of whether it was hidden in brothels or paraded in public, its very existence threatened everyone in the city. Through the spread of venereal disease, the social evil could attack the families and even the bodies of respectable middle-class women. The problem demanded that women abandon the illusory shelter of their homes and take to the streets to press their cause. The emergency forced them to take daring steps, but success would allow them to feel at home in public; the street would be made an appropriate place for ladies because it would be morally purified. The entire public sphere would be imbued with the values of genteeel femininity.

The suffragists gained greater access to public space, but they failed to transform that space as thoroughly as they had desired. Earlier police predictions came true, as closing the red-light district meant the end of an attempt, however ineffectual, to keep vice away from middle-class citizens who sought to avoid it. Having demolished the crumbling barriers that marked out Hartford's moral geography, middle-class women gained the right to leave the private sphere — only to find the world outside the home as impure as ever. Regardless of what Hepburn said in 1913, Hartford was not cleansed.

The sun rose over Hartford each morning on streetcars rattling down country roads and through empty streets toward the department stores and granite office towers downtown. By the time the first ripple of the daily tide of commuters flowed into City Hall Square, an even earlier group of workers was waiting for it: dozens of young newsboys gripping fresh armfuls of papers and clamoring for attention. “Got up at 5:30 in the morning to catch the trolleys coming in from across the river from Manchester and Glastonbury to sell 50 papers to make 50 cents,” recalled Anthony Tapogna, an East Side Italian boy whose brother was also a “newie.” Many newies would return to the sidewalks and streetcars after school, joined by other boys and girls, to peddle afternoon papers to the rush hour crowds. Some would stay late into the evening to make a few extra cents from sales in saloons.

A harried commuter might be grateful for a chance to relax with the news, but a growing number of reformers around the turn of the century saw the presence of these children downtown as a troubling anomaly. By the early 1900s, American educators and reformers were working to
construct a new, separate world for children, both inside and outside of school. As a result of child-labor laws, mandatory school attendance, longer school years, age-graded classrooms, and organized recreation programs, children were increasingly segregated from adult activities and grouped with their peers of the same age. Given this trend, it is not surprising that children, whose lives were supposed to revolve around education and age-segregated play, would be considered out of place in the bustling downtown, an adult-dominated place reserved for work and commercial exchange. Children who simply wished to play outdoors could find more convenient places closer to home. When children went downtown, it was often for the same reasons as adults: to attend commercial amusements, to acquire goods, or to make money.

A few moralists might object to the corruption of young movie addicts, but it was the children who worked on the street who truly offended them. Children's role in the street trades had given them a niche in the economic life of the downtown—and a claim to what was otherwise adult turf—but by 1900 reformers were beginning to question the validity of this role. For the first time, child labor in America was being viewed as a major social problem. Child-welfare organizations through most of the nineteenth century had been more concerned about idle and vagrant children than about child laborers, but by the turn of the century they were attacking child labor as a violation of children's sentimental value. Reformers, who now viewed children as sacred, considered their hawking of newspapers on the street almost blasphemous.

Certain reformers in Hartford worked to rescue all children from what they saw as the corrupting influence of the street trades. Their repeated lobbying campaigns from 1895 to 1910 pressured the city government to forbid the sale of newspapers by boys under ten years of age and to put new restrictions on older newsboys. The boys had to obtain licenses, curtail their hours, and behave more courteously. The child-labor reformers' greatest concern, though, was the newsgirls, whose status as both females and children made their selling of newspapers doubly inappropriate. Reformers warned repeatedly that the girls were in danger of losing their chastity and of learning bad manners. After two full decades of work and against determined opposition, including some from other social activists, the child-labor reformers were finally able to push the newsgirls off the street. As a result of the child-labor reform campaigns, downtown streets became more exclusively the property of adults, especially at night. The area of Hartford with the most diverse range of street activities was becoming more narrowly restricted.

Newies at Work

There were other street jobs available for Hartford children besides selling papers. Boys and girls could also sell chewing gum, postcards, and shoelaces, for example. Many children helped their families by hunting for wood scraps for the cookstove or for metal scraps that could be sold to junk dealers. The scavengers could be seen at work in the streets around town pushing their homemade wagons. They also kept an eye out for cigar and cigarette butts that could be sold to bums or to tobacco recyclers. Messenger services employed boys to deliver telegrams and notes, sometimes late into the night, a job that had an unsavory reputation because it often involved delivering messages to brothels or running errands for prostitutes or their clients. Some boys also shined shoes on the sidewalk or in saloons, though not as many as in some other cities such as New Haven (many of Hartford's shoes were polished instead by adult Italian immigrants who worked in indoor shoeshine parlors and even had their own labor union).

