

Seeking Neutrality: The Public Politics of the Colored Orphan Asylum of New York

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Columbia University & Slavery Course

2021

On Wednesday, July 13, 1863, an angry crowd moved through the streets of New York bringing along with it fire and destruction. At about five in the afternoon, the mob gathered in front of a building on Fifth Avenue between Forty-third and Forty-fourth streets which quickly became the crowd's next target.[1] As the children and employees in the building rushed to escape, rioters moved quickly, taking anything they believed to be of value.[2] Newspapers published the next day noted how the rioters tore through the building taking and removing books and furniture including tables and chairs. The rioters even went as far to remove doors and shutters from the building, causing complete destruction.[3] The mob concluded their violent ransacking by setting the building alight. Firemen on the scene took action, but as the *Journal of Commerce* noted, "water was thrown on the flames only when too late to save anything." [4] When the flames settled, the building which held the Colored Orphan Asylum of New York, was completely destroyed.

The destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum, or COA, was just one incident of many which took place on a violent and dramatic day in New York City, when a white crowd incited by federal draft laws for the ongoing American Civil War, violently targeted Black

New Yorkers and those with ties to the Black community in New York, including the Colored Orphan Asylum. Founded in 1836, the Colored Orphan Asylum was the first orphanage in New York to open its doors to Black children.

Although the political climate in New York eventually led to the destruction of the COA, the women who ran the orphanage tried very hard to keep politics out of the institution. In newspapers and annual reports, the COA consistently asserted their neutrality on political issues, specifically enslavement. This paper looks to research in depth the Colored Orphan Asylum's practice of politics in the public sphere in order to better understand the motivations of the association and the women who ran the orphanage. The Colored Orphan Asylum and its institutional trajectory from 1836 to 1863 was deeply rooted in issues of gender, race, social work and political activism at the time. Through researching the orphanage, this paper looks to better understand the social and historical context that the orphanage existed in, specifically in relation to the COA's position on politics.

The paper begins in 1836 when the Colored Orphan Asylum was created by the Association for the Benefit of Colored Children and focuses specifically on the Colored Orphan Asylum in New York City. The research will cover from the orphanage's creation up to the 1863 Draft Riots when the orphanage's building was burned down. Studying the Colored Orphan Asylum and its links to Columbia University provides an important perspective in the beginnings of social work and the university's relationship to the city and in particular the Black community in New York. Created at a moment when women's associations began to provide public services through private associations, the orphanage was part of the beginning of social work and notably looked to provide services to the Black community which had been largely ignored by this movement.[5] Researching how the women of COA interacted in the political context of time provides greater understanding of the orphanage and its legacy.

There are important pieces of scholarship on the Colored Orphan Asylum which this paper seeks to build upon. The first of which is a book dedicated specifically to the white women running the orphanage called, *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum* by William Seraile. Seraile provides a detailed

account of the everyday functioning of the COA from its inception in 1836 up to 1946 when the orphanage, then called the Riverdale Children's Association, was disbanded. In *Angels of Mercy*, Seraile uses the concept of "paternalism" to describe the approach of the women of the COA to their work in the orphanage. Seraile himself does not provide a definition for paternalism, but rather presents the concept as the fact that the women did little to involve the Black community in their work while accepting their financial support.[6] Seraile's work is important in understanding the background of functioning of the orphanage but does not deeply evaluate the orphanage's political positions at the time. Furthermore, Seraile's concept of paternalism in this case is flawed as the orphanage was run almost entirely by women. In this paper, I will use the term "maternalism" instead, to better acknowledge the role that gender played in the dynamics of the orphanage.

