

“Apprenticeship and Popular Literature in Seventeenth Century London” is the result of two years of research under the guidance of my advisor, Dr. John Marshall. It was in his class on popular culture in early modern Europe that I first sparked an interest in youth culture in early modern England. That class inspired a proposal to write a thesis on debates about London apprentices in the seventeenth century. This paper, which was produced between August and October of 2005, will be expanded into that thesis.

The primary argument of this essay is that there were two evolutions in seventeenth century London regarding apprentices: an evolution of apprentice political activity and an evolution of London’s perception of its apprentices. These gradual changes over the course of the century can be seen in popular literary forms such as pamphlets, broadsides, and petitions.

Because EEBO provided access to the majority of primary texts that I examined, it is fair to say that this essay would not have been possible without EEBO. It seemed that each major pamphlet or petition dealing with London apprentices in the seventeenth century was available through EEBO. The texts are cited throughout the essay and there is no question that the documents that I found in EEBO are the focus of this exploration.

Historians of early modern England have written on the London apprentices before, but they have neglected the public perception of the young men. In 1617, apprentices were celebrated for their collective actions because they upheld traditions. In 1668, apprentices were condemned for their collective actions and labeled as politically dangerous. This essay tracks the changes in public opinion as they run parallel to changes in the apprentices’ collective actions.

In the spring of 1617, a group of apprentices in London attacked and at least partially destroyed a house of ill-repute in Drury Lane. The young men were not arrested, and in fact were not even scolded by their masters. A ballad was written about these “bold prentices,” celebrating their actions. Their collective act of destruction had upheld a specific tradition of apprentice holiday riotousness. Apprentices in London had torn down “bawdy houses” on Shrove Tuesday since before anyone could remember, and no one would think of prosecuting them for the vandalism.¹ Half a century later, in the spring of 1668, another group of London apprentices engaged in bawdy house destruction in Moorfields, East Smithfield, Shoreditch, and Holborn. This act was ruled in court to be treasonous, and the ringleaders were executed.²

While it is true that the fifty years separating the two aforementioned bawdy house attacks were fifty of the most tumultuous in London’s history, the change in the reaction to apprentice violence in London was more than a byproduct of the civil wars, the interregnum, and the Restoration. Collective apprentice action in 1617 was considered to be the exercise of holiday tradition. A similar action in 1668 was considered to be treason. In the time between those two events, new forms of collective action emerged for apprentices, and London’s non-apprentices were witnesses to and commentators on the change. Two evolutions involving apprentices occurred in London during the 17th century: the evolution of the apprentices’ political actions and the evolution of London’s opinions of its apprentices. The purpose of this essay is to trace both of these evolutions through London’s popular literature. By “popular literature,” I refer to print media that had wide urban distribution and a large readership that

¹ “A Ballad in Praise of the London Prentices and What They Did at the Cockpit Play-House, in Drury Lane” in *A Collection of Songs and Ballads Relative to the London Prentices and Trades; And to the Affairs of London Generally*. ed. Charles Mackay. (London: The Percy Society, 1841), 94-97.

² Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics From the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 85-92.

included literate apprentices. Items “hawked” on street corners and sold in coffee shops make up the bulk of the texts examined in this paper. Secondary literature also makes it possible to follow the evolutions, and I am particularly indebted to Steven Smith, Brian Manning, and Tim Harris.

Young men entering apprenticeships in the early seventeenth century were heirs to a tradition of disorder on holidays. Peter Burke has identified two holidays that developed reputations for apprentice unrest: May Day and Shrove Tuesday. May Day was annually observed on May 1, and celebrations featured dancing around a may pole. Occasionally the merriment would grow into violent frenzy among the youths. Shrove Tuesday was the day of revelry that preceded Lent. Apprentice riots on Shrove Tuesday had a more specific purpose than those on May Day. As contemporary comic writer John Taylor stated it, assemblies of apprentices gathered on Shrove Tuesday “arm’d with cudgels, stones, hammers, rules, trowels and hand saws” and “put playhouses to the sack and bawdy-houses to the spoil.” The young men upheld the tradition of destroying London’s houses of ill-repute in order to purify the city for Lent.³