Newies, however, were by far the most numerous of the children in the street trades in Hartford, as in other cities. It is hard to determine their exact number at any time—possibly no one ever tried to count—but in 1912 the city's Juvenile Commission reported that 583 boys and 37 girls from ages ten through thirteen had been issued licenses and badges. Boys as young as five or six had sold papers a few years previously, before the ordinance prohibiting newies under ten. Newies older than thirteen were not required to obtain licenses, so there is no way of telling how numerous they were. But newies were less likely to be older teenagers, and since most children who were required to get licenses did so, the licensed children probably represented a majority of all Hartford newies at that time.

Their main reason for working, according to their later recollections and to a 1921 study by the state, was to supplement their immigrant families' income. Their daily contributions ran between 25 cents and a dollar. Three-fourths of Connecticut children in the street trades came from
Boys scavenging for scrap, 1918. Scavenging was one of many ways in which children could make money on the streets. (Hartford Public Library)

families in which both parents were foreign-born, according to the state's study. Although the newsies might keep a few pennies to buy candy or pay their admission to the movies, the overwhelming majority of them gave most of their earnings to their families.⁷

The work was available because of a greatly expanded market for newspapers at this time, especially for afternoon dailies. Nationwide, the late nineteenth-century booms in afternoon newspaper circulation and the newsie population were indirect results of new patterns of urban growth and transportation. The unprecedented geographical expansion of American cities at this time went hand in hand with an increase in the number of commuting workers, many of whom could be persuaded to buy papers to fill their empty time on the streetcar home. Children flocked to meet this need, concentrating at the points where commuters gathered to catch the trolleys, particularly the major stops downtown. In Hartford, two of the best places were Union Station and City Hall Square. The square was especially good because it was the point of convergence for streetcar lines from throughout the metropolitan area.⁸

Despite the large market, selling papers was a demanding job that forced newsies to hustle aggressively for customers. Newsies in Hartford, as elsewhere, were independent entrepreneurs who bought their goods from the newspaper companies or from newsdealers and sold them at a profit. Some staked claims to spots from which they sold to a regular clientele, while others clustered at busy corners and swarmed around potential customers. Eager to make sales, "They stick a paper in a man's face and keep it there for a dozen steps, until he simply has to buy it. They are a persistent crowd, and their persistency seems to win," reported the Hartford Courant. The work rewarded assertiveness and nourished a tough-guy subculture of fighting, swearing, and gambling.
“Competition was keen among the paper boys,” recalled one of the newies:

I became tough and very alert to the slightest semblance of a whistle on the street. This whistle, of course, plays an important part in a paper boy's life. It means business for him, someone is calling him for a paper. I would often find one of those “wise guys” who would whistle just for the sake of seeing the boys prick up their ears and scramble madly in the direction of the false alarm. People who do such a thing are the bitterest and most hated enemies of the vendors. Some of the names that we paper boys would call these persons would make Bacchus blush. But the majority of our customers were fair and even kind. They would usually buy their papers from the boy who approached them first after they had whistled or called him. Naturally enough, there were always a few fistfights among the paper boys during the course of a day's peddling. I enjoyed the excitement, the fights, and the feeling of making money on one's own that a paper boy experiences.⁹

Some of the sneakier newboys would use the “last paper” ploy to help sell papers late at night. In one example, the smaller of two brothers would enter a saloon looking for sentimental drunks who would buy his “last papers” so he could go home. Having made his sales, he would go back outside to get more papers from his waiting brother, and the two would walk on to the next saloon. “Drunks are me best customers,” said the enterprising young Joseph Bishop. The ploy was effective because, while some newboys stayed out late just to enjoy a sense of freedom, to make more spending money, or to avoid unpleasant home life, others really did feel obliged to work until they had sold enough papers to satisfy their parents. Newboys who feared being beaten for poor sales might stay out all night, hanging around theaters and then sleeping in alleys.¹⁰

Around 1890, girls—particularly from poor Jewish immigrant families on the East Side—began selling newspapers in the afternoons and evenings. The newgirls quickly adopted some of the newie subculture. “A truthful and intelligent teacher at the Brown School [on the East Side] has been heard to say that she could tell almost invariably when any of her girl pupils had begun selling newspapers,” read an anonymous letter
to the Courant in 1895. “The change in manners and morals is so great that it cannot escape notice.” The Courant, a morning paper that refused to sell to newgirls, reported that the girls often “are not merely impertinent to people to whom they offer papers but they use vulgar and abusive language if the offer is declined. They quarrel with each other. They stay out far later in the night than they ought.” Like the newboys, some newgirls who stayed out past 10 P.M. were truly struggling to sell enough papers to satisfy their parents. Others were shamming.¹¹ In the course of their work newgirls entered restaurants, offices, and saloons, reported the Courant. Although the editors did not need to point it out, the saloon was, except for the brothel, the single most inappropriate place for a young girl. It was an almost exclusively male environment that nurtured values wholly at odds with female domesticity. Worse, the Courant
editors claimed to have seen newsgirls late at night entering the saloons near newspaper offices on State Street, at the edge of the red-light district: "The girls run into the saloons not merely with impunity but with impudence. One of them was heard boasting recently, as she came out of one of these places, 'It's my two dollars.' Another in front of one such place... announced, 'This is the kinder place I like. I do my business with sports, I do. They come down with the money. And these are simply illustrations of what is going on every night. Little girls are made hard and coarse and sent on the way of becoming bad women.'"

