cent Fare Bill to maintain the lower rate all day. As historian Alyn Brodsky eloquently described it, “Tammany had done its damndest to get the five-cent fare bill passed.”⁵⁰

Cleveland vetoed the proposed legislation, and addressed the New York assembly on March 2, 1883, to outline his reasons; “it is manifestly important that invested capital should be protected and that its necessity and usefulness in the development of enterprises valuable to the people should be recognized by conservative conduct on the part of the State Government.”⁵¹ His retort to Tammany’s push was to defend capital and adopt a laissez-faire approach to price controls. Cleveland did close his address with a nod towards the disaffected:

“I am not unmindful of the fact that the bill originated in response to the demand of a large portion of the people of New-York for cheaper rates of fare between their places of employment and their homes, and I realize fully the desirability of securing to them all the privileges possible, but the experiences of other States

⁴⁹ Thomas Nast, “Deep Diplomacy,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 28, 1882.

⁵⁰ Alyn Brodsky, *Grover Cleveland: A Study in Character*, (New York: Truman Talley Books, 2000), 64.

⁵¹ Grover Cleveland, “The Governor’s Message.: His Reasons for Not Signing the Five Cents Fare Bill,” *The New York Times*, March 3, 1883.

teaches that we must keep within the limits of law and good faith, lest in the end we bring upon the very people whom we seek to benefit and protect a hardship which must surely follow when these limitations are ignored.”⁵²

The Governor in deference to capital, and in an early reference to the fear of capital flight, denied Tammany’s drive for the bill and deepened the rift between him and Kelly. The two men clearly had grave policy differences, but Cleveland also disdained Tammany’s political base. He viewed the boss system as “political gangsterism by an ignorant, venal Irish element that offended his own Anglo-Saxon tradition.”⁵³ While Nast’s portrayal of Kelly cynically indicated that he would clash with Cleveland after the election because of his desire to maintain a corrupt Tammany, the evidence indicates that personal and policy differences between the two men influenced Kelly’s grab for power in the Democratic Party.

From Kelly’s clashes with Tilden and Cleveland, Nast continued to portray him as deceitful and corrupt. The political machine undoubtedly continued patronage under Kelly and likely what George Washington Plunkett would later call “honest graft.”⁵⁴ While Tweed and his associates undoubtedly committed exhortation, graft, and enriched themselves by pinching from the public coffers, there’s no evidence that John Kelly did the same. He was a critic of Tammany’s corruption under Tweed and helped to reform its structure and institutions. Being the head of a political machine, regardless of any unlawful or unethical behavior, elicited the same response from the mainstream political cartoonists of the day. German-Irish relations, class differences, and personal enmity shaped how Nast and Keppler portrayed Tammany’s politics. Political machines were corrupt not by actions but by their nature.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Nevins, 446.

⁵⁴ William L. Riordan, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*, (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 3-4.

The Machine in Edward Harrigan's Plays

Tammany Hall's roots grew deep in the largely poor, Irish Lower East Side of New York City in the 1870s. Being a local, Edward Harrigan, interacted with Tammany and incorporated machine politics into his plays. The fictional life of Dan Mulligan closely resembled John Kelly's rise to power. In the series of plays, Dan Mulligan began his social and political career as the leader of the Mulligan Guard. Aspiring politicians often launched their careers by forming volunteer groups, where they accrued power and gained supporters. William Tweed led a volunteer fire company, Americus Engine Company, Number 6, before catching the eye of local Democrats who urged him to run for Alderman.⁵⁵ Like Dan Mulligan, John Kelly's career began with his leadership of an armed fraternal group called the Emmet Guard.⁵⁶ Following in Tweed's and Kelly's footsteps in *Mulligan Guard's Nominee*, Dan Mulligan runs for Alderman of his neighborhood, Mulligan's Alley. Though Mulligan's fictional career closely followed the same trajectory as Tammany's bosses, it likely was a popular choice for all aspiring politicians in the urban milieu.

