

NOCTURNAL HABITS AND DARK WISDOM: THE AMERICAN RESPONSE TO CHILDREN IN THE STREETS AT NIGHT, 1880-1930

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In his 1915 book, *Street-Land*, Philip Davis wrote of a well-brought-up young boy named Tommie, the son of a schoolmaster in Boston:

Like his parents, Tommie was taught from infancy to retire soon after sundown. One evening, while in his 'nightie' and in the midst of his prayers, he heard the fire alarm. He ran excitedly into the front-room, flung the window open—just in time to catch sight of the fleeting shadows of little children running madly behind a clanging, hissing fire-engine. 'Mama,' he asked in great surprise, 'are these the night children?'

The phrase "night-children" made Davis think of an analogy:

Did you ever hear of night birds? There are owls, to be sure. Those on the Boston Common, known to sight-seers the country over, are as cosmopolitan by nature as our city children. But their reputation is rather low in birdland. Their reputed wisdom is of a doubtful sort, mostly derived from a knowledge of things which well-bred babes of birdland close their eyes to before nightfall. Nevertheless, the owl, in its nocturnal habits and dark wisdom, strikingly resembles the 'wise-guy' of Street-Land. The alarming thing about city children is that they are becoming more and more owlish.¹

Davis's vignette of Tommie and the night children reflected a widespread concern among the American middle class at this time. From about 1880 to 1930, children's access to the nighttime city became a subject for public hand-wringing and for intervention by middle-class social reformers and government officials. Middle-class Americans feared that children's development would be undermined. The orderly process of learning and acculturation that took place in schools and homes would be tainted by the "dark wisdom" to be gained in urban public spaces—knowledge of the world that was unsuited to young people.

This concern revealed cultural conflicts between middle-class and working-class Americans over the meanings of modern night, and over the raising of children. Middle-class city dwellers, like Tommie's parents, already ensured that their own children stayed indoors at night and went to bed early. Working-class parents did not. Confident of their own cultural superiority, middle-class Americans searched for ways to remove all children from the streets after dark. Their desire to shield even poor children from premature exposure to adult knowledge lay behind efforts to create

¹ Philip Davis, *Street-Land: Its Little People and Big Problems* (Boston: Small, Maynard & Co, 1915), 62-3.

supervised recreation centers such as boys' clubs, to regulate child labour in the streets, and to impose juvenile curfews.

The Problem of Night

I will examine each of these reform campaigns in turn, but first let me address this question: How did the middle class come to perceive night as such a problem, and why did their concerns focus on children?

The most obvious reason for concerns about night stems from the increasing nighttime use of urban public spaces. Through the mid-nineteenth century, night had been associated in the public mind with vice and danger. A woman who was on a dark street without an escort was almost certain to be a prostitute, also known as a "night-walker." Men were likely to be out for debauchery, if not crime. Except for these disreputable activities, the American street was typically deserted for most of the night. Fanny Trollope, who visited Philadelphia in the late 1820s, wrote, "the great and most striking contrast between this city and those of Europe, is perceived after sun-set; scarcely a sound is heard; hardly a voice or a wheel breaks the stillness. The streets are entirely dark, except where a stray lamp marks an hotel or the like; no shops are open but those of the apothecary, and here and there a cook's shop; scarcely a step is heard and for the note of music, or the sound of mirth, I listened in vain."² Inadequate street lighting was part of the problem. Flickering oil lanterns or gas jets cast only small, isolated pools of light. They could help walkers find their way home around some of the visible hazards, such as uneven sidewalks, mud-puddles, and muggers. But the lamps were extinguished after midnight, and on evenings when the moon was bright.³

Mid-nineteenth-century exposés like George Foster's *New York by Gas-Light* portrayed night as a time of covert depravities among the very poor and the very rich. Foster told of revelry in filthy saloons and orgies in the mansions, "of which ordinary and orderly people, who go to bed virtuously at ten o'clock, have no possible idea." Virtually every American writer on mid-nineteenth century night took special note of Broadway, a unique marvel of nocturnal activity as early as the 1820s. "Fashionable, aristocratic Broadway," as Foster called it, was a bustling promenade with gas lamps, brightly lit shops, theaters and restaurants. Many writers acknowledged

²James D McCabe, *The Secrets of the Great City: A Work Descriptive of the Virtues and the Vices, the Mysteries, Miseries and Crimes of New York City* (Philadelphia: Jones, Brothers & Co, 1868), 51, 549-50. Edwin G Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 185, 213, 637, 756. Fanny Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (London: Penguin Books, 1997; originally published 1832), 209-10.

³Kate Bolton, "The Great Awakening of the Night: Lighting America's Streets," *Landscape* 23, no 3 (1979) 41-7. Harold L Platt, *The Electric City: Energy and the Growth of the Chicago Area, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 12.

Broadway's appeal, admitted that it had a generally respectable atmosphere, but still warned of its moral dangers. Its elegance lured virtuous men and women to mingle "promiscuously" with the gamblers, prostitutes, and adulterers who still inhabited the night.⁴

Despite—or partly because of—its temptations, Broadway became a model for modern American night. The longstanding association of light with virtue and wealth contributed greatly to the avenue's success in drawing ever larger amounts of nighttime activity. The fame of the "Great White Way" as a place of fashionable consumption, entertainment, and personal display encouraged imitations in cities throughout the United States. Cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century installed ever more dazzling lights along major retail and entertainment streets. The brightness of these "white ways" attracted crowds to enjoy the spectacle, and created an aura of energetic modernity.⁵

Gas and electric lighting slowly spread throughout the urban landscape in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, first in the commercial streets and elite residential areas, then gradually into middle-class and finally poorer sections of the city. City officials, businessmen, and residents hoped that improved street lighting would increase the city's safety and moral tone. The unequal progress of lighting, though, created a highly visible division of the city into zones of relative light and relative darkness—a division that was often viewed as revealing the moral darkness of the slums.⁶

⁴George C Foster, *New York by Gas-Light and Other Urban Sketches* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; originally published in 1850), 70-76, 123, quotes on 164 and 73. Anonymous, *Tricks and Traps of Chicago*, part 1 (New York: Dinsmore & Co, 1859), 63-9. George Lippard, *The Empire City or, New York by Night and Day. Its Aristocracy and its Dollars* (Philadelphia: T B Peterson & Brothers, 1864; first published 1850), 134. George Lippard, *New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million* (Cincinnati: H M Rulison, 1854), 140, 146-7. Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 273. McCabe, *Secrets of the Great City*, 47.

⁵McCabe, *Secrets of the Great City*, 46-47. James D McCabe, *New York by Sunlight and Gaslight: A Work Descriptive of the Great American Metropolis* (Philadelphia: Douglass Bros, 1882), 153-54, 191, 252-3, 268, 271, 276. David E Nye, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 56-7. Platt, *Electric City*, 100-10. Bolton, "Awakening," 41-6. "Blaze of Lights Packs Asylum Street," *Hartford Courant*, Dec 19, 1921." Charles J Stahl, "City Zoning of Street Lighting," *American City* 29, no 4 (Oct 1923): 359-63.