Helping the Daughters of Toil

The Courant's remarks were part of the debate that had broken out in Hartford over whether to prohibit girls from selling newspapers. The issue first arose in January 1895, when the Common Council began considering whether to regulate newsgirls' hours to get them off the street at night. A committee of councilmen looked into the matter (under pressure from an unspecified group of wealthy women involved in charitable work), and instead decided to ban all girls under sixteen from selling papers at any hour. One councilman pointed out that government was already taking a greater responsibility for protecting children, and that such a measure would be in keeping with recent laws to ban child labor in factories. The councilmen argued that, away from parental supervision, the newsgirls were not only becoming coarse and rude; they were also "exposed to greater dangers upon the streets, especially at night, and... the tendency is to lead them to immoral lives." The charity workers reportedly feared that newsgirls were even tempted to become prostitutes.13 But opinion on the subject was sharply divided. Charity leaders, ministers, and politicians differed from one another, as did the two leading newspapers.

Foremost among the defenders of the newsgirls was Mary Hall, a women's rights advocate and founder of a club for poor boys. Born in 1843, Hall grew up in the country town of Marlborough, Connecticut, where her father was a prosperous miller. She received a secondary education at Wesleyan Academy in Wethersfield, Massachusetts, and pursued a career in teaching until she lost her enthusiasm for the work.

She began teaching herself law in the summer of 1877, hoping that her brother Ezra, an attorney, would help her become the first woman lawyer in Connecticut. Though her brother died of a sudden illness that fall, Mary's career was rescued by John Hooker, Ezra's colleague and neighbor in the Nook Farm area of Asylum Hill. Hooker and his wife, Isabella Beecher Hooker, were both active supporters of women's rights, and they encouraged Mary Hall's ambitions. Hall studied law in John Hooker's office, and, thanks in part to his arguments before the state supreme court, was admitted to the bar as Connecticut's first female lawyer in 1882. The right to practice law was, she hoped, "my passport to a field of helpfulness... to my sex."14

In addition to her work as a lawyer, Hall was drawn into the woman suffrage movement. She formed a close friendship with Frances Ellen Burr, one of Connecticut's pioneer suffragists. Burr and Hall were among the founding officers of the Hartford Equal Rights Club in 1883. In the early 1900s Hall served on the State Board of Charities, where her insistence on making surprise inspections of state institutions made her a controversial figure. "She... is always battling for what she believes is right, making herself hated by those who resent her interference," wrote the Courant.15 Hall's greatest accomplishment was founding and leading the Good Will Club, which provided recreation for Hartford's poor and immigrant boys. From its modest beginnings in Hall's law office in 1880, the club expanded into a major Hartford institution—partly because of fundraising assistance from Frances Burr's brother, the Hartford Times publisher Alfred E. Burr.16

Given the support she received from Alfred Burr, it was certainly in Hall's interests to please him by defending the rights of girls to sell newspapers. Yet her motives for getting involved in the issue were actually much less self-serving. She had watched the first newsgirls enter the business around 1890, had befriended the girls through their brothers at the Good Will Club, and by 1894 knew nearly every one of the Times' forty or fifty newsgirls by name. She sent a letter to the editor defending their work as soon as the first criticisms were voiced in 1893. A letter she wrote the following year suggests that Hall felt the newsgirl controversy was an echo of her own struggle to become a lawyer. "It seems to me the old, old story—of not giving girls a chance in the world as boys have when
you do this,” she wrote, criticizing those who would forbid girls to sell newspapers. Instead of taking girls off the streets to save them from immorality, she added, “My remedy would be [to] make the streets clean morally, so clean that a girl who wishes to sell newspapers can do it in safety.”

This call to make the streets morally clean was vague, but it deserves closer examination. First, the idea foreshadowed the suffragists’ later call for the suppression of prostitution. Second, Hall’s idea suggests intriguing differences from that of the suffragists. Hepburn and her supporters spoke of mothers’ need for a public environment that would let them raise moral children, and they also spoke in abstract political terms of women’s right to share public space with men. Hall’s remedy, in contrast, aimed at winning for females the use of the streets for commercial purposes without risking the loss of their higher moral status. Given that an essential aspect of separate-spheres ideology was the spatial separation of commerce and morality, Hall’s proposal was a radical one. She was issuing a subtle yet profound challenge to conventional beliefs about gender and public space.