I contend that Harrigan's personal favorite, and most famous character, Dan Mulligan, was a fictional reconstruction of John Kelly. Machine politics were so intertwined in the urban, Irish society that it was not only possible, but likely that Kelly served as a template for Mulligan. Though many scholars have noted the political themes in Harrigan's plays, they have not viewed Kelly as a prototype for Daniel Mulligan. Harrigan stated that if he had not taken up minstrelsy as a career, he "might have become

⁵⁵ Burrows and Wallace, 823.

⁵⁶ McLaughlin, 25.

one of the calkers—the swell ‘boys’ in politics with ‘Boss Tweed.’”⁵⁷ Calking had been his father’s trade on the wharf, an area controlled by Tammany Hall. Though Harrigan would have been deeply involved with the machine had he chosen to labor on the docks, his entertainment career did not avoid interactions with Tammany. Ely Jacques Kahn, Jr. asserted that Tammany politicians would often attend Harrigan’s productions and visit him at his home.⁵⁸ In addition, Harrigan and Braham dedicated their song, “The Black Mario, O!,” to “Honest” John Kelly.⁵⁹

Harrigan also developed a personal relationship with Kelly beyond song dedications. In 1881, while Harrigan was building his new uptown theater on Broadway, the New Theater Comique, he won encouragement from Kelly on his new venture. Harrigan’s previous plays were only one act long, and with his new theater he intended to create more developed, three act productions. In a 1903 article in *Pearson’s Magazine*, Harrigan related an interaction he claimed he had with Kelly:

“I was burrowing away in the sand of my theater site, John Kelly, then the leader of Tammany, sat on a wheelbarrow and listened to me while I expatiated upon my plans for the new type of drama. When I had finished, he slapped me on the back and exclaimed: ‘Splendid! You’ve struck the right idea!’ He was the only man who gave me encouragement.”⁶⁰

This kind of personal relationship illuminates the character of Dan Mulligan that Harrigan held so dear. Whether consciously or unconsciously, Harrigan likely modeled Mulligan on Kelly and he was true to his opinion that playwrights ought to hold “the mirror up to nature.”⁶¹ Whether Harrigan embellished his story or not, it speaks to his desire for Tammany’s approval. Asserting a bond between him and Kelly could have

⁵⁷ Harrigan, “Holding the Mirror up to Nature,” 500.

⁵⁸ Kahn, Jr., 98.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 93.

⁶⁰ Harrigan, “Holding the Mirror up to Nature,” 504.

⁶¹ Ibid, 500.

provided Harrigan with critical cultural capital in establishing a rapport with his audience.

Harrigan's connections to Tammany did not end with his modeling the Dan Mulligan character on Kelly, but continued through his series of Mulligan Guard plays. His 1880 production, the *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, is a musical comedy that follows events surrounding Dan Mulligan's campaign for Alderman of the fictional Fourteenth Ward of New York City. Running parallel to Mulligan's politicking, his wife Cordelia organizes a meeting of the Nightingales, an Irish women's association that supports Irish nationalists abroad. Under cover, English authorities investigate the Nightingales, suspecting they are supplying munitions to Irish revolutionaries. Dan Mulligan ultimately wins election for Alderman over his German neighbor opponent, Gustavus Lochmuller. The play culminates on election night with all the characters aboard a ship heading up the Hudson to Albany. The bungling English investigators confront Cordelia and her group but instead of discovering they provided firearms to militants, they find out that they were only sending old clothes. As is common in Harrigan's plays, a general melee breaks out amongst the characters as the boat sinks.

The characters in Harrigan's play are all non-WASP members of the working class who look to politicians for particular favors. This patronage often came in the form of employment and monetary dispensations. As Steven P. Erie persuasively argues, the actual amount of jobs that Tammany could offer was quite low in comparison to modern political machines.⁶² By the late 1880s, Tammany controlled 40,000 public jobs in a labor force of one million.⁶³ But, Tammany was able to dramatically increase the

⁶² Erie, 58.