⁶Robin L Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 96. Burrows and Wallace, *Gotham*, 439, 1065. McCabe, *Sunlight and Gaslight*, 191-92. Mark J Bouman, "Luxury and Control: The Urbanity of Street Lighting in Nineteenth Century Cities" *Journal of Urban History* 14, no 1 (Nov 1987):12, 28. James B Carrington, "New York at Night"

In addition to the reassuring glare of street lamps, demographic, economic and cultural changes were also putting more people on the streets at night in the late nineteenth century. First of all, there were more people on the streets because there were more people in the cities. The population even of relatively stagnant Philadelphia rose by over one hundred per cent during the period from 1880 to 1930, while Chicago's rose by over *five-hundred* per cent and Detroit's by over one thousand per cent. New York's population reached a total of nearly seven million. By 1930, ninety American cities had populations of over one hundred thousand; many of these, particularly in the West, had been no more than small towns fifty years earlier.⁷ More important, city dwellers were spending their evenings differently from in the past. Thanks to modest increases in income and decreases in hours of labour, urban Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had more money and time to spend on entertainment after work. This meant larger, more diverse crowds out to enjoy what had come to be called "night life." Previously, with the exception of a few prestigious restaurants, hotels, and high-brow theatres, and a handful of ethnic working-class theatres, most mid-nineteenth century night spots had drawn an overwhelmingly adult male clientele. Men, particularly bachelors, gathered in concert saloons, neighbourhood bar-rooms, and pool-halls where no respectable woman would be seen. Others patronized brothels and gambling dens. Around the turn of the century, urban recreation attracted greater numbers of respectable working-class and middle-class people, including women. Vaudeville theatres courted a mixed-gender clientele by offering entertainment less raunchy than was seen in the concert saloons. Dance halls drew young women and men together in an atmosphere that pushed—but usually was not allowed to cross—the boundaries of permissible sexuality. After 1900, movie theatres became the largest part of the recreation business. By 1910, 1.5 million people a week—men, women and children—went to the movies in New York.⁸

Scribner's Magazine 27, no 3 (March 1900), 326-36. Stahl, "City Zoning of Street Lighting."

⁷*The World Almanac and Book of Facts for 1947* (New York: New York World-Telegram, 1947), 186.

⁸Carrington, "New York at Night", 332-34. Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). Lewis A Erenberg, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 6-56. Howard P Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 106-21. Timothy J Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W W Norton, 1992), 99-116, 225-32. David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York:

While most city people were resting or enjoying themselves in the evening, a significant part of the working class was still on the job. The handful of watchmen and night-soil collectors who prowled the early nineteenth-century streets at night were supplemented by armies of workers providing the services demanded by a modern metropolis. Policemen, firemen, gas-house workers, telephone operators, freight handlers, power plant workers, and trolley conductors remained on duty while most of the city slept. Through the nineteenth century, factories relied increasingly on artificial lights to allow work before dawn and after dusk. By the early twentieth century, heavy industries such as steel mills, glass works and shipyards often ran through the night with continuous shifts of workers. Newspapers also ran around the clock, and the business of supplying the city's food never stopped; dealers began arriving at the wholesale markets many hours before dawn. Each of these activities attracted all-night services such lunch wagons, saloons, restaurants and news vendors, creating pockets of incessant activity even in areas far from the entertainment districts.⁹

Working-class children participated in both nightlife and night work. Children and teenagers would loiter in the "bright lights sections" —the major shopping and entertainment districts—listening to the music that spilled out of concert saloons and waiting for excitement. Some would take in a vaudeville show or a movie. Newsboys and child peddlers worked the night-time crowds. In working class neighbourhoods, children and teenagers flocked to the cheap storefront movie theatres, called Nickelodeons, where even at night only a minority of the audience were adults. Smaller numbers walked to events at nearby settlement houses. Other children could be seen

Basic Books, 1993), 3, 19-33.

⁹ Jacqueline Jones, *American Work: Four Centuries of Black and White Labor* (New York: W W Norton, 1998), 265. Daniel T Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 155. David R Roediger and Philip S Foner, *Our Own Times; A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 51. Nye, *Electrifying America*, 193. Charles Hill, "Fighting the Twelve Hour Day in the American Steel Industry," *Labor History* 15, no 1 (Winter 1974). Florence Kelley, "A Boy Destroying Trade," *Charities* 1, no 1 (July 4, 1903), 14-19. Edward Hungerford, "The Night Glow of the City" *Harper's Weekly*, April 30 1910, 13-14. Simeon Strunsky, "When the City Wakes" *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 129 (Oct 1914), 697-706. "When the City Sleeps," *Literary Digest*, May 15, 1917, 1369-73. McCabe, *Sunlight and Gaslight*, 144, 190, 268, 595, 665.

on the streets returning from work in the factories and sweatshops, or running errands.¹⁰

Most working-class children, though, spent their evenings playing on the streets of their neighbourhood. As population densities soared in central cities, and open space dwindled, children who lived in cramped apartments had nowhere else to play; their parents often wanted them outside so that they wouldn't interfere with the housework. The sidewalks and streets of immigrant districts such as New York's Lower East Side or Chicago's Near West Side were filled with children from the moment school let out until late in the evening. According to an 1891 article in *Scribner's Magazine*: "Every doorway pours forth its little quota, and it is sometimes with difficulty that one can thread one's way through the crowds that literally swarm about the sidewalks. Some are playing quietly; some are fighting; some are 'passing' ball when the policeman on the beat is not in sight." Girls were greatly outnumbered by boys, but could still be seen skipping rope under the street lamps.¹¹

Nevertheless, the bright lighting and greater activity did not rid the streets of moral danger. Neither did the professional police who had replaced the inefficient night watchmen of the early nineteenth century. Like street lighting, police protection was unequally distributed. Too small to protect the entire city, police departments concentrated on areas with high property values, and the people who visited there.¹² Even in these areas, they achieved only limited success. Violent crime dropped sharply in American cities in the late 1870s and 1880s, and continued to fall through the early

¹⁰Davis, *Street-Land*, 19, 82-4. David Nasaw, *Children of the City: At Work and at Play* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1985) 49, 63, 74, 82-6, 123. Elliott West, *Growing Up in Twentieth Century America: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1996), 68.

¹¹David I Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America, 1890-1920* (New York: Twayne Publishers; London: Prentice Hall International, 1998), 65, 125-26, 131. Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 17-18, 20. Evert Jansen Wendell, "Boys' Clubs," *Scribner's Magazine* 9, no 6 (June 1891), 738-39. John H Finley, "The Child Problem in Cities," *Review of Reviews* 4, no 24 (Jan 1892), 685. Allen Hoben, "The City Street," in *The Child in the City: A Series of Papers Presented at the Conferences Held During the Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit* (Chicago: Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, 1912), 458-59. Percy Stickney Grant, "Children's Street Games," *Survey* 23 (Nov 13, 1909), 235. William I Hull, "The Children of the Other Half," *Arena* 17 (June 1897), 1045.