The second fundamental piece of scholarship on the orphanage is from Leslie M. Harris' book *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. In her book, Harris writes an entire paragraph on the Colored Orphan Asylum. While Seraile focuses mainly on the role of white women in the orphanage, Harris centers Black New Yorkers in her analysis, arguing that Black middle-class New Yorkers played an influential role in the operation of the COA. Harris and Seraile similarly agree on the broader motivations of the white women of the COA as largely individualistic without little regard for helping the larger Black New York community.[7] Harris' works shine an important light on the role of Black New Yorkers in the orphanage. This paper will focus mainly on the perspectives of the white women who ran the orphanage but believes it important to recognize the fundamental contributions made to the orphanage by Black New Yorkers that Harris has covered.

While not focused solely on the Colored Orphan Asylum, one more piece of scholarly work important for understanding the orphanage is *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* by Anne M. Boylan. *The Origins of Women's Activism* gives a general overview of various different women's organizations during the time in which the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans was formed. Boylan's work provides important background for understanding the gender dynamics of the time

period and within the COA. According to Boylan, women's associations like the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans marked an important turning point in gender and politics. Prior to these associations, the public political space in the United States was almost exclusively male. Boylan argues that once these associations formed, they used print culture to publicize their work, feminizing the traditional male public political space. However, Boylan points out, these associations argued that they were not political, and stayed within acceptable societal norms for women.[8] This paper aims to build upon previous work by Seraile and Harris while drawing on important background knowledge from Boylan in order to better research and interrogate the public practice of politics of the Colored Orphan Asylum.

In this paper, I will first examine the creation of the Colored Orphan Asylum, looking at the motivations and political stances of the women involved in its inception. In doing so, I have analyzed the first meeting minutes from the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, the *First Annual Report* (1837) of the orphanage, and the *Fourth Annual Report* (1840). Next, I cover the public politics of the orphanage from 1843 to 1863 looking at several newspaper articles from various papers, including *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, *New York Herald*, *Journal of Commerce*, *New York Tribune*, *Commercial Advertiser*, *Evening Post*, and more, as well as a speech made by John Jay II, the *Eleventh Annual Report* (1847) and the *Twenty Fourth Annual Report* (1861) of the orphanage. In the discussion I will mention various points of conflict in the orphanage's public politics, concluding with the building's destruction in 1863. I will discuss the orphanage's attempts at political neutrality and the intersection of its politics with gender and race at the time.

The Creation of the Colored Orphan Asylum

The Colored Orphan Asylum was created during a period when women began to form associations to address what they believed were problems persistent within society. As Boylan wrote in *Origins of Women's Activism* these "formal organizations came to

represent a source of collective influence and (at least potentially) an “engine for moving [women’s] concerns into the public sphere.”[9] Through collective action, women in this period were able to take concrete steps towards influencing policy and addressing issues related to poverty and lack of resources. According to Boylan, this movement of women’s association was key in changing the gender dynamics of the public practice of politics, which had been exclusively dominated by men. The women who created the Colored Orphan Asylum were also the first to establish an orphanage for Black children in New York. Not only were the women of the COA groundbreaking in terms of gender and politics, but in terms of race and politics as well.

The Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans, which held its first meeting on November 26, 1836, was responsible for the founding of the Colored Orphan Asylum. Seventeen women gathered in the house of William Shotwell, drew up a constitution and adjourned the meeting.[10] At the association’s next meeting on December 12 of the same year, the women drafted the constitution, putting to paper their motivations for creating their association and the orphanage. In the constitution of the association, the women write that Black orphans who were “in a state of enter destitution” claimed the association’s “special care and protection.”[11] From their own words it is clear the position that the women of the COA saw themselves in, as maternal figures who could protect and save Black children. This approach is further seen in the *First Annual Report* of the association, in which is written,

“When it is remembered that three Asylums for white children are liberally support in this city, and that there still remained a class excluded from a share in their benefits, with souls to be saved, mind to be improved, and characters to be trained to virtue and usefulness,”[12]

The white women of the COA saw their work as saving Black children and by providing them protection under their own beliefs. Seraile labelled this approach as paternalistic, given the underlying racial dynamics of the orphanage, as white women looked to “save” the Black children without having any consideration for the Black community at the time. It is important to note that many of the women founders were Quakers, and there was a religious motivation involved in the notion of “saving” the children.[13]

However, given that the organization was a women's organization, the term "maternalism" is better suited for the approach of the women of the COA.