⁶³ Ibid.

number of Irishmen in public sector jobs during the 1870s and 1880s. Even though Tammany could only provide 3% of the available jobs in the city, its supporters expected some form of benefaction, and a steady income was the most useful kind. In Harrigan's play, on the night before Election Day, Mulligan asks McSweeney what kind of favor he could offer him for his continued support:

MULLIGAN. I desire information in regard as to what synacure (sic) I can offer ye.
 McSWEENEY. I would like four dollars a day to sleep in the pipes on the Boulevard.⁶⁴

Though exaggerated for comedic effect, McSweeney's desire for a high-paying "job" of leisure demonstrates the paternal relationship between Aldermen and their electorates. Harrigan illustrates this later in the play with the song, "Mulligan's Promises:"

I promise all my workers
 Fat offices untold.
 ...
 Oh he promises, he promises,
 Daniel Mulligan.
 Ye'll be sure of a synacure. (sic)
 From our next Alderman.⁶⁵

Unlike Nast's venomous and racial criticisms of machine politics, Harrigan offers a nuanced view with tangible benefits for the working class, but also critiquing its overindulgence through humor and song. The Alderman offered sinecures after election, the spoils of victory, but also used monetary rewards to secure votes before Election Day.

In the *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Harrigan showed two examples before the election where Dan Mulligan solicited support through cash advances. Early in the play, Mulligan happens upon Snuff Maloney, and schemes to elicit his backing:

⁶⁴ Edward Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, 1871-1984, Billy Rose Theater Division, New York Public Library, 62.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

SNUFF. Hello, Dan. (offering hand)

MULLIGAN. How dare you put your hand out to me? How dare you recognize me in the presence of the City Hall? Do you observe the Mayor on the corner beyant (sic). Walk on like a tramp.

SNUFF. Dan, don't. I'm down. I'm the under dog. Don't kick me.

MULLIGAN. Didn't you help nominate Lochmuller?

SNUFF. Yes, but I'm with you now, Dan.

MULLIGAN. (aside) I can use the man. ... What do you want? To borrry?⁶⁶

In a similar scene, the African-American characters Palestine Puter and Rebecca Alsop approach Mulligan and ask him to be the official polling station for black voters.

Mulligan regretfully informs him that he has already promised that privilege to Captain Primrose of the Skidmore Guard. Instead he offers him money:

MULLIGAN. I could loan ye a half a dollar. Here's half a dollar.

PUTER. You lend me a half a dollar?

REBECCA. Would you offer us a bribe.

...

MULLIGAN. I have some posters here, you can paste over Lochmuller's.⁶⁷

Puter and Rebecca squabble over who should get the half dollar, Dan responds, "Don't quarrel. Here's another half dollar and some posters."⁶⁸ In both circumstances, Mulligan offers loans to shore up support for his candidacy. To the middle-brow press, this was another example of corruption of republicanism. For the characters in the play it was a mutually beneficial relationship, political purity mattered little on the margins of society. Harrigan presented a realist view of patronage, exempt from the sanctimonious overtones of Nast and Keppler.

Harrigan illustrates the constituent parts of New York's machine politics, electioneering and patronage, but he also highlights the more visceral aspect of politics, violence and intimidation. In the opening scene of *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*,

⁶⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 16-17.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 17.

Mulligan's friend McSweeney and his housekeeper, Mrs. Dublin, encounter Snuff Maloney at the Castle Garden pier. Snuff tells him he wanted to speak with Dan Mulligan and learned that he would be at the docks with his wife to meet the arriving Bridget Lochmuller. McSweeney is cynical of Snuff's motives:

McSWEENEY. I don't think you're a friend of Mulligan.
 SNUFF. McSweeney, I'd jump off the East River bridge for Mulligan.
 McSWEENEY. You helped nominate Lochmuller for Alderman at large.
 SNUFF. I admit it, but when the Mulligan Guard nominated Mulligan, didn't I holler for him?
 MRS. DUBLIN. Was you ever sea-sick, Mac?
 McSWEENEY. No, but I'll make this young fellow sea-sick if he goes back on Dan Mulligan.⁶⁹

The character of McSweeney is an archetypal enforcer, fiercely loyal to Mulligan and willing to inflict violence to affirm his political ascendancy. McSweeney later tells Mulligan's opponent, Lochmuller, that "Mulligan will make ye a political corpse."⁷⁰ Threats and intimidation continued their natural course to physical violence later in the play on Election Day.