¹²Howard P Chudacoff and Judith E Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 4thed (Englewood Cliffs, N J: Prentice Hall, 1994), 64. John C Schneider, "Public Order and the Geography of the City: Crime, Violence and the Police in Detroit, 1845-1875," *Journal of Urban History* 4, no 2 (Feb 1978), 183-208. McCabe, *Secrets of the Great City*, 47, 190. McCabe, *Sunlight and Gaslight*, 379.

twentieth century. But police were plagued by a boom in prostitution, attributable to a variety of factors including the profusion of single young adults in an anonymous environment. Selective enforcement did help cluster brothels and streetwalking in poor areas close to the central business districts. Police and public officials justified their policy of tolerating vice districts on the grounds that prostitution was a necessary evil that should be kept where respectable people would not have to see it. Even on these grounds, however, the policy was a failure. Most of these districts lacked clear boundaries, and prostitution thrived outside the districts as well.¹³

All sorts of people were thrown together on even the most respectable streets, particularly at night. On the well-lit sidewalks, one could see ladies and gentlemen in evening dress emerging from restaurants and theatres; middle-class and working-class couples out for a stroll; factory hands returning home; shopgirls rushing to an evening's entertainment; German families headed for respectable beer-halls; young "bloods" starting a debauch; peddlers, newsboys, matchgirls, beggars, drunks, pickpockets, and, conspicuously, streetwalkers. Though a few small and notorious areas were given over entirely to vice, no well-used part of the nocturnal city was entirely virtuous.¹⁴

Night could not be turned into day anywhere, either in the literal sense of illuminating the street as brightly as sunlight, or in the figurative sense of creating an island of virtue in a sea of moral darkness. The increasing use of urban public spaces ensured, rather, that much larger numbers of people—particularly working-class people—came in contact with the dubious elements that had long characterized the night. Modern urban night was not an extension of day; it was a liminal new world in which conflicting moral values mingled uneasily. This spectacle of moral diversity, even chaos, unmistakably heightened the excitement of the nighttime street. The "white ways" seemed to many observers to be the essence of the urban experience, buzzing with energy and barely suppressed eroticism. The

¹³Theodore N Ferdinand, "The Criminal Patterns of Boston since 1849," *American Journal of Sociology* 73, no 1 (July 1967), 84-99. Neil Larry Shumsky, "Tacit Acceptance: Respectable Americans and Segregated Prostitution, 1870-1910," *Journal of Social History* 19, no 4 (Summer 1986), 665-79. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 122-23, 197-98, 205-208, 211, 223.

¹⁴McCabe, *Sunlight and Gaslight*, 153-155, 270-73, 276. Foster, *New York by Gas-Light*, 70-76. Junius Henri Browne, *The Great Metropolis: A Mirror of New York* (New York: Arno Press, 1975; originally published in 1869), 28-9. W O Stoddard, "Bowery, Saturday Night" *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 42 (April 1871), 670-80. David Graham Phillips, "The Bowery at Night," *Harper's Weekly* 35 (Sept 19, 1891), 710. Carrington, "New York at Night." Mrs Schuyler Van Rensselaer, "Midsummer in New York," *Century Magazine* 62, no 4 (Aug 1901), 483-501. Hutchins Hapgood, *Types from City Streets* (New York: Garrett Press, 1970; originally published in 1910), 132-3.

effect on adolescents could be devastating, wrote Jane Addams in 1909. The teenage boy, at an impressionable age when he was first confronting powerful urges, walked unsupervised through the streets and into places of commercial entertainment. "It is nothing short of cruelty to over-stimulate his senses as does the modern city. This period is difficult everywhere but it seems at times as if the great city almost deliberately increased its perils. The newly awakened senses are appealed to by all that is gaudy and sensual," Addams wrote.¹⁵

Addams was drawing on new ideas of child development that had emerged in the late nineteenth century and had been given clearest expression in G Stanley Hall's famous 1904 book, *Adolescence*. Hall, the foremost child psychologist in the United States, argued that the child recapitulated the stages of evolution of the human race, from pre-savagery to civilization. In order to become a happy adult, the child must successfully pass through each of these stages. Adolescence, between thirteen and eighteen years of age, was particularly crucial. "The dawn of puberty," Hall wrote, "is soon followed by a stormy period when there is a peculiar proneness to be either very good or very bad."¹⁶

Child experts and reformers viewed the city as an unnatural environment that threatened to upset the schedule of development. They urged parents and teachers to shelter children from influences that were inappropriate for their age. The proper childhood was thought to take place in a single-family home, with a private bedroom for the parents and separate bedrooms for boys and girls, in order to shield the child from premature exposure to sexuality and sexual difference. Children were supposed to spend their days in a schoolroom with their peers, and in specially designated play spaces such as private backyards and playrooms. The sheltered child should also be kept to a regular schedule for meals and sleep, with early bedtimes that differed from those of adults. Dr F S Churchill, a Chicago pediatrician, wrote in 1912: "We should apply not only the principle of regularity but we should stick to natural hours in our regularity. For countless ages the young of all animals have naturally slept and rested at night. They have not been careering around cities..."¹⁷

¹⁵Hapgood, *Types from City Streets*, 75. Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 27.

¹⁶Quoted in Howard P Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?: Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 67. Joseph F Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 217-20.

¹⁷Macleod, *Age of the Child*, 20-1, 25-6, 30-1, 51. Karin Calvert, "Children in the House, 1890 to 1930," in Jessica H Foy and Thomas J Schlereth, *American Home Life, 1880-1930: A Social History of Spaces and Services* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 75-93. Davis, *Street-Land*, 228-36. Mrs Theodore W

As Davis suggested in his story of Tommie and the night children, a sheltered childhood was still far more common among the middle class than the working class. The seclusion of children, like the domesticity of women, was a luxury that working class Americans neither desired nor could afford. Working-class parents admired the industrious child who helped provide for the family, and the spontaneous, self-reliant child who could hold his own in the streets. As reformers complained incessantly, working-class parents were far less concerned about strict scheduling either of daily activities or of child development. They granted children freedom. As a result, Davis warned in his 1915 book, the street remained at least as powerful an influence on the working-class child as the home and the school. Most disturbingly, the street was where children learned about sexuality, the most carefully guarded part of adult knowledge. "For a decade, this country has hotly debated the where and when and how of teaching sex hygiene. During this same period, the street has been teaching it at all hours, under all sorts of conditions, to thousands of children regardless of age or sex." Contaminated by illicit knowledge, working-class children had crossed the line into a dangerously precocious adulthood.¹⁸

These beliefs about child development, coupled with the increased use and moral uncertainty of the nighttime street, were what motivated the middle-class concern about "night children" In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, social reformers and public officials strove to bring the blessings of a proper childhood to the urban poor.