From the inception of the COA, the women of the association looked to assert a politically neutral stance in public. In the second paragraph of the *First Annual Report of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans*, front and center, the women wrote that the association was "without sectarianism or party spirit, and entirely independent of the exciting questions that have lately agitated the public mind, in relation to the colored race." [14] The association took a strong position by pointing out so early in their report that the orphanage was "entirely independent" of party politics or questions of race. While in private discussion in the meeting minutes, the association did not comment on politics. However when the women produced a document for public distribution, they made sure to establish their political neutrality.

The COA's neutral public political stance falls in line with other women's associations at the time. As argued by Anne Boylan in *The Origins of Women's Activism* women's associations in the early nineteenth century would often use personal connections to wield their influence, while they simultaneously "clung steadfastly to the notion that their organizations served no political functions, avoided "exciting public attention," and operated securely within "woman's province." [15] While the women of the COA insisted on their neutrality, their personal connections and the orphanage's finances show that their political positioning was more muddled than presented. The women of the Colored Orphan Asylum were closely linked with the Manumission Society of New York which was founded in order to outlaw enslavement in New York. Several of the founding members of the COA were related to William Shotwell, a founding member of the Manumission Society and as previously mentioned, the first meeting of the Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans was held in his house. [16]

Another personal connection that the Colored Orphan Asylum had to both the Manumission Society of New York and Columbia College was the Jay family. John Jay was a prominent King's College (later named Columbia College) alumni and first President of the Manumission Society. [17] Although Jay himself passed away before the creation of the COA, his various family members including his daughters Ann and

Maria, as well as his son William and grandson John, were active in the association. Ann was a manager of the orphanage and both her and Maria gave various donations throughout the years, often donating twenty dollars annually.[18] William Jay also financially contributed to the orphanage multiple times in his life, including a twenty-five dollar donation in 1848.

The Manumission Society also financially supported the Colored Orphan Asylum in its inception and beyond. In the *First Annual Report* it is noted that the Manumission Society promised the association five hundred dollars (375 dollars of which was already paid) for education which was used to create a school for the children.[19] The Manumission Society would continue to financially support the COA beyond the initial formation of the orphanage. In the *Fourth Annual Report* published in 1848, the Manumission Society is noted as having given 5,000 dollars for the “erection of a new building.”[20] Although the women running the orphanage may have argued that the association had no position on “the exciting questions that have lately agitated the public mind, in relation to the colored race” the institution had strong personal and financial connections to the Manumission Society, which was certainly politically charged.

Public Politics of the Colored Orphan Asylum 1843-1863

From its inception onward, the women of the Colored Orphan Asylum presented a politically neutral stance on enslavement as well as other issues related to race in the public sphere. Their apolitical stance fit with the societal norms around women in politics at the time, even as a greater shift to a less male exclusive public sphere was underway. Although the women publicly argued their neutrality, they were still aligned with abolitionists and often would make subtle political comments which could be interpreted as anti-slavery or criticizing discrimination against Black New Yorkers. As the years progressed, the women tried to maintain their neutral position, but they were not spared from the heightened political atmosphere that eventually led to the Civil War.

John Jay II, the son of William and grandson of John, gave a speech at the celebration of the seventh anniversary of the COA on December 11, 1843. Jay's speech praised the work of the women of the orphanage, in particular the educational aspect of the orphanage. As compared to the "despotic governments of the Old World" Jay argued the Republic had not fulfilled its "duty" of providing education.[21] Jay's speech transitioned to discussing the racial dimension of the orphanage, commenting that the other "happy effect" of the orphanage was the "kindly feeling it elicits" from the Black community towards white people. Although Jay did not discuss enslavement, he did comment on the political treatment of Black Americans. Jay stated, "Our General and State Governments have, with rare exceptions, long pursued toward them [Black Americans] a cruel and selfish policy, as unwise as it has been wicked." [22] In general Jay's speech is somewhat politically charged as he criticized US policies toward Black Americans, specifically the lack of free education as well as the "cruel and selfish policies" that he does not name. Even though Jay was to become known for his abolitionist politics, he left out discussion of major debates such as enslavement or racial equality. Gender dynamics may have played a role in Jay's lack of discussion as such topics could have been seen as inappropriate for an association run by women.