For its part, the Times hammered away relentlessly at the newsgirl issue in its editorials, articles, and letters columns. The Times agreed that newsgirls had no place in saloons, but it insisted on their right to the streets and denied that they were immoral. “These little girls of 9, 10, and 12 years, are quiet and orderly, and many persons buy a paper of them rather than of the boys.” If one believes what was printed in the Times, selling newspapers taught poor girls the work ethic, gave them uplifting contact with the better classes, provided them with money for warm clothes, and let them help their widowed mothers put bread on the table. Through honest work newsgirls warded off the extreme poverty that might otherwise force them to sell themselves. But the Times and its letter writers, despite their florid rhetoric, also directly and creatively engaged the question of the street’s influence on feminine morality.

The fact that the newsgirls did their work in plain view actually served to protect them, making their job no more dangerous than a shopgirl’s, the Times claimed: “The traffic is open — on the streets — all in public. Is it likely that under such circumstances it leads to vice?” In letters to the editor, the Rev. George Leon Walker and the Rev. Cornelius G. Bristol compared the superior moral climate of the streets downtown to the dangers of the alleys, streets, and tenements in the East Side slum, which was the home of several thousand immigrants — as well as of the red-light district. Bristol wrote:

It ought not to be questioned for a moment whether the morality of Main Street in daylight and early evening is of an inferior quality to that of Front or Commerce streets. If this be an open question, then the common council should direct its attention to the police department rather than to the newsgirls. Any person who believes that the moral condition of these young girls is made worse by three hours of contact with the busy, changing element that moves in the main thoroughfares must be woefully [sic] ignorant of the conditions under which those same girls live for the remainder of the time when not within the schoolroom.

Bristol emphasized that he greatly valued female domesticity, but that he was trying to be realistic. “If the prohibition that is proposed would better the morals of these young girls by keeping them in or about the homes from which they come, there would be no objection to it. It can do nothing of the kind, for there is little or nothing there with which to better them, and in many cases their ‘home’ is but a sad parody on that sacred name,” he wrote.

The image of the home as a refuge from the street was, in the case of the slums, a false one, the Times’ letter writers suggested. The dominant division in the moral geography of the city was not between indoor and outdoor space, but between differing neighborhoods. A home in the slums was no better than its surroundings. Even if not itself given over to vice, an apartment in a tenement house failed to provide the insulated environment that could shelter a girl from the wickedness of the outside world — and in any case it failed to keep the girls indoors. As Walker and Bristol pointed out, some parents even sent their children to saloons to buy beer. A female letter writer went so far as to claim that if the newsgirls were banished “back to the cheap lodgings from which they necessarily come and [left] to reflection . . . the so-called genteelly brought up maidens may with impunity while away their time by promenading openly with observed decorum, but on the sly making appointments and
casting doubtful glances at the admiring crowds, before which they leisurely parade.”

It is unlikely that only a bundle of papers stood between a poor girl and a life of streetwalking, but the larger point made by these letters is well taken. Prohibiting girls from selling newspapers would not have returned them to a cloistered childhood in a bourgeois home. The choice faced by the city council was not whether to save girls from the immoral influence of the street, but merely whether to force them out of the downtown, where most sold their newspapers. In the tenement houses and slum side streets where they lived and played, the girls would be out of sight and out of mind. Downtown shoppers and businessmen would no longer be confronted by insistent reminders that middle-class ideals of domesticity had no place in the lives of the poor.

The Times and its letter writers suggested alternative reforms, including an 8 P.M. limit on newspaper sales by children, a 9 P.M. curfew for all unaccompanied children, and a prohibition on children entering saloons. One letter, signed “Equal Rights,” questioned why newsgirls should be treated differently from newsboys. This writer proposed that the city make public space safer for all children by closing the saloons. A writer calling herself “A Mother” announced that she was one of a group of thirty mothers who planned “to give one afternoon in a month to meeting with these daughters of toil and helping them to right views of life—and I will engage that by the help of books and photographs and pleasant chat we will so influence these little women that they will not only help to conserve the morals of our streets, but carry a little light, perhaps, into the dark places where many of them are now obliged to make their homes.”

In short, the Times’ editorials and letters proposed to make the downtown street environment safer for children rather than to segregate the children from it. Fortified by moral influences and working under regulated conditions, the newsgirls would be safe from harm.