Boys' Clubs

The boys' club movement originated in New England from a Protestant sense of Christian stewardship. The earliest charitable club for boys, according to the Boys' Clubs of America, was the Dashaway Club of Hartford, Connecticut. This organization was created in 1860 by women volunteers at a Congregational church mission in the slums. It fell apart during the Civil War, but was followed by a succession of three other boys'

Birney, *Childhood* (New York: Frederick A Stokes, 1905), 47. F S Churchill, "The Effect of Irregular Hours upon the Child's Health," in *The Child in the City*, 311.

¹⁸ Macleod, *Age of the Child*, 30-1. Kett, *Rites of Passage*, 169-70, 227; See also Anna Davin, *Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996), 52-4. Davis, *Street-Land*, 84, 227, quote on 29-30.

clubs in Hartford between 1867 and 1876, all of them affiliated with the Congregational churches.¹⁹

All of these early clubs attempted to mimic the atmosphere of a respectable home to compensate for a lack of domesticity in the lives of poor children. Typically, a club was furnished with a piano, books and pictures to make it look more like a middle-class parlour. As in a parlour, the evening's activities included playing games and singing songs. Boys were strongly encouraged to wash their faces or to bathe if bathtubs were available, in keeping with the middle-class fetish of personal cleanliness. The supervisors, many of them women, attempted not only to remove the children from the influences of the streets but also to provide moral training. Virginia Smith, organizer of the Hartford Boys' Club, explained:

We hoped to make the place one of entertainment, instruction, comfort, and good, homelike Christian influences for those boys who for any reason needed such a place of resort, or had fallen or were in danger of falling into evil ways in unemployed hours. The conditions of membership were obedience to the rules, general good behaviour, and the payment of monthly dues. Morality and temperance were inculcated, and many pledged themselves to abstain from tobacco and intoxicating drinks.

By the mid 1870s, the Hartford clubs had been joined by similar organizations in Salem, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; and New Haven, Connecticut.²⁰

The early Hartford clubs were small, drawing nightly attendance of no more than a few dozen children, many of them newsboys. As the boys' club movement expanded throughout the Northeast in the late 1870s and 1880s, local philanthropists formed much larger clubs, starting with the Boys' Club of New York in 1876. The mass boys' clubs differed from the small clubs by offering a wider range of activities. In addition to providing books, board games, and magic lantern shows, the Boys' Club of New York opened a gymnasium with trapezes, horizontal bars and boxing equipment. It offered classes in singing and art, and instruction in carpentry, bookkeeping, and printing. The Boys' Club of Fall River, Massachusetts, had its own bowling alley, indoor running track, and swimming pool. By 1923, the Boys' Club

¹⁹Robert Owen Decker, *Hartford Immigrants: A History of the Christian Activities Council (Congregational) 1850-1980* (New York: United Church Press, 1987), 10-2, 117-8. "Historical Sketch of the Boys' Clubs in Hartford, Conn," *Good Will Star* 5, no 3 (April 1908), in Hall Scrapbook 11, Stowe-Day Library, Hartford.

²⁰*The Annual Report of the City Missionary to the City Missionary Society of Hartford, 1877-1878* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1878) 12-13. Howard Tooley, undated history of boys' club movement, Chicago Boys' Club (CBC) papers, box 1, folder 7, Chicago Historical Society. Edward T Hartman, "The Massachusetts Civic Conference," *American City* 2, no 1 (Jan 1910), 31.

Federation counted 180 boys clubs in the United States, mostly in the cities of the Northeast and Midwest. Dealing with hundreds of unruly boys, the organizers of mass boys' clubs had to use different methods from those of smaller clubs. The leader of a mass boys' club could not know all the boys individually or serve as a surrogate parent. Rather, he was what one advocate called "a moral policeman," who would patrol the rooms breaking up fights and preventing thefts of the equipment. The Fall River superintendent was so insistent on order that he trained boys to fall silent at the blast of a whistle.²¹

Club officials regretted that the mass boys' clubs could not provide the personal attention found in smaller boys' groups, such as those that opened at settlement houses in the 1890s. But they pointed out that their organizations reached more children every night, often tougher children who would otherwise be getting into trouble on the streets. Like the early Hartford clubs, the mass boys' clubs targeted what were known as "street arabs"—wandering ragamuffins, presumed to be homeless. John F Atkinson founded the Chicago Boys' Club in 1901 specifically to serve homeless newsboys and bootblacks who slept in the alleys of Chicago's Loop. The Chicago Boys' Club initially combined the functions of a social club and a homeless shelter for children, providing free lodging, meals, baths, and clothing. As late as 1911, the club's publication was titled "Darkest Chicago and Her Waifs," though the typical club member was acknowledged to live with his family in an immigrant neighbourhood.²²

Even if the boys were not literally homeless, boys' club advocates argued that they might as well be. According to a boys' club leader in Boston, "It is a true and trite saying that a good home is a better place for a boy at night than a boys' club. If all homes were perfect homes, then would the boys' club be useless." The tenements of the poor were far from perfect, club leaders contended. John Atkinson of Chicago took his critics on a tour of the slums in response to their complaints that the Chicago Boys' Club would draw boys away from their homes and into the "bright light section." According to a later club history, Atkinson converted his adversaries by

²¹Tooley, history of boys' club movement. *First Annual Report of the Union for Home Work of Hartford (1872-73)* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 1873). Wendell, "Boys' Clubs." Edith Parker Thomson, "A Remarkable Boys Club," *New England Magazine* n s 19, no 4 (Dec 1898), 488-97. William Byron Forbush, *The Boy Problem*, sixth edition (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1901), 68. *The Boys Club Federation International, 1923 Year Book* (New York: Boys' Club Federation International, 1923), in CBC papers, box 43, folder 3.

²²Forbush, *The Boy Problem*, 69-70. "Urge a Club for Boys of Street," *Chicago American*, Nov 12, 1901. Untitled typescript, n d, CBC papers, box 1, folder 1. *Darkest Chicago and Her Waifs: Ninth Annual Report of the Chicago Boys' Club* (Chicago: Chicago Boys' Club, 1911). *Tenth Annual Report of the Chicago Boys' Club* (Chicago: Chicago Boys' Club, 1912), 17.

showing them “homes of indescribable poverty and numberless boys without any opportunity for wholesome, character building activities.” Clearly, the boys would be better off in a supervised clubhouse downtown. They might even pick up civilized habits that could be spread to their parents. In any case, the tenements failed to hold the boys inside. Turned loose, boys would amuse themselves shooting craps, watching prostitutes, and learning the ways of the street. Children of low morals taught the others to drink, smoke, swear and steal.²³

The clubs' most important benefit was thought to be their power to save boys from a life of crime. In the industrial city of Binghamton, New York, the superintendent of the boys' club asserted that juvenile crime dropped by sixty percent in the year the club opened. “Make them interested in something that will drive thieving and street walking out of their heads, and you'll have no more trouble with juvenile delinquents.” The Chicago Boys' Club tried to garner support by hinting that its clients were potential muggers and gangsters. The club's 1911 annual report warned: “The slums of Chicago are places where crime breeds. They fester with filth, squalor, sin, vice and corruption of all kinds. Amid such conditions as this thousands of helpless children are born each year.” Such children, the club pointed out repeatedly, could be more cheaply entertained by the Boys' Club than incarcerated after the street had worked its influence. The Chicago Boys' Club had initially focussed on children between eight and thirteen years old. Because of its increasing concern with juvenile crime, it expanded its work in the 1920s to include more boys in their later teenage years, when the turmoil of adolescence and the temptations of the gangs were strongest.²⁴

Newsies and Messenger Boys

As the boys' club organizers had hoped, thousands of children from the toughest neighbourhoods were persuaded to spend their evenings indoors playing checkers or basketball. But since attendance was voluntary, children could escape from supervision whenever they wanted. Even though hundreds of supervised playgrounds, boys' clubs, outdoor gymnasias and

²³Forbush, *Boy Problem*, 73-74. Untitled typescript, n d, CBC papers, box 1, folder 1. Wendell, “Boys' Clubs,” 738-39.