With fifteen minutes left on Election Day, McSweeney and other Mulligan supporters crowd around the local polling booth. Snuff Maloney's father, only acknowledged as Maloney, shared his son's affection towards Gustavus Lochmuller. McSweeney confronts him as he went to cast his vote:

McSWEENEY. Hello, Maloney, here's your Mulligan ticket.
 MALONEY. I vote for Lochmuller.
 McSWEENEY. Lochmuller has no tickets or boxes here.
 OMNES. No – no dutch tickets here.
 MALONEY. I vote for the Lochmuller ticket.
 McSWEENEY. You are an Irishman?

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 6.

MALONEY. I am.

McSWEENEY. And ye'd vote for Lochmuller.⁷¹

While McSweeney's character would likely criticize anyone voting for Mulligan's opponent, he could not fathom how a fellow Irishman could betray his blood by voting for a German. It escalates once Maloney and McSweeney trade insults. Maloney does not balk at McSweeney's insinuations that he is betraying his roots, but he does respond to the accusation that he is a political reformer:

MALONEY. I'm an engineer on the Albany boat and I'll vote for Lochmuller before I sail.

McSWEENEY. Maloney, you're a reformer.

MALONEY. You're a liar.

McSWEENEY. What! (strikes Maloney who runs off)⁷²

Harper's Weekly and *Puck* valorized reform as ending the corruption of America's republican government. Compared to the middle-brow readership of those magazines, to the working-class Irish audience of Harrigan's plays, reform was a pejorative. Maloney did not suffer this claim, retorting that McSweeney was lying. The scene ends with McSweeney punching Maloney who scurries off, successfully blocking him from voting for Lochmuller. Using humor, Harrigan could broach subjects sensitive to his audience, such as political reform, without insulting them.

Later that night while on the boat to Albany, Dan Mulligan and McSweeney encounter Malone, working as the ship's engineer:

MULLIGAN. Maloney, I'm sorry you didn't vote for me.

MALONEY. I voted for ye Dan, and there's my hand on it.

MULLIGAN. You're my second cousin and that ties us.

McSWEENEY. There's no hard feeling, it's all settled.⁷³

⁷¹ Ibid., 97.

⁷² Ibid., 98.

⁷³ Ibid., 122.

Violence, via McSweeney's fist, reversed Maloney's political opinion. In a scene reminiscent of a multitude of gangster films, McSweeney confidently buries any acrimonious feelings after intimidating Maloney enough to change his vote. These incidents appeared as natural parts of the election process in the play. The relationship between McSweeney and his prospective Alderman was personal. They were close friends before the election, but that kind of personal connection between a politician and their constituents was also an important aspect of Tammany's control after the election. With local Aldermen helping immigrant families with funerals, finding jobs, and literally surviving in their adopted home, close bonds could form. McSweeney's spirited defense of Mulligan was not only effective, but suggests a development of the personal relationships in machine politics that connected politicians with their voters.

Often concomitant with illicit force is the interjection of the legalized arm of violence, the police. Harrigan's play follows suit when after McSweeney struck Maloney at the polling booth, a police officer captures the offender. While the enforcement of law is far from unusual, Harrigan scripts the interaction between Mulligan and the officer in a telling scene. The police officer grabs McSweeney:

OFFICER. Come on.

MULLIGAN. Release that man, sir.

McSWEENEY. How are you Dan?

OFFICER. He's been making a disturbance at the polls.

MULLIGAN. Release him. I am 2000 ahead of Lochmuller and I'll say no more.

OFFICER. Anything Mr. Mulligan to please you.⁷⁴

Immediately upon seeing McSweeney, Mulligan insisted that the officer release him.

Mulligan is equally curt when he reiterates his demand, and the officer sycophantically acquiesces. This scene would likely not surprise Harrigan's audience. In 1894, the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 98-99.

Lexow Committee investigated Tammany's collusion with the police and "amassed a mound of evidence—six thousand pages in all."⁷⁵ In his quest for realism, Harrigan illustrated the control Tammany exercised with law enforcement. While middle-class New Yorkers might have balked at Mulligan's corruption, Harrigan's audience likely applauded the officer's "sensibility." Again Harrigan could offer mild rebukes of corruption while being good-natured, and showing its advantages for the masses. The ability to coerce the police became one of the many forms of patronage that the political machine offered its constituents. Later in the play, Harrigan illustrated what happened when an Alderman failed in this responsibility.