John Jay II was far from the only abolitionist that the orphanage associated with. In 1843, James McCune Smith, a well-known Black New Yorker abolitionist, was hired by the COA to be the orphanage's physician. According to Harris, McCune Smith's hiring was a "major event" in the COA establishing trust with the Black middle class in New York, and a moment when the women of the association broke away from the male advisors, who were becoming more conservative.[23] Even with their support of McCune Smith, as Harris noted, none of the managers of the association openly embraced radical abolitionism.[24] Even though the managers did not support radical abolitionism themselves, they were still heavily connected with the movement and even invited one famous abolitionist to speak at a fundraiser for the orphanage.

On January 20, 1846, the association invited famous abolitionist politician, Cassius Clay to come speak in order to raise funds for the orphanage. In one newspaper article, printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* but originating in the *New York Tribune*,

Clay is credited with discussing with the audience “the relations of the rich and poor, competition between labor and capital.”[25] Clay comforted the Northern audience that emancipation would benefit their business interests, “that as freemen, the wants as well as the means of the negroes would greatly increase.”[26] Clay made further politically charged statements including the redistribution of public land and mentioning potential solutions to unemployment. While the coverage of the event by the *New York Tribune* highlighted the political nature of Clay’s speech, other newspapers at the time admonished the Colored Orphan Asylum for not being political enough.

In the same edition of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, an article titled “Mr. Clay at the North,” the authors criticized the COA for not taking a strong enough political stance. The author first criticized the *Tribune* article for not providing an accurate depiction of the meeting that the author described as “very contemptible in its character.”[27] The article stated that before Clay spoke to the audience, Hiram Ketchum of the COA “declared at considerable length, that the Asylum had no opinion to express in regard to Slavery,—that with the exciting topics of the day it had no concern.”[28] The article said it would not ask the orphanage to “become actively engaged against Slavery” but that the orphanage “has no right, even in the lowest view of the subject, to give the weight of its influence in favor of Slavery, as it evidently does by the remarks of its mouthpiece on Tuesday evening.”[29] The scathing critique of the COA continued as the article argued that the association knew that Clay would draw a crowd and raise lots of money while keeping silent on “the very subject which had given to him name and fame.”[30] This article painted a very different picture from the *New York Tribune* coverage of the event. *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* even went as far to wage pro-slavery allegations against the COA.

The varying responses to Clay’s event showed the careful political line the women of the orphanage were treading. While the *New York Tribune* coverage was generally favorable of the orphanage, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* heavily criticized the political positioning of the organization. The women may have declared publicly a neutral stance on the issue of enslavement but inviting Cassius Clay to come speak was political as the organization aligned itself with a famous abolitionist. Although the

National Anti-Slavery Standard was critical of the lack of anti-enslavement rhetoric, the invitation to Clay itself was not a neutral approach but rather one in support of abolitionists.

Left out of both the articles was any discussion of gender. All the speakers involved were men including the spokesperson of the orphanage, Ketchum. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* mainly leveled its charges at Ketchum and not at the women of the orphanage. Even though the event was orchestrated and the organization was run by women, when political discussion arose, there was a removal of any discussion of women's influence.