²⁴William I Engle, “Supervised Amusement Cuts Juvenile Crime by 96 Per Cent,” *American City* 21, no 6 (Dec 1919), 516. *Darkest Chicago and Her Waifs* (1911), 12. Luther Laflin Mills and Solon C Bronson to Fred K W Moeller, 16 Feb 1905, CBC papers, box 43, folder 2. *Building the Boy Right: Fourteenth Annual Report of the Chicago Boys' Club* (Chicago: Chicago Boys' Club, 1916?). *The Danger Hour* (Chicago: Chicago Boys' Club, 1918), CBC papers, box 26, folder 11. *Write Your Biography in the Life of a Boy* (Chicago: Chicago Boys' Club, 1928), CBC papers, box 26, folder 11. John H Witter, “Memorandum to the Board of Directors at the Annual Meeting, January 1919,” CBC papers, box 3, folder 5.

vacation schools had opened throughout the urban United States in the early twentieth century, the street was the favourite playspace. One playground advocate estimated in 1913 that ninety per cent of play in Boston took place in streets. The freedom from supervision was both the greatest attraction of the street and, from the perspective of child care experts and social reformers, its greatest danger. Children could not be kept inside at night without some kind of coercion, reformers realized. Two such efforts at coercion came from the child labour reform and juvenile curfew movements.²⁵

Child labour reformers in the early twentieth century asserted that childhood should be a period of natural development and education, free from economic interference. Reformers criticized factory and mine labour for enslaving small children, and denying them the stimulation of uninhibited play in the open air. They attacked the street trades for nearly opposite reasons: children who worked on the streets as newsies, bootblacks, peddlers or messengers were given too much freedom and stimulation. Reformers paid surprisingly little attention to the dangers children faced in traffic. Physical danger was secondary in their minds to the danger of disrupted development and moral corruption.²⁶

Of all the street trades, selling the news drew the largest number of children. Every major American city had hundreds or even thousands of newsboys in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most were under sixteen years old, and many were under ten. There were a few newsgirls among them, but only a few. In Chicago in 1905, girls were estimated to total perhaps five percent of all newsies²⁷. The busiest time of

²⁵Stephen Hardy, *How Boston Played: Sport, Recreation, and Community, 1865-1915* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1982), 105. Davis, *Street-Land*, 19.

²⁶"The Nation and Child Labor," *New York Times*, April 24, 1904. Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 138-9. Felix Adler, "Child Labor in the United States and its Great Attendant Evils," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 25, no 3 (May 1905), 427-8.

²⁷E N Clopper, "Children on the Streets of Cincinnati," in *Child Labor and Social Progress: Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the National Child Labor Committee*, supplement to the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol 32 (July 1908): 113. Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 69-70, 103. Vincent Richard DiGirolamo, "Crying the News: Children, Street Work and the American Press, 1830s-1920s" (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1997), 308. "What of the Newsboy of the Second Cities?" *Charities* 10, no 15 (April 11, 1903), 368). Esther Lee Rider, "Newsboys in Birmingham," *American Child* 3, no 4 (Feb 1922): 315. H M Diamond, "Connecticut Study of Street Trades," *American Child* 4, no 2 (August, 1922), 97. Bruce Watson, "Street Trades in Pennsylvania," *American Child* 4, no 2 (August, 1922), 125. Sara A Brown, "Juvenile Street Work in Iowa," *American Child* 4, no 2 (August, 1922), 140. "Study of Newsboys in Springfield, Mass.," *Monthly Labor Review* 18, no 1 (Jan 1924): 97-8. Ernest Poole,

work was from three to eight pm, when newsies peddled evening editions to people leaving work. Many continued late into the night. In metropolitan centres like Chicago and New York in the early twentieth century, the publication of multiple editions ensured that fresh news could be sold around the clock every day of the week. Saturday night was especially busy; newsboys in the entertainment districts sold theatrical papers and early Sunday editions long after midnight.²⁸

“The main characteristic of street work is its unwholesome irregularity,” wrote settlement house worker Ernest Poole in 1903. In contrast to the disciplined pace of the factory, the street trades retained a premodern mixture of work and leisure that—in Poole's opinion—made the boys unsuited for later jobs. The hours were defined only by the availability of newspapers and the presence of crowds. Between editions, newsboys would loiter in the streets or in the “news alleys” outside the pressrooms. They passed the time by smoking cigarettes and shooting craps. While proper children dined regularly, the newsies gobbled snacks of doughnuts or hotdogs washed down with large bowls of coffee.²⁹

Selling newspapers allowed boys to escape from adult control. Since their earnings were unpredictable, newsboys found it easy to keep money for themselves instead of turning it over to their parents. Their profits and their freedom from supervision allowed them to enjoy movies, cheap plays, shooting galleries and peep shows. Boys who lost their money gambling or attending shows would often sleep out to avoid punishment at home; they would huddle together for warmth in stairwells and over steam grates. Eventually, they might grow so independent that they would join the homeless “street arabs,” supporting themselves with newspaper sales and petty thefts. Even boys who did not go to this extreme found that the late night excitements of the street made it hard to pay attention to their boring classes the next day.³⁰

Child welfare advocates warned “street arabs” and juvenile delinquents mingled with boys from decent homes, teaching them bad habits and worse morals. Newsboys learned to smoke, gamble, swear and drink; they learned about sex. According to Chicago activist Florence Kelley, “there is a tradition among the boys themselves that in order to be a ‘wise guy’ he must know

Child Labor—the Street (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1903), 1.

²⁸Myron E. Adams, “Children in American Street Trades,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 25, no 3 (May 1905), 27. Poole, *Child Labor*, 2-3. “Child Labor Reform in New York” *Charities* 10, no 2 (Jan 10, 1903), 54-5. Scott Nearing, “The Newsboy at Night in Philadelphia,” *Charities and the Commons* 17, no 18 (Feb 2, 1907), 778-79. Elsa Wertheim, *Chicago Children in the Street Trades* (Chicago: Juvenile Protective Association, 1917): 8-9.

²⁹Ernest Poole, “Waifs of the Street,” *McClure's Magazine* 21 (May 1903), 40, 43. Poole, *Child Labor*, 4, 6; Nearing, “Newsboy at Night,” 779.