During a volatile melee in the middle of the play, the police arrest a group of characters. One of these characters is Dick Dublin, Mulligan's bartender. His mother, Mrs. Dublin searches the ship for Dan Mulligan:

Mrs. DUBLIN. Where's Mulligan, where is he?

MULLIGAN. I'm here.

Mrs. DUBLIN. You have my boy incarcerated.

MULLIGAN. I never had him lacerated.

Mrs. DUBLIN. You sent him up for ten days.

...

Mrs. DUBLIN. Will you free my boy, Richard?

MULLIGAN. I know nothing of him.

Amid the puns in this humorous exchange, Mrs. Dublin expresses her anger at Mulligan whom she believes is responsible for the imprisonment of her son since it occurred at Mulligan's political gathering. More importantly she expects Mulligan to bail him out.

In the "Mulligan's Promises" song Harrigan writes:

Whenever ye get collared,
For breaking of the peace,

⁷⁵ Richard F. Welch, *King of the Bowery: Tim Sullivan, Tammany Hall, and New York City from the Gilded Age to the Progressive Era*, (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 52.

Oh come around and see me,
I'll fix up the police.⁷⁶

A typical request that working-class immigrants made of their local politician was to help them get out of jail. Tammany politician, George Washington Plunkitt recorded in his diary that a local bartender knocked on his door at 2am and asked him to bail out his boss.⁷⁷ Plunkitt provided the bail money and retired for the evening. The following morning he “went to police court to look after his constituents. Found six ‘drunks.’ Secured the discharge of four by a timely word with the judge, and paid the fines of two.”⁷⁸ Harrigan imbued Mulligan with this patriarchal responsibility that defined the relationship between machine politician and his supporters. When Mulligan denied Mrs. Dublin this favor, she exploded in anger and later rowed with other passengers on the ship.

In *Cordelia's Aspirations*, Harrigan again borrowed from modern developments involving the Tammany machine. While Kelly was consolidating power at Tammany in the 1870s and early 1880s, a division formed between the working-class base of Democrats, ethnic and largely Irish immigrants, and the Swallowtail Democrats. The Swallowtails were wealthy, politically motivated uptown Democrats who maintained a greater influence than Tammany during this time period. Do to their sway, all the mayors of New York in these two decades were wealthy merchants.⁷⁹ They were the Democratic Party's capital wing in the city compared to Tammany's labor. Since Tammany lacked the funds that the Swallowtails had, Kelly had to drop his usual intransigence and work

⁷⁶ Harrigan, “The Mulligan Guard Nominee,” Edward Harrigan Papers, 1871-1984, 72.

⁷⁷ Riordan, 104-105.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 105.

⁷⁹ David C. Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century*, (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982), 110.

with them.⁸⁰ In Harrigan's play, Dan Mulligan tells McSweeney that he is reluctantly moving uptown to please his wife:

McSWEENEY. Well, Dan, I suppose it's all for the best, you're a bit interested in politics.

MULLIGAN. I am.

McSWEENEY. The lower wards are at your beck and call.

MULLIGAN. Yis, I haven't an enemy downtown.

McSWEENEY. Well, when you move up to Madison Avenue, you can secure the swallow-tail vote.

MULLIGAN. Mac, you're (sic) judgment may be right but I can't bring myself to meet it.

McSWEENEY. I only speak for friendship's sake. Whatever's between you and the old woman, I'm out of it, but if you want to hold the key to Tammany Hall you must have the millionaires with you.⁸¹

The Democratic Party's division is acted out on stage, with Mulligan torn between his loyal base of supporters and ingratiating himself with the wealthy Democrats uptown.

Harrigan's emphasis on realism clearly included pulling stories from the headlines and incorporating them into his productions.