Advocates of a ban on newsgirls, however, held their ground. Most of them stuck to standard arguments about the threats to girlish innocence. Since the girls persisted on putting themselves in danger, they asserted, the city government was obliged to “protect the children from themselves and their parents.” Young women in the junior department of the United Workers’ Club shared these concerns but addressed the opposing viewpoint more directly. In a letter to the Courant, they rebutted the comparisons made between the effects of the downtown and East Side streets:

We are told that these girls [the newsgirls] are better off on the business streets than they would be running about Commerce and Charles and North. Granted that, if this business were stopped, they would not stay at home, it is absolutely not true that they would in this case be more exposed to influences that degrade. The danger to this class of girls is not, except in very small degree, from men of their own class. It is from men in the walks of life higher in the social scale than theirs; from men, or from those like them, who now tap the girl of 14 under the chin as they buy a paper, or laughingly encourage them in their childish attempts at flirtation. . . . The flattery and all the rest that goes to make up the fascination of the streets—where will be the end thereof?

In other words, urban danger came not from the presence of lower-class men, but from the mixing of classes. Regardless of what police might do to suppress crime and control hoodlums, no working-class girl would be safe on the streets so long as she did business with more affluent men. This analysis of the problem attacked Hall’s remedy at its very root. By redefining interclass contact as a menace rather than a benefit, moreover, these letter writers cast doubt on any hope for a shared public space safe for all. Let readers mistake them for ignorant prudes, the letter writers established their authority by assuring readers, “We are speaking not as women whose lives are sheltered and who can know nothing definite about the temptations of those of whom we write. We are speaking for a club of working girls.”

At a public hearing held by the Common Council in May 1895, the opposing sides agreed on the need to protect young maidenhood but disagreed whether a ban on newspaper sales by girls would realize that goal—or whether it would simply rob poor families of needed income. Neither the faction on the council seeking to ban newsgirls nor the one wishing merely to make them stop work at 8 P.M. was initially able to gain a majority. Finally, in January 1896, the council agreed to prohibit all street sales by girls or boys under fourteen during school hours or after 8 P.M. This decision gave reformers considerably less than they had wanted.
The Hartford reformers revived the issue in early 1905. The Hartford Consumers' League organized a meeting of the leaders of local charities, church organizations, and civic groups to discuss what to do about the newsgirls. Despite Hall's dissenting arguments, a majority of those present voted to direct their efforts toward a state law forbidding such work. Oscar A. Phelps, a member of the Consumers' League and the superintendent of the First Church of Christ's East Side mission, drafted the bill banning the sale of newspapers on public property by girls under eighteen and had it submitted to the legislature. Among other local organizations supporting the bill were the North Street Settlement, the Civic Club, the Motherhood Club, the Central Labor Union, and the Hartford Federation of Churches. At the legislative hearing on the bill, much of the debate repeated what had been said in 1895—in fact, Walker's old letter to the editor was even read into the record. But the speakers also brought out an issue that had not been explored ten years earlier: the question of whether the reformers were acting on values not shared by the families of the newsgirls.

That issue was inadvertently raised by the inflammatory and ill-advised remarks of a speaker in favor of the bill, the Rev. Dennis Gleason of St. Anthony's Catholic Church. Gleason remarked that even though the Italians of the East Side were poor, they refused to let their girls sell newspapers on the street. "The same principle which keeps the Italian girls off the street keeps the Italian women modest and virtuous, and makes them faithful wives. This principle they learned in their native land, and they brought it with them to this country. That principle includes the idea that women should be retiring, and it makes for the seclusion of women." The Italians, Gleason's words implied, carried an important aspect of middle-class Yankee domesticity to an admirable extreme.

But did feminine virtue truly require seclusion? Those who opposed the bill vehemently disagreed. Among those anxious to challenge Gleason's remarks was Henry M. Mayer, the assistant principal of the Brown School and the Sunday school superintendent at Beth Israel. In his speech against the bill, Mayer said that poor East Side Jewish girls and their families benefited greatly from newspaper sales, and that this was nothing to be ashamed of. The money helped their families keep them—or their older brothers and sisters—in school at an age when they might otherwise be dropping out to work. Mayer said that members of the Jewish community had visited the homes of the newsgirls and heard no reports of the girls being harmed or threatened on the street. "I believe that the virtue of Jewish womanhood and family life has always been proverbial and needs no law of the state to guard it," he concluded.

Charles L. Ames, the principal of the Brown School, cast the issue in terms of class culture instead of ethnic culture. "The whole difficulty attending this move to place such a bill upon our statute books is that the people are thinking and acting from different standpoints," he said. A wealthy man might oppose the idea of girls selling newspapers because he would want to keep his own children off the streets, but an East Side father "sees no harm in his little girl selling papers for a compensation that shall bring comfort to both family and girl." Even if the girl was not actually driven into newspaper selling by desperate poverty, why shouldn't she have a chance to make a few pennies to buy candy or chewing gum? The bill—which was also opposed by police officials, local judges, two ex-mayors, the labor advocate John F. Gunshinan, Mayor William F. Henney, and of course Mary Hall—died in committee. The committee agreed that the newsgirls were in little danger on the public streets. The reformers had failed again.