³⁰Poole, *Child Labor*, passim.

the greatest possible amount of evil, and what he does not know he must invent, and he must tell the last newcomer everything he knows or can invent." The adults that the newsboys encountered were supposedly an even worse influence. While selling papers at night on the streets and in the saloons, boys met prostitutes and their clients. Further, some boys were known to be sexually assaulted or prostituted by newspaper distribution workers and by strangers who loitered in the news alleys. There is no way of knowing how frequent child molesting was, but it was a major concern among child welfare advocates, judging from their frequent discussion of the topic.³¹

These kinds of concerns were expressed even more strongly in descriptions of the night messenger boys, who were the targets of a reform campaign between 1909 and 1915 led by the New York-based National Child Labour Committee (NCLC). At this time, in every significant city, telegraph companies such as Western Union and American District Telegraph employed dozens of teenage boys as young as twelve years old to carry telegrams and notes, and sometimes to run errands for customers. After about nine or ten at night calls to legitimate businesses dropped off, wrote Owen Lovejoy, an NCLC leader. "The service at night plunges us at once into another world. As day is given up to industry in most cities, so the forces of pleasure and recreation hold chief sway at night." Night messengers were called on to deliver some messages to respectable hotels, theatres and ballrooms, but more often they glimpsed the darker side of urban recreation. According to another reform article, night messenger work left the boy "exposed to temptation at the time when he is least able to resist— just as he is passing through those bodily changes which accomplish adolescence, and when his mind is swayed by the natural curiosity of youth toward the other sex." At the brothels to which they were called, messengers would see women in various states of undress, or they might witness sexual activity. Once having tasted forbidden knowledge, some boys were drawn into participation in the vice trade. They were sent on errands to buy condoms, liquor, cigarettes, opium and cocaine. They received commissions for sending customers to certain prostitutes, and tips from men who wanted to be shown the red light districts. According to the NCLC, boys as young as fourteen or fifteen became customers in the brothels, sometimes being initiated by women who thought they could get rid of venereal disease by giving it to a virgin.³²

³¹Poole, *Child Labor*, 2, 17-18. "What of the Newsboy of the Second Cities?" 371. "Child Labor Reform in New York," 56. Florence Kelley, "The Street Trader Under Illinois Law," in *The Child in the City*, 296. Wertheim, "Chicago Children in the Street Trades," 6. Adams, "Children in American Street Trades," 33.

³²Owen R. Lovejoy, *Child Labor and the Night Messenger Service* (New York: National Child Labor Committee, 1910). "Pennsylvania Three-Ply Child Labor Campaign," *Survey* 25 (March 18 1911), 994. Edward Barrows, typescript titled "Extracts from Report on the Night Messenger Service in Pittsburgh, November,

Thanks to efforts by the NCLC and local child welfare advocates, most of the urbanized states of the Northeast and Midwest began regulating the street trades in the early twentieth century. The laws took so many forms as to defy easy generalizations, but they typically established permissible hours and permissible ages for boys and girls in the street trades. Ohio, for instance, prohibited children under eighteen from serving as messengers between nine pm and six am. It prohibited newspaper sales on the streets of Cincinnati at any hour by boys under ten and girls under sixteen. Such laws were essentially attempts to keep the most innocent and vulnerable children out of the street trades, and to impose curfews on the older boys. By 1912, child labour reformers had persuaded state legislatures to adopt laws keeping boys under twenty one out of the night messenger service in the cities of Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Utah and Wisconsin. Five other states allowed no one under eighteen to do this work, and eleven others allowed no one under sixteen. By 1915, states restricted newspaper sales and other street trading by boys and girls in the major cities of thirty states; most of these states either set higher minimum ages for girls in the street trades or prohibited girls altogether. Other regulations were imposed by municipal ordinances. The enforcement of these laws and ordinances left much to be desired. For example, police rarely enforced the Chicago municipal ordinance, although they were occasionally persuaded to crack down on flagrant violations such as sales by newsgirls.³³

1910,"National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) papers, box 4, folder marked "Penn, Philadelphia-Night Messengers-1910,"Library of Congress. Edward N Clopper, *Child Labor in City Streets* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 101-18. Lewis W Hine and Edward F Brown, "An Investigation of the Street Trades of Wilmington, Delaware," (May 1910) in National Child Labor Committee (NCLC) papers, Box 17, Columbia University Rare Books and Manuscripts Library.

³³Edward F Brown, Jan 26, 1912 remarks in stenographic record, binder marked "Proceedings, Eighth Annual Conference on Child Labor under the Auspices of the National Child Labor Committee, Louisville, Kentucky, January 25, 26, 27, 28, 1912," Box 11, NCLC papers, Library of Congress. "Child Labor Laws in All States," *Child Labor Bulletin* 1, no 2 (Aug 1912), 1-79. "Map No 3—Night Work Prohibited to Children," *Child Labour Bulletin* 1, no 4 (Feb 1913). Nasaw, *Children of the City*, 103. Clopper, *Child Labour in City Streets*, 132-33, 196. Adams, "Children in American Street Trades," 40-2. James K Pelting, "Enforcing the Newsboy Law in New York and Newark," *Charities* 14, no 11 (June 10, 1905), 836-37. National Consumers' League, "Seventh Annual Report, Year Ending March 1, 1906," National Consumers' League papers, microfilm reel 3, Library of Congress. Lillian A Quinn, "Enforcement of Street Trades Regulations," *Child Labour Bulletin* 1, no 2 (Aug 1912), 122-4. *Annual Report of the Juvenile Protective Association of Chicago: 1924* (Chicago: Juvenile Protective Association, 1924), 7-9, 27-9. Jessie F Binford to Morgan Collins, March 16, 1925, Juvenile Protective Association (JPA) papers, folder 88, University of Illinois at Chicago. Letters from Morgan Collins to parents of newsgirls, April 1 1926, Sept 24 1926, and Sept 25 1926, JPA papers, folder 88. "Violations of the Chicago Street Trades Ordinance," n d, (ca 1928), JPA papers, folder 86.

Juvenile Curfews

The establishment of permissible ages and times for street work reflected the era's fascination with scheduling human activities. The age consciousness that shaped school systems and ideas about child development around the turn of the century was paralleled by a stronger consciousness of precise times within the day. American work had become increasingly defined by time rather than by the task, and by clock time rather than by the passage of the sun. Frederick Winslow Taylor proved in his famous time and motion studies in the 1880s and 1890s that even the components of a minute task could be analysed with a stopwatch to maximize efficiency. As Americans grew used to planning their activities by the clock, they also grew to accept a stricter scheduling of entertainment events such as stage shows and movies. Time became not only scheduled but standardized. Railroads divided the continent into time zones in 1883, effacing local variations in order to simplify train schedules. Most city dwellers soon scheduled their lives by "railroad time." Similarly, Taylorist scientific management aimed to establish the one best way to perform any task, rather than finding better methods for each worker. Everywhere, man-made schedules were replacing natural rhythms and variations in the temporal order of modern life. The restrictions on children's street labour were one way in which Americans consciously tried to shape this new temporal order.