Harrigan incorporated aspects of the *New York Times*' scathing revelations of corruption involving Tammany and the National Guard in two of his plays. While the *Times*' exposed Tweed and Ingersoll's fraudulent real estate rentals to the National Guard, Harrigan illustrates Tammany's use of the National Guard to secure patronage for its constituents. In a scene early in the *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Dan Mulligan tells his wife of a promise he made to the African-American target company, the Skidmore Guard:

MULLIGAN. I promised the Skidmore Guard, as you are aware, I would see the Governor the moment I was elected for the purpose of having them consolidated in the National Guard. The N.Y.S.N.G. That ought to catch the nagur vote.

CORDELIA. What will the Governor say?

⁸⁰ Burrows and Wallace, 1103.

⁸¹ Harrigan, "Cordelia's Aspirations," 36.

MULLIGAN. He'll say 'Daniel – The Skidmore Guard can take the place of the Seventh reg'ment.'⁸²

Political office, under Tammany's banner, provided its holders privileges to dole out favors and patronage. What the *New York Times*, Thomas Nast, and Joseph Keppler saw as corruption, Harrigan's audience saw primarily as a tool of upward mobility. Aligning oneself with an Alderman could gain you *respectability*, as was the case with the Skidmore Guard. For the African Americans in the outfit, their votes for Harrigan translated into official recognition from the state.

The prospects for the Alderman in the situation are go beyond status improvements. *Quid-pro-quo* gained Mulligan the office of Alderman, which opened the gilded door to Tammany. In a scene in the *Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Mulligan worries that his wife supports his rival for Alderman:

MULLIGAN. Are ye in favor of Lochmuller or Daniel Mulligan for Alderman?

COREDELIA. Wasn't it me that coaxed ye to open the Wee Drop Saloon?

MULLIGAN. The Wee Drop Saloon cost me two thousand dollars and if I'm not elected it will be a big drop."⁸³

Without the revenue from political office, Mulligan's business would fold. As late as 1898, the salary for a New York City Alderman was \$1,000, which was considerably more than the median income of Irish New Yorkers.⁸⁴ The route out of poverty in New York often led directly through Tammany Hall. Even without the explicit corruption and embezzlement of the Tweed era, Tammany and its associates could guarantee themselves sizable salaries. John Kelly famously made himself wealthy without partaking in bribes during his time as Sheriff and comptroller. Power accrues wealth, and in Harrigan's

⁸² Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, 1871-1984, 12.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ *The New York Press Almanac for 1898: A Volume of Statistical, Official, Agricultural, Historical, State, National and General Information*, Volume 1, (New York: New York Press Company, 1898), 15.

plays, it was no different. A comfortable salary was not the only way to gain income through political office. Alderman could additionally profit through graft and legitimate business opportunities accrued through political connections. Harrigan depicted Mulligan's entrance into Tammany's machine as his financial savior. The symbiotic relationship between politician and voter was a non-zero sum game, where both attempted to improve their social standing by incorporating into the Tammany machine. Nast's republican ideals, of an incorruptible societal middle class, could not suffer the accumulation of power and wealth through machine politics, especially by Irish whom Nast saw as racially unqualified for self-government. Working-class immigrants likely acknowledged the corruption and could laugh at its hyperbolic representations but saw more opportunity in patronage than hegemonic political ideology.

The character of Dan Mulligan is attractive to working-class Irish because of his rags-to-riches story, a Horatio Alger character for the Irish poor. The audience could relate to a hard-working Irishman, who slung coke, earning his wages in the heat, grime, and smoke of a coal plant. In the *Mulligan Guard Ball*, Cordelia Mulligan tells her housekeeper about her husband, "the poor man works hard wheeling smoke and weight coke."⁸⁵ The audience then sees over the course of the *Mulligan Guard* series, Mulligan's steady social rise, gaining wealth, respect, and power. The Alderman position was a critical step in parlaying local power and friendships into wealth and citywide authority. Harrigan's audience could envision themselves as Mulligan, as members of a prosperous political machine. As in all cultural productions, Mulligan was not typical of the Irish-American experience, but the *idea* of Dan Mulligan, of rising out of the poverty stricken streets of downtown New York through Tammany Hall, was undoubtedly

⁸⁵ Harrigan, "Mulligan Guard's Ball," act 1, 3.

desirable. This connection to the character may very well be the reason for the *Mulligan Guard's* tremendous success compared to Harrigan's other musical comedies.