The Colored Orphan Asylum also looked to assert their political neutrality during an anniversary celebration. On May 11, 1847, *The New York Herald* published an article recounting the events of the eleventh anniversary celebration of the COA. Hiram Ketchum, who had spoken at Clay's speech for the orphanage, spoke once again at the celebration. Ketchum again brought up the association's position on enslavement stating, "This society has nothing to do with the question of slavery. The friends of slavery and the opponents of it, can meet on the platform and relieve the distresses of our common nature." [31] Ketchum's speech was an effect of the orphanage once again looking to assert itself as neutral in regards to enslavement. Although the orphanage maintained a face of political neutrality in the *New York Herald* article, in another article published by *The New York Commercial Advertiser*, there was a more subtle political message.

The New York Commercial Advertiser, also published a news article covering the eleventh anniversary celebration of the orphanage. Similar to the *New York Herald*, the *Commercial Advertiser* started off with a discussion of the general festivities of the celebration. The article also discussed Ketchum's speech and that the association had "no such feelings" on the subject of enslavement. However, that statement is immediately followed up by an anecdote which was left out of the *New York Herald* article. According to the article, a "Southern gentleman— a slaveholder" visited the orphanage and "was so greatly influenced by what he saw" that he decided to "manumit" the people that he enslaved. [32] The article commented that the managers of

the orphanage, “did not ask him to do that— but doubtless they were glad of it.”[33] This discussion of the “slaveholder” is a much less neutral position on enslavement than in the first article about the anniversary celebration. Although the orphanage still took no strong stance against the institution and practice of enslavement, the anecdote in the article was considerably less neutral than the previous statements made by the association.

Even though in the public anniversary speeches of the time the COA discussed its position on enslavement, in the *Eleventh Annual Report* published by the association in 1848, the orphanage had no discussion of the topic. In general, the annual reports published were not politically charged. There are a few statements within the report which have a political tone. When discussing the origins of the COA, the report stated “when it is considered that Colored Children are wholly excluded from the costly and extensive provision of the Long Island Farms, and that by their support in this Institution, many are rescued from the preparatory steps to a state prison confinement,”[34] The women of the COA, even eleven years on, were critiquing the policy that excluded Black children from orphanages and instead placing them in almshouses, which were often dirty and crowded, and largely intended for adults.[35]

Within the report, the women of the COA also made a subtle political statement by emphasizing the interdependence of white and Black communities in New York. The report stated, “[The managers] feel physically conscious how much their own moral and physical well-being has resulted from the position assigned to them in earlier years by a benignant Providence, and desire also to recognize the links by which the Divine author of society has united all classes of men, in one irrevocable bond, of mutual dependence and obligation.”[36] Although the women spoke of unity, they did not equate the term with equality. The women of the COA believed that it was necessary to not ignore the Black community and to use their privilege to help Black individuals, but stopped short of supporting action to elevate the Black community to equality.

The eleventh anniversary articles, the Cassius Clay incident, and the *Eleventh Annual Report* all have a different balance of political discussion and gender. The women of the orphanage are featured more prominently in the articles which discussed the eleventh

anniversary than in those which discussed Clay's speech. Both the *New York Herald* and *Commercial Advertiser* discuss the role of the "benevolent ladies" in the institution as compared to the Cassius Clay articles which left out the discussion of the women entirely.[37] The major difference between the two cases is that Cassius Clay's speech was inherently political as it was given by a famous abolitionist politician, while the anniversary was truly centered around the COA, with some political commentary given. Comparing the coverage of Clay's speech to the coverage of the anniversary, it is interesting to note how gender, and more specifically, women, are left out when intense political discussion arises. When the women are the authors, as was the case in the *Eleventh Annual Report*, there was almost no political discussion. The report focused mostly on the operations of the orphanage with only a few subtle political statements. Overall, in the three instances, the more discussion of politics featured, the less gender was mentioned.