In contrast to the boys' club and child labour movements, which were strongest in the nation's urban industrial core, the juvenile curfew as another³⁴ movement started in the periphery. The movement appears to have originated as an import from small towns in Canada. The town council of Waterloo, Ontario, adopted a resolution in the late 1880s that the town bell should be rung at nine o'clock every evening, and that children under fifteen could be arrested after that hour if they persisted in loitering on the streets without parental supervision. Encouraged by enabling legislation in Ontario's 1893 "Children's Law," many other towns and small cities including Windsor adopted curfews by 1896.³⁵

Curfews, which dated back as far as the Middle Ages, had not previously been directed so narrowly against children. They had often been used to control potentially unruly subordinate groups, such as Saxons under William the Conqueror. In the United States, most Southern towns and cities before the Civil War forbade slaves to be on the streets at night. General curfews were used as temporary, emergency measures in the aftermath of disasters such as the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Some eastern towns such as

³⁴Michael O'Malley, *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), ix, 99-144, 164-71, 219.

³⁵J J Kelso, *Revival of the Curfew Law* (Toronto: Warwick Bros & Rutter, 1896), quote from p 9. Andrew Jones and Leonard Rutman, *In the Children's Aid: J J Kelso and Child Welfare in Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 51, 64.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, also maintained a long-standing tradition of a general curfew, but this custom was regarded as a sign of backwardness inappropriate for any ambitious city.³⁶

After originating in Ontario, the juvenile curfew movement leapt the border in the mid 1890s to emerge in the towns of the Midwestern United States. There it quickly spread under the leadership of an eccentric named Alexander Hogeland, who claimed for himself the titles of “father of the curfew law” and “the newsboys’ friend.” Hogeland had become interested in the plight of newsboys in the early 1870s, apparently while employed as a superintendent of news carriers for the *Louisville Commercial*. “The boys of many families roam the streets early and late, away from home restraint. They fall victim to vicious habits and practices, and thus go rapidly to swell the army of criminals in our prisons,” he wrote in his 1883 book, *Ten Years Among the Newsboys*. In this sentimental and self-congratulatory tract, Hogeland presented himself as delivering street-corner sermons to crowds of guttersnipes. After moving the boys to tears, he would try to bring them to Christ or at least to an evangelical night school where they could wash their faces. He would use his connections with local businessmen to find jobs for promising young lads.³⁷ Hogeland expanded his activities throughout Kentucky and the Midwest. In 1886 he organized the National Youths’ Home and Employment Association to help street boys find homes and jobs. From his new home base in Lincoln, Nebraska, Hogeland travelled throughout the Midwest under the auspices of this shadowy organization, supporting himself from charitable donations and by selling publications boasting of his work.³⁸

³⁶ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 82. William Ruefke and Kenneth Mike Reynolds, “Keep them at Home: Juvenile Curfew Ordinances in 200 American Cities,” *American Journal of Police* 15, no 1 (1896), 64-5. Charles S Rhyne, *Municipal Curfew for Minors—Model Ordinance Annotated* (Washington: National Institute of Municipal Law Officers, 1943), 2-3. (Washington: National Institute of Municipal Law Officers, 1943), 2-3. Kenneth M Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 209. Richard C Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 98, 184. Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 77-9. “Trouble with the Curfew,” *New York Times*, March 22, 1896. Untitled editorials, *Omaha Evening Bee*, March 17, 18, and 19, 1896.

³⁷ “Col Hogeland’s Life Work Done,” *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), June 18, 1907. Caron’s *Annual Directory of the City of Louisville for 1872* (Louisville: C K Caron, 1872), 261. Alexander Hogeland, *Ten Years Among the Newsboys* (Louisville: John P Morton & Co, 1883), quote from 94-5.

³⁸ “Found Dead, With the Gas Turned On,” *Louisville Times* (June 17, 1907). “Col Hogeland’s Life Work Done,” *Courier-Journal* (Louisville, KY), June 18, 1907. *First National Convention of the National Youths’ Home and Employment Association of*

Hogeland appears to have launched his curfew campaign in the mid 1890s, when he persuaded city officials in Lincoln to impose a curfew on children under 15. Under Lincoln's widely copied 1896 ordinance, children could not be on the streets after 9 pm in the spring and summer, or after 8 pm in the fall and winter, unless they were accompanied by a parent, or were running an errand, or held a job that required them to be on the streets. This last exemption was evidently intended for Hogeland's friends, the newsboys. In his speech supporting the ordinance, Hogeland promised that it would help parents regain control of incorrigible children, would improve the morals of Lincoln's youth, and would diminish crime and vagrancy. He also claimed that the measure had been successfully tried in many villages and towns, particularly in Nebraska. He said that it had done wonders for the towns of North Platte and Grand Island.³⁹

Hogeland's allusion to these precedents revealed one of the major liabilities of the curfew movement in its early years: curfews were associated with small towns, not with thriving cities. The Nebraska towns at the forefront of the curfew movement in the 1890s were far from thriving. Nebraska was suffering from both a severe drought and the nationwide depression. Towns that had boomed in the 1880s saw their urban pretensions shattered—their banks ruined, their businesses closed, and their people fleeing to more promising places. North Platte's electric light company collapsed in 1895, forcing townsfolk to resort to kerosene lanterns again. Grand Island's streetcar system was failing and would soon end service. In Lincoln in 1895, two hundred houses and numerous downtown storefronts were vacant. Against this backdrop of urban decline, Nebraska's towns were anxious to assert control over the children.⁴⁰

The news of Lincoln's curfew inspired similar ordinances throughout the Midwest, Pacific Northwest and New England. Hogeland promoted the movement by writing to newspapers and public officials nationwide, and by addressing municipal councils. Hundreds of villages and small towns adopted the curfew in the late 1890s, as well as some of the major cities of the central states, notably St Paul, Kansas City, Des Moines, Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Denver, Dallas, and Omaha. (Except for the two Indiana cities, all of these were places that had at least doubled in population in the 1880s but saw only slow growth or decline during the hard times of the 1890s.) In Omaha in 1896, Hogeland successfully persuaded the city council to adopt

the United States (Minneapolis: Swinburne & Co, 1886). "Alexander Hoagland (sic) Found Dead at Omaha," *Indianapolis News* June 17, 1907.

³⁹"A Curfew Ordinance," *Lincoln Evening Call*, Jan 14, 1896.