Though the plays were light-hearted entertainment, Harrigan did not shy away from addressing Tammany politicians' control over their constituents. During a stump speech, some of Mulligan's Irish supporters eyed a German man and chased him out of the meeting hall. As the Irishmen darted out the door after the man, Mulligan spoke:

MULLIGAN. I'm the boss here. The first man bolts from this convention, I'll brain him wid this parliamentary banner.⁸⁶

Rather than elevating the people's voice, the machine enacted patriarchal power over them, appeasing them with perks. In the scene, Mulligan acts much like a labor boss, enforcing control over his political base, threatening them with violence. Like his depictions of McSweeney's assault on Snuff at the polls, Harrigan did not whitewash machine politics. Bosses operated as puppet masters, pulling the strings and influencing policy and the distribution of support. In a scene later in the play while on the Albany bound boat, Mulligan toasts himself:

MULLIGAN. (holding up glass of liquor(sic)) And now I ax ye, gentlemen, would we be sailing into this – if I wasn't driving the political machinery of the party.

MALONEY and McSWEENEY. No, sir, No, sir.

MULLIGAN. I am the engineer of the political boat.⁸⁷

The metaphor of a ship's engineer directing the coal, which ultimately drives the ship, is an astute description of bossism. Mulligan is not driving politics, but a driver of men. Mulligan concisely states this desire for power to his wife, "I'll be Boss Mulligan or nothing."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Harrigan, "The Mulligan Guard Nominee," Edward Harrigan Papers, 1871-1984, 74.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 140.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 13.

CONCLUSION

Harrigan's works will continue to be a rich vein to mine for scholars of ethnicity, race, politics, and urban history. Previous scholars have found them to be along the spectrum from radical, such as Koger to reactionary, such as Dormon. Moloney emphasized Harrigan's place in theatrical history as the founding father of modern American musical theater. While many conclusions can be drawn from the plays, I have shown that they can inform historians of the lives of the working class in Gilded Age New York. Relations between the Irish, Germans, and African Americans were tense, but clearly their lives in a shared urban space produced intricate and often incongruous experiences. Harrigan's working-class audience also saw the political machine, personified by Tammany Hall, as an opportunity or at least a possibility for social mobility. Through juxtapositions with middle-brow political cartoons, Harrigan's works show how he softly critiqued the excesses of politics without stripping immigrants of their humanity.

Harrigan opined in 1889 about the modern criticism of drama, "Perhaps the only general rule of valuing a dramatic composition is by applying the question, 'Does it contain enough powerful, interesting, humorous, or beautiful features to attract and hold public attention?' This touchstone...enables us to form a fair opinion of modern dramatic values."¹ Using Harrigan's self-supporting metric, his *Mulligan Guard* series was a huge success. In the 1880s, Harrigan's immigrant comedies offered theatergoers sympathetic views of working-class life in the city. Harrigan noted towards the end of his career, "I suppose ere long I shall add the Bohemian, Hungarian, Roumanian, Polak,

¹ Harrigan, "American Playwrights on the American Drama," 98.

and Scandinavian. As yet, however, their turn has not come.”² Indeed, their time did come, as these new immigrants outpaced Harrigan’s Irish and German base. Harrigan’s world typified the “old immigrant,” and his unfamiliarity with immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe likely facilitated his decline in popularity. By the 1890s, Harrigan’s realism was a realism from a bygone era. New York City changed, and the *Mulligan Guard* felt outdated. Harrigan was a man of his time, but no other. For a short period in the early 1880s, Harrigan’s plays captured the zeitgeist of working-class New York. A city of Germans, Irish, and African Americans, engaged in dialectic relationships that produced nuanced and often contradictory experiences, a city of political patronage and machine politics, and most importantly, a city of people trying to survive.

² Ibid.

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Curriculum Vitae

Sean Patrick Boyle

Born September 4, 1981 in New Brunswick, New Jersey

Education:

South Brunswick High School, Monmouth Junction, NJ 1999

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 2010
BA in History, minor in Classical Humanities, *summa cum laude*.

Rutgers University, Newark, NJ 2013
MA in History.