While the tradition of apprentice violence kept outbreaks from being completely unexpected, there were some holiday riots in London’s history that got out of hand. Among the earliest recorded instances of collective violence enacted by the London apprentices was the “Evil” or “Ill” May Day of 1517. The event was memorialized by a popular ballad that was entitled “The Story of Ill May Day, In the Time of King Henry the Eighth, and Why it was So Called.” Early in the sixteenth century, there was a growing animosity in the London trades toward foreign craftsmen and unqualified “non-freed” craftsmen who were allowed to practice in the city. The 1562 Statute of Artificers was an attempt to set regulations across the trades on

length and nature of apprenticeships required before freedom; but until it was passed, qualification standards were in the control of the guilds, whose powers of enforcement were limited.⁴ A broker named John Lincoln was the leading urban voice of opposition to foreign artisans, and he had enough urban influence to rally a mass of Londoners behind his effort. It was rumored that an attack on foreign and illegitimate craftsmen was to take place on May Day. The city's common council put an order into effect at 9pm on the night of April 30 that required masters to lock their apprentices indoors until the following morning. The order was not proclaimed until 8:30pm. At a few minutes past 9, Sir John Mundie, an alderman, was walking home from the council meeting when he saw two apprentices playing in the street. He threatened to send the youths to jail if they did not cease their sport, and when they did not respond, he seized one of them by the arm. Seeing their peer confronted, and high on adrenaline from the controversy, nearby apprentices sent up a shout: "Prentices! Prentices!—Clubs! Clubs!" Thus the riot began. The mob started by attacking prisons where other apprentices were held, and proceeded to the dwellings of foreigners and non-freedmen. The ballad describes the city scene at the height of the rioting:

All the channels run with blood,
In every street they (the apprentices) remained;
Yea, every one in danger stood,
That any of their part maintained;
The rich, the poor, the old, the young,
Beyond the seas tho' born and bred;
By prentices they suffered wrong,
When armed thus they gather'd head.⁵

³ Peter Burke, "Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century London," in *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*. ed. Barry Reay. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 31-58.

⁴ Jocelyn Dunlop and R.D. Denman M.P. *English Apprenticeship and Child Labor: A History*. (New York: the MacMillan Company, 1912), 60-61; 83-87.

⁵ "The Story of Ill May Day, In the Time of King Henry the Eighth, and Why it was So Called," in Mackay, *Collection of Songs and Ballads*, 11-22.

It is worth noting that the apprentices who rioted on Evil May Day were stirred into excitement by non-apprentices such as John Lincoln. Non-apprentice figures as the motivators behind apprentice actions would re-emerge throughout the 17th century.

One hundred years after Evil May Day took place, Shrove Tuesday served as the setting for an incident of apprentice violence in London. Since “time immemorial,” the apprentices had reserved the right to tear down the city’s bawdy houses on Shrove Tuesday. It was a symbolic gesture of preparation for the season of Lent. On March 4, 1617, a crowd of apprentices made an attack on the Cockpit Play-House in Drury Lane. Some accounts of the event claim that the lads tore the theatre down, others claim that they merely destroyed parts of it. By all accounts, though, lives were lost in the incident.⁶ The attack on the Cockpit was also the subject of a ballad, but unlike the ballad depicting Evil May Day, “A Ballad in Praise of the London Prentices and What They Did at the Cockpit Play-House in Drury-Lane” is supportive of the apprentices’ violence. It concludes by praising the effort to cleanse the city:

Now sing we laude with one accord,
To these most digni laude,
Who thus intend to bring and end
All that is vile and bawdie;
All players and whores thrust a’dores
Seductive both and gawdie,
And praise we these bold prentices
Cum voce et cum corde.⁷

French historian Natalie Zemon Davis has postulated that there was a functional explanation for society’s allowance of “misrule” undertaken by young men in early modern France. It seems that

⁶ John Payne Collier, *The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the Time of Shakespeare: And Annals of the Stage to the Restoration*. (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1879), 401.

⁷ “A Ballad in Praise of the London Prentices and What They Did at the Cockpit Play-House, in Drury Lane,” in Mackay, *Collection of Songs and Ballads*, 94-97.

the London apprentices were appreciated in a similar way for the purifying function that they performed on Shrove Tuesday.

By the late 1630s, the London apprentices' collective acts of violence had developed the reputation for being quickly escalating affairs. This reputation was on the mind of agitator John Lilburne as he sat in prison in May of 1639 and penned a letter "to all the brave, courageous, and valiant apprentices of the honourable city of London, but especially those that appertain to the worshipful company of Cloth workers (of which company, if I live I hope to be a Free man)." Lilburne was strategically appealing to many groups in an effort to win his liberty. Ten years later, as he reflected upon writing the letter, Lilburne would admit that he wrote it "to excite the apprentices." If that was the aim, then Lilburne hit his mark. After Lilburne's friend dropped copies of the letter amongst a group of the apprentices on holiday, the youths gathered peers and went to Lambeth Palace where they protested Lilburne's imprisonment. They were initially assembled "in a faire and peaceable way," but as the apprentices arrived "by the hundreds of thousands," they took on the semblance of a riot.⁸ Like in 1617, apprentice enthusiasm on a holiday was tipped into riot