Despite this particular failure, however, the issue of children in the street trades was gaining new attention not only in Hartford but across the nation. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Boston, Newark, Washington, and Cincinnati set age restrictions and limited hours on child labor in the street trades, as did the states of New York and Wisconsin. The National Child Labor Committee, a reform organization advocating laws to restrict child labor, began gathering evidence about night messenger work and other street trades.

In Hartford, the anti-newsgirl campaign resumed in 1909 under the leadership of the Consumers' League of Hartford and its parent organization, the Consumers' League of Connecticut, which was interested in the newsgirls as part of its broader effort against child labor and poor working conditions for women. The statewide organization began its active existence in 1907, hiring Mary Cromwell Welles of Newington to oversee its work. Welles appears to have been similar to her somewhat older opponent, Mary Hall, in a number of ways. Born in 1860 in
Newington, a rural area near Hartford, she was part of the first generation of women to attend college in significant numbers. After graduating from Smith in 1883 and studying abroad, she worked as a teacher, then earned a Ph.D. in social welfare at Yale and switched to a career in social reform. Like Hall, she never married and was noted for her determined defense of what she believed to be right. "She was somewhat radical in her views, and perseverance was one of her major qualities," the Times editorial read at her death in 1930, with an evident attempt at tact. "Those who are inclined to resist the march of progress possibly found her a bit difficult to deal with." 35

In support of the 1909 newsgirl campaign by the Connecticut Consumers' League, the National Child Labor Committee's investigative photographer, Lewis Hine, in March 1909 took photographs of several dozen local newsies and messenger boys. Hine's Hartford photographs were obviously intended to illustrate many of the same points that reformers had been making for years. The photographs emphasized the frailty of young children and their vulnerability on the uncaring city streets. A number of the photographs showed children facing the camera with their backs to blank walls, or framed them as small figures in an empty urban landscape. Hine, who acknowledged that he sometimes paid his subjects and even asked them to hold poses, also presented moralistic photographs of newsboys entering a saloon and messenger boys gambling. A disproportionate number of his Hartford newsgirl photographs were of girls. Hine also depicted groups of smiling newsies, but he indicated his disapproval in captions that emphasized the children's young age. 36

Hine and a representative of the Child Labor Commission of New England presented the photographs almost immediately at a legislative hearing in which Hartford reformers were arguing once again for restricting children's participation in the street trades. Two bills on the subject had been drafted by the Consumers' League of Hartford. The first proposed regulating the employment of boys under fifteen in street trades. The second would have banned all girls under sixteen from working in the streets, factories, and stores, and all boys under fifteen from working in factories and stores, among other places. The bills, which were presented and debated together, drew strong opposition not only from Hall, Gunshanan, and the Times, but also from manufacturers throughout the state. 37 Both bills were defeated. The following year, Hartford reformers gave up on persuading the legislature and turned their attention back to the city government. 38

Regulating an Evil

Although the second of the two 1909 bills was hopelessly ambitious, the first represented a promising new direction for reformers. A proposal to regulate children's role in street trades was potentially viable politically where a sweeping prohibition was not. In 1910 Hartford's newly formed Juvenile Commission led a successful fight to regulate the street trades. It persuaded the Common Council to pass an ordinance prohibiting children under ten from selling newspapers on the street and requiring
children between ten and fourteen to get licenses from the superintendent of schools if they wanted to do this work. To head off the school superintendent's announced intention of denying permits to girls, the council specified that there be no discrimination on the basis of sex.

The prohibition on newsies under ten was a major step toward the reformers' goal of removing children from what they considered a dangerous environment, but the licensing requirements represented an interesting detour. Reformers in other cities and states disagreed over the value of such measures. "In many instances it has been pointed out,...that a system of licensing and badging is but a method of legalizing what is indisputably an evil," wrote Edward N. Clopper of the National Child Labor Committee in 1912. For reformers to support licensing required not just a tactical shift but an intellectual one. The street environment, formerly said to have disastrous effects, now had to be seen as a potentially acceptable place for children—as long as they were under official supervision.

The desire for greater supervision over newsboys was nothing new. In 1881, the Hartford police had proposed licensing newsboys and bootblacks as a way to force them to behave. Licensing, the police chief said, would "give the police some authority where they have none now, it would enable the officers to relieve our merchants and citizens generally of a great nuisance, and at the same time benefit all boys who behave themselves." In the early twentieth century reformers calling for regulating Hartford's street trades described unsupervised newsies both as potential victims and as potential troublemakers. At a 1909 hearing, E. W. Lord of the Child Labor Commission of New England spoke with alarm on the subject: "Street trades are open to these young people without any restriction. They are not under the supervision which the young workers in the factory are receiving—they are their own masters, do as they please and naturally cultivate an early independence, which is not fitting for a child. They have then precocity, which is injurious, and they suffer from the effect of street life." Mary Welles drew a distinction between newsboys and newspaper girls. In the case of the newspaper girls, she said, "I am in favor of a sweeping law prohibiting them on the streets" in order to preserve their feminine modesty. But "in the case of the boys, the question is entirely different, it is not the danger period but a period of great restlessness."