In April 1860, the women of the COA held a fair in Brooklyn in order to raise funds for the orphanage. The highlights of the fair were thoroughly covered in an article published by the *Weekly Anglo-African*, a Black-owned abolitionist newspaper.[38] In the discussion of the fair, the article quotes several men and women who commented on how their night influenced their perspective on race. One person is written to have said "that he believed it to be next to impossible for any intelligent white person to have mingled freely in the gathering for an evening, joining in their social amusement and their intelligent conversations, and come out with any prejudice against color." [39] Another person is quoted as saying they wished "that the entire white population could, by some means, this night see this people. They would go hence divested of most, if not all, of their foolish prejudices." These are strong statements against the racial prejudice rampant during the time. The *Weekly Anglo-African*, as compared to other New York newspapers covered in this paper, was more likely to make such statements given the Black ownership and abolitionist nature of the paper.

As compared to other articles which mentioned the COA, the *Weekly Anglo-African* article featured the woman of the orphanage much more prominently. Given that the fair was a social event, there was much discussion of social customs such as the attire and

presentation of the women. The women of the Brooklyn branch of the managers were noted of being “all decked in pretty calico gowns, all, or nearly all, or the same stripe, giving thereby a most picturesque effect, and not infrequently placing one in an awkward fix.”[40] The article described the young ladies of the association “all looking so charming and nice” and the first, second and third directresses as well as the committee “as busy as the most industrious of bees;...”[41] The discussion of gender in the article and the prominence of femininity is in significant contrast to the other public discussions of the association. While the prominence of the women is probably due to the social nature of the event, the article did not stop from making strong statements against racial prejudice alongside the discussions of femininity and social custom.

In 1860 the COA was linked to another famed abolitionist, Lewis Tappan, who was involved in a dramatic episode at a period of heightened political tensions in the United States. On July 23, 1860, a boat was found “abandoned” off the coast Anguilla and was seized by John Duncan of the US Navy, who in court testimony, claimed he seized it “for a violation of the laws of the United States against the carrying on of the slave trade.”[42] On the ship were three African boys.[43] The ship and the children were taken to the port of New York City in order to undergo court proceedings.[44] In September of 1860, the courts decided that the ship was condemned to be sold.[45] Reverend Pennington wrote a letter to the District Attorney of New York on behalf of the Black community in the city, proposing to send the children found on the boat to the Colored Orphan Asylum.[46] United States Marshal Isiah Rynders advertised on September 11, 1860, his holding of a public auction of the boat and its cargo.[47]

On October 19 of the same year, abolitionist Lewis Tappan and his grandson had a confrontation with Marshal Rynders at this office, in which Rynders physically and verbally attacked Tappan and his grandson.[48] Rynders threw many insults at Tappan calling him a “God damned abolitionist” and threatening violence against Black Americans.[49] Tappan was at Rynders’ office in order to advocate for bringing the three boys to the Colored Orphan Asylum. In the meantime, the boys were being kept at the Eldridge-street jail.[50] One newspaper article published in *The Evening Post* commented that Tappan’s visit to Rynders’ was at the request of the women of the

COA. However, another article in *The Evening Post* containing Tappan's affidavit, claims that he was there at the request of lawyer William C. Noyes.[51]

The incident involving the three boys, Tappan and Rynders was only tangentially related to the COA, the orphanage's place in the narrative is telling to its general perception in public politics. The orphanage's care for the boys was supported by both the Black New York community, as well as abolitionist Tappan. Even though the orphanage did not put out a public opinion on the event it was strongly connected to the abolitionist side. In his attacks towards Tappan, Rynders is quoted saying, "I hate your damned hypocritical philanthropy; why don't you look after poor white people;..."[52] Although Rynders leveled these accusations at Tappan, this sentiment was probably indicative of the attitude that poor white New Yorkers held towards the COA at the time.

Even as the political climate began to get more hostile in the 1860s, the Colored Orphan Asylum's *Twenty Fourth Annual Report* still maintained a largely apolitical stance, similar to their other reports discussed in this paper. The most political statement contained in the report is when the association posed the question, "*but when it is remembered that the colored people of this city are excluded from most lucrative employments, that little encouragement is given to raise their condition, and that a small comparative amount is afforded to relieve their distress ; that but a few of the public charities of this city afford aid to their suffering poor, may we not hope that this appeal will awaken attention to the subject, and that the claims of the colored orphan will be remembered?*"[53] Once again, the women of the COA made a subtle political statement, pointing out the exclusion of Black New Yorkers from jobs as well as the lack of charities aiding the Black community. However, like the other reports, there is no discussion of equality or emancipation, even under the heightened political climate.