⁴⁰*An Illustrated History of Lincoln County, Nebraska, and Her People*, vol 1, edited by Ira L Bare and Will H McDonald (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1920), 237-49. *History of Hall County, Nebraska* edited by A F Buechler and R J Barr (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Co, 1920), 118-19, 431-32. Neale Cople, *Tower on the Plains: Lincoln's Centennial History, 1859-1959* (Lincoln: Lincoln Centennial Commission, 1959), 82-7.

the curfew despite the mayor's veto and the hostile editorials in a local newspaper. The *Omaha Evening Bee* argued that "a curfew ordinance may be all very good in little villages, but does Omaha want to put itself in the same class with every country cross-roads town?" It argued that the ordinance was unnecessary, unenforceable, and likely to detract from Omaha's image.⁴¹

Hogeland's idea was scorned or ignored in the largest metropolitan centres in the 1890s. The leader of the curfew movement in New York City, for instance, reported that her proposal encountered "derision, and unbounded incredulity." The *New York Times* mocked the curfew as a needless restriction worthy of Prussian autocrats, on the rare occasions when it deigned to notice the movement at all. "Much literature from the 'curfew' cranks has reached this office, and enough of it was read to justify its wholesale deposition in—or around— convenient waste baskets. The documents sent gave enough evidence that by shutting children up in the house at nightfall juvenile crimes and misdemeanours had been made less numerous in several towns, but what of that? Even more effect in this direction would be produced by cutting the throats of everybody under age."⁴²

Far from cutting throats, police and courts seemed unwilling even to make curfew violators pay small fines. Lincoln Police Court records show that not a single child was arrested during the first two months that the curfew was in effect. (Supporters of the ordinance, however, claimed that no arrests were needed because the children were off the streets.) In Indianapolis, an average of four children a year were arrested in the first six years of the curfew.⁴³

⁴¹Untitled editorials, *Omaha Evening Bee*, March 17, 18, and 19, 1896. Untitled editorial, *Lincoln Evening Call*, Feb 4, 1896. Kelso, *Revival of the Curfew Law*, 15-16. Rhyne, *Municipal Curfew for Minors*, 12-16. "Curfew," *Indianapolis News*, Dec 21, 1897. "Curfew Ordinance Invalid," *New York Times* July 9, 1898.

⁴²"Curfew for New-York," *New York Times*, Feb 20, 1896. Mrs John D Townsend, "Curfew For City Children," *North American Review* 163 (Dec 1896), 725-30. Untitled editorial, *New York Times*, Oct 8, 1897. Quote from untitled editorial, *New York Times*, July 10, 1898.

⁴³Police Judge's Docket, Lincoln Police Court, vol 37, Nebraska State Library, Lincoln. "A Great Success," *Lincoln Evening Call*, Feb 6, 1896. *Fourth Annual Message of Thomas Taggart, Mayor of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Sentinel Printing Co, 1899), 223. *Fifth Annual Message of Thomas Taggart, Mayor of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Sentinel Printing Co, 1900), 189-90. *Sixth Annual Message of Thomas Taggart, Mayor of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Sentinel Printing Co, 1901), 195. *Seventh (sic) Annual Message of Charles A Bookwalter, Mayor of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Levey Bros, 1903), 190-1. *Second Annual Message of Charles A Bookwalter, Mayor of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Levey Bros, 1904), 218. *First Annual Message of John W Holtzman, Mayor of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Wood-Weaver Printing Co, 1904), 186. "Curfew Will Not Ring," *Omaha Evening Bee*, Dec 12, 1896. *Omaha Municipal Reports for the Fiscal Year Ending Dec 31, 1897*

Concerns about crime and unruly youth gave a new boost to the curfew movement in cities in the 1920s. As the historian Paula Fass has shown, there was a great deal of anxiety during this decade about young people's independence and rejection of traditional morality. These worries coincided with a perceived breakdown of law and order in the major cities during Prohibition. Chicago aldermen decided in the fall of 1920 to tackle the youth problem and the crime problem simultaneously. Illegal liquor was flowing into the city, gangsters were killing each other, and police were rumoured to be too corrupt to do anything. Statistics showed that juvenile crime had actually dropped in 1920, but an attack on delinquency was nonetheless included in a larger attempt to reform the police department and end the crime wave. A grand jury investigation that fall called attention to the problem of unsupervised youths, and the *Chicago Daily Journal* ran a sensational series on teenage promiscuity. As in the boys' club movement, teenagers were feared to be both vulnerable and menacing. Grand jury members urged imposing fines on the parents of delinquents, and forcing all children under sixteen off the streets after ten pm. The *Chicago Tribune* used a familiar metaphor to support the proposal: "The street corners and vacant lots of the city are the kindergartens of a school of crime. The primary and intermediate classes meet in vicious pool rooms. Cabarets and tough saloons are offering advanced lessons, and post-graduate instruction is available in the jails and penitentiaries. Parents who provide their children with clean entertainment and interests in their own homes. . . will keep them out of the path to a criminal education." The Chicago city council passed the curfew unanimously. Before the repeal of prohibition, so did Detroit and several other cities.⁴⁴

Conclusion

(Omaha: Klopp & Bartlett, 1898), 144. "Curfew Law to be Revived," *Omaha Evening Bee*, June 11, 1907.

⁴⁴Paula S Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920's* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977). "A Grand Jury Speaks Out," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov 2, 1920. Richard C Lindberg, *To Serve and Collect: Chicago Politics and Police Corruption from the Lager Beer Riot to the Summerdale Scandal, 1855-1960* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 153-67. "Fine Parents to Save Boys," *Chicago Daily Journal*, Nov 13, 1920. "Delinquency Cut in Third, Juvenile Court is Told," *Chicago Daily Journal*, Nov 15, 1920. The series on the girl problem emphasized the temptations that girls faced in dance halls and other public spaces; for instance, see "Dance of Death for Many Girls," *Chicago Daily Journal* Nov 27, 1920. "Curfew Bill Passes Council Without a Fight," *Chicago Evening Post*, April 8, 1921. "Council Rings Curfew on Night Blooming Kids," *Chicago Tribune*, April 9, 1921. "Chief Opposes Curfew Law," *Chicago Daily Journal*, April 9, 1921. "Can't Enforce Curfew: Chief," *Chicago Daily Journal*, May 5, 1921. "One Lone 'Pinch' All New Curfew Nets First Night," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 6, 1921. Rhyne, *Municipal Curfew for Minors*, 12-16.

None of these three reform efforts succeeded in forcing children off the streets at night in the period before 1930. The boys' clubs never matched the popularity of street play, while the street trades laws and curfews were not well enforced. Their larger significance was educational and symbolic. They advertised middle-class beliefs in the value of scheduling children's lives, and made it a matter of public policy to give each age group its appropriate activities, spaces, and daily routines. Ultimately, these beliefs became more prevalent among the working-class; more and more families tried on their own to get their children off the streets.⁴⁵

In the same way that the vice district boundaries (and later zoning regulations) were intended to divide the city spatially, the effort to remove children from the streets at night was intended to divide it temporally. Vice districts were not places for decent people; night was not a time for children in public. Further, like the policy of tolerating vice districts, the boys' clubs, street trades laws and curfews were all intended to guard the boundaries of knowledge. Though adults encountered moral diversity on the streets, child welfare advocates cherished the hope that children could be kept innocent.

⁴⁵Gill Valentine, "Children Should Be Seen and Not Heard: The Production and Transgression of Adults' Public Space," *Urban Geography* 17, no 3 (1996), 205-20.