Oscar Phelps added that "paper selling should be made a boys' business and superintended as other work is."

After the passage of the 1910 ordinance, reformers and city officials temporarily turned their attention from protecting children to disciplining them. The text of the "Child Street Sales Permit" included a long list of requirements overtly aimed at controlling the newsies' behavior. "The badge and this permit is [sic] lent to you to show that you have a right to sell things in the streets, but you will hold them only as long as you obey the instructions," the text warned. The newsies were told always to wear their badges, which were supposed to be fastened high on the right side of the chest, while selling on the streets. They were never to sell during school hours or after 8 P.M. They were also given the following commandments: "You must always be clean and properly clothed while selling", "You must attend school regularly", "You must not beg", "You must not go into saloons, or saloon entrances, theaters, moving picture houses, or street cars to sell", "You must not annoy people by getting in their way or by shouting, or hanging around entrances to office buildings", "You must not draw or write anything indecent on walls or sidewalks"; and "You must not fight or call other boys or girls names." The superintendent of schools could revoke the permit of anyone who violated these conditions.

Welles and other members of the Consumers' League of Connecticut conducted surveys to gauge the ordinance's popularity and effectiveness. "One patrolman declared the ordinance 'an awful good thing. It helps us get the boys in line that we couldn't get hold of before,' " Welles reported in early 1912. "A grocer on City Hall Square ... used to be much annoyed by the newsboys, but now finds everything quiet in front of his store." League members quoted the police chief as saying that the licensing requirements had kept newsies off the streets after 8 P.M., forced them to attend school, and improved their behavior. But the reformers did not lose sight of their earlier goals. One of the most beneficial effects of the badge system, they reported, was that it made it easier to prevent underage children from selling.

The newsies' reactions to the new system were mixed. Girls interviewed by the reformers tended to dislike having to wear a badge. "Not nice for girls to wear it," said thirteen-year-old Yetta Weinstein. "Children call you names, call you ragpickers." Boys, however, tended to like the
badge system, though not for the same reasons as reformers. Some liked the fact that the system discouraged fights and brought more order to the selling of newspapers, but just as many praised it for reducing their competition by banning younger children. "Make more money with badges," said one boy.46

Reformers soon became dissatisfied with the way the city regulated the newbies. Not all the newbies wore their badges as they were supposed to, and some did not even bother to get a badge, complained members of the Consumers’ League of Connecticut and the president of the Council of Jewish Women.47 In 1913 the Consumers’ League and the Hartford Council on Child Welfare unsuccessfully asked the Common Council to hire female inspectors to enforce the licensing system as well as to inspect dance halls and investigate vice. Councilmen, who were annoyed by suffragists’ ongoing antiprostitution campaign, explained their refusal by declaring that the inspectors might abuse their powers.48

The Removal of the Newgirls

The regulations, regardless of their success or failure, did not address the problem that reformers had been fighting for nearly two decades. More than thirty girls continued to peddle papers on Hartford’s streets. While other reformers were busy fretting about badgeless newboys, the Council of Jewish Women began in 1912 to resolve the newgirl problem privately. This council, which was dominated by the more prosperous German Jewish element within Hartford’s ethnically divided Jewish community, was eager to get newer Eastern European immigrants to adapt to middle-class American standards. Members visited the homes of the newgirls and persuaded many of the parents to take the girls off the streets. When persuasion failed, they bribed the parents with gifts and weekly payments to help make up for the loss in income. Within a year, the number of newgirls had been halved, and by 1914 it had been reduced to seven. But other girls entered the business to replace those who quit, and when the outbreak of World War I increased the demand for news, the number of newgirls rose to twenty. The Council of Jewish Women realized that its work would be endless.49

At the request of the Jewish women’s group, Welles presented a peti-

tion to the Common Council that October calling for the removal of the newgirls from the street. A sympathetic alderman proposed an ordinance that would prohibit all girls under sixteen from selling papers and require boys who were fourteen and fifteen to obtain licenses and obey the same rules as younger boys. With a few minor exceptions, the 1914 public hearing was a tedious repetition of the same points that had been made for twenty years. Welles argued that the council had a duty to complete the work of the Council of Jewish Women. Her old nemesis, Mary Hall, repeated her familiar position in favor of allowing newgirls. According to the Times, Hall added that “she was ashamed of parents afraid to trust their daughters and sons on the bright streets of Hartford,” implying that an improvement in the moral environment would logically result from the improved electric street lighting recently installed downtown. She further argued that the charity provided by the Jewish women was turning self-reliant poor families into dependent paupers. The reformers’ only new cause for hope was that the Times had agreed to stop actively opposing a ban on newgirls, since their small numbers had made them a less important form of labor.50