As Civil War broke out in the United States, the Colored Orphan Asylum continued to function as normal. For Thanksgiving 1862, the orphanage put out a public appeal for donations in *The Journal of Commerce*. [54] The appeal mentioned that the year previous, the orphanage put out a call to the "principal churches" of New York, and only received a donation of "one turkey and a ham, except \$60 presented by a gentleman formerly of the South." [55] In a country in Civil War, the fact that the women choose to

point out the Southern origins of the gentleman is notable. When considering the association's formerly stated position on enslavement and that the orphanage was a place where the "friends" and "opponents" of enslavement could "meet on the platform" it may be in this perspective that the women sought to include the Southern origins of the donor. The anecdote about the donor is followed immediately by the statement "Our professions of philanthropy are often found very hollow, when sacrifices are required." It is unclear which sacrifices in particular the association was discussing, whether it be in reference to accepting donations from Southerners or the potential sacrifice of a Thanksgiving dinner due to lack of funds. Regardless, the call for funds put out by the orphanage solicited a response from the South, more specifically, New Orleans.

On December 18, 1862, the *New Orleans Picayune*, a Louisiana newspaper, published a response to the COA's advertisement in the *Journal of Commerce*. The *Picayune* heavily commended the *Journal of Commerce* while criticizing New York abolitionists. The *Picayune* praised the *Journal* for being "strongly conservative" and "moderate in tone," while not "pandering to the isms of the hour" and defending "the South from torrent vile abuse which has flowed constantly from abolition sewers." [56] The article then leveled that the advertisement put in the paper by the orphanage "contains this quiet but telling blow at the hollow-heartedness of the all professed sympathy for the negro that abolitionism would fain have us believe exists among its advocates:..." [57] The *Picayune* quoted the story from the advertisement of the donation of the Thanksgiving turkey and ham, criticizing the abolitionists of New York for failing to support the orphanage. "Only think of it—" wrote the *Picayune*, "the rich and fashionable abolitionist of New York upon an appeal to them for a colored orphan asylum, made the magnificent response of "one turkey and a ham!" [58] The article made no comment on the Southern origins of the donor. The *Picayune* then proceeded to commend the *Journal of Commerce* for pointing out the hypocrisy in the New York abolitionists, stating that they have "long regarded it not only as a very able and learned supporter of political virtue and right, and private justice and honor, but in many respects a model journal." [59] The *Picayune* also defended enslavement in the article, arguing that enslaved people in the South "should have good homes, should be will [sic] fed and well clothed, and do not more than half the work that Northern laborer do;..." [60] This blaring

defense of enslavement and attacks on abolitionism were notable, especially given that they come from a Southern paper, in the midst of the Civil War. Given the orphanage's constant assertion of neutrality, it is possible that the *Picayune* did not consider the COA in itself to be directly tied to abolitionism as the article did not directly criticize the orphanage.

While the COA kept out of any political discussion in relation to the Civil War, the politics of the war still reached the orphanage. White resentment in New York City surrounding the war led to the orphanage destruction during the New York City Draft Riots of 1863. The Draft Riots were one of the most intense episodes in New York City during the Civil War as federal draft laws incited many poor white New Yorkers to take to the streets and act out in violence. The targeting and destruction of the asylum was not accidental but an intentional act by the crowd which was agitated by racial tensions in the city. *The New York Tribune* at the time published that "the infuriated mob, eager for any outrage, were turned that way by the simple suggestion that the building was full of colored children." [61] The crowd may have shared the sentiment of US Marshall Rynders, questioning why the philanthropists were focusing on Black children rather than helping white children and resenting them for their lack of support for the white community. The orphanage's previous assertions of political neutrality were lost on the crowd as the building was ransacked and set alight in an ultimate act of political violence.

Conclusion

From the inception of the Colored Orphan Asylum through to 1863, when its building was destroyed during the New York Draft Riots, the women of the orphanage maintained a neutral tone in their public practices of politics. When it came to their own publications, the women of the COA mainly focused on their work in the orphanage, rather than pushing a political agenda. Their approach was one of maternalism, helping individual Black children rather than trying to elevate the Black community as a whole to equality. The women did not aim to use their platform to push for political change for

Black Americans, but rather stayed within the norms of women's organizations at the time and insisted on neutrality. However, the women were linked with important men in the Manumission Society as well as abolitionists like James McCune Smith and Cassius Clay. While declaring neutrality, these links as well as subtle political and anti-slavery statements challenged the orphanage's supposed stance.

As the political climate got more heated in the build up to the Civil War, the women's neutrality began to be implicitly challenged, as New York abolitionists connected to the asylum were criticized. It became more difficult to claim neutrality on questions of race and enslavement, even though the women of the COA tried to publicly maintain that assertion. The links of the orphanage to the Black community and abolitionism, made the COA a target during the 1863 Draft Riots, leading to the building's destruction. While the orphanage's building may have been destroyed, the institution was not, and continued caring for children until its successor, the Riverdale Children's Association was disbanded in 1946. The women of the COA and their public politics reflect an important story on the concept of neutrality. Although one may attempt to maintain a neutral stance, the impact of the surrounding political climate cannot be ignored.

Endnotes

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- [3]"Destruction of the Colored Orphan Asylum," *Journal of Commerce* (New York, NY), Jul. 14, 1863.
- [4] Ibid.
- [5]Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: Univ of North Carolina Press, 2002)
- [6]William Seraile, *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum*. (United States: Fordham University Press, 2013), 7.
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- [16]"Extract From An Oration." *Freedom's Journal* (New York, New York), Oct. 12, 1827
- [17]"Extract From An Oration." *Freedom's Journal* (New York, New York), Oct. 12, 1827
- [18]Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans “First Annual Report” (New York, NY, 1837); Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans “Fourth Annual Report” (New York, NY, 1840)
- [19]Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans “First Annual Report” (New York, NY, 1837), 2
- [20]Association for the Benefit of Colored Orphans “Fourth Annual Report” (New York, NY, 1840), 7
- [21] Jay, John, “An address in behalf of the Colored Orphan Asylum” Dec 11, 1843, 8
- [22]Ibid.
- [23]Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. (Switzerland: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 157.
- [24]Ibid.
- [25]“Mr. C.M. Clay’s Lecture.” *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York, New York), Jan 22, 1846, 1

[26]Ibid.

[27]"Mr. Clay at the North." *National Anti-Slavery Standard* (New York, New York), Jan 22, 1846, 3

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

[31] "The Colored Orphan Asylum." *The New York Herald*. (New York, NY), 11 May 1847.

[32]"Anniversary Week. Melioration of Condition of Seamen." *Commercial Advertiser* (New York, New York) May 11, 1847, 1

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[35]William Seraile, *Angels of Mercy: White Women and the History of New York's Colored Orphan Asylum*. (United States: Fordham University Press, 2013), 11.

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[41]Ibid.

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[43]"The Slave Trade Seizure of the Brig W. R. Kibby of New York on the Coast of Cuba." *New York Herald* (New York, New York), no. 8741, Aug 14, 1860, 3; "Our Answer to Counsellor Gerard. The Three Negroes And Marshal Rynders. Affidavits of Lewis Tappan." *Evening Post* (New York, New York) 69, no. 255, Oct 26, 1860, 3; "The Perils Of Philanthropy." *Evening Post* (New York, New York) 59, no. 256, Oct 27, 1860, 2

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[54]"Thanksgiving at the Colored Orphan Asylum" *Journal of Commerce, jr.* (New York, New York), Nov 25, 1862, 2

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