But an unexpected event suddenly tipped the controversy decisively in the reformers’ favor. Before the Common Council could vote on the proposal, an eleven-year-old newgirl was lured into a remote room one evening by a man offering to buy her last three papers if she would follow him to where he could get change. There he raped her and left her infected with venereal disease. To their thinly disguised satisfaction, the advocates of a ban on newgirls had seen their dire warnings verified at the most opportune possible moment.51

Hall made one last attempt to prevent the inevitable. She met with the girl’s family, and, with the cooperation of the Times, printed an account of her visit in which she discussed the rape as an individual human tragedy, not as generally illustrative of the dangers of the street trades. Her report took the reader to the top floor of a dark Pequot Street tenement house, the home of a Jewish peddler and his nine children. She described how the mother was struggling despite poverty to provide a good home and wholesome food for her children. The mother cared deeply about the children and was grief-stricken over the rape. “This is the first time in twenty-five years, so far as I can remember, that any newgirl has
gone wrong, and all girls should not be deprived of an opportunity to earn some money honestly,” Hall wrote. “Girls can’t be kept off the street. They have a right to be there at reasonable hours.”

Hall’s cause was hopeless. Having accepted that the chastity of young girls was a crucial issue in the newsgirl controversy, Hall and her allies now found themselves in an impossible position. The rape had produced such a powerful impression in the city that not a single councilman dared to vote against the ordinance. “Thus has come to an end a practise [sic] about which there has been an amazing amount of argument and feeling for the space of 25 years,” Welles noted happily. Though it refused to require licenses for fourteen- and fifteen-year-old boys, the council prohibited all girls under sixteen from selling newspapers. By January there was not a single newsgirl to be seen in Hartford.55

Child-labor reformers continued to grumble about unruly newsboys and the lax enforcement of the badge requirement, but they had won their battle.56 As a result of the Common Council’s votes in 1910 and 1914, newsboys under ten and newsgirls under sixteen had become a thing of the past. The remaining boys sold papers only under conditions that restricted their hours and constrained their behavior. They had been placed under the parental authority of the police department and the superintendent of schools. Though reformers and city officials had not entirely banished children from the street trades, they had asserted more exclusive adult ownership over the downtown. The newse ordinances made it clearer than ever that children did not enjoy equal rights to the streets, especially at night.

The campaign to rid the streets of newsgirls triumphed a few months after suffragists finally declared victory over Hartford’s red-light district, but the two campaigns had little in common. The campaign against the newsgirls was built on many ideas the suffragists opposed: the desire to sequester females to preserve their chastity; the denial of equal rights in the workforce; the denial of equal access to public space. Whenever the women’s-rights argument entered into the newsgirl issue, it was as a protest against proposed reforms. Like Katharine Hepburn in the antipornography campaign, Mary Hall and her allies called for making public space safer instead of forcing females into seclusion. The arguments of the anti-newsgirl forces echoed those of the older antipornography reformers who had grudgingly accepted the existence of the East Side brothels. As the Rev. Elmer Dent had explained in the pastors’ 1907 campaign to mitigate the effects of the vice district, “Keep the boys and girls off the streets!” From this perspective, Hartford’s streets could not be cleansed of vice, disease, and danger. The only way to protect the vulnerable was to separate them from threatening influences, preferably by keeping them inside the home.

Reformers seeking to restrict the newsies may have built some of their arguments on fading beliefs about gender, but their ideas about public space proved to be more influential than those of the seemingly more modern advocates of women’s rights. While Hepburn and Hall clung to the doomed hope of purifying the urban environment, the street-trade reformers were part of the rising effort to segregate the use of public space. Restrictions on newspaper selling had strengthened the temporal and age-specific dimensions of urban geography, which were further reinforced by the growth of downtown nightlife, by weak intermittent attempts to impose a curfew on children,57 and by the playground movement. The newse ordinances added to a differentiation of public space that was developing out of reforms affecting park construction, pushcart peddling, street paving, and pedestrian traffic.

The campaigns to purify public space through municipal housekeeping and antipornography reform had rested on the theoretical support provided by Horace Bushnell and by women who wanted to extend their moral authority outside the home. The campaigns to segregate space developed a somewhat different reform ideology, drawing together new ideas of social “efficiency,” child development, and—to some extent—cultural pluralism. This ideology was most clearly articulated in reform activity affecting public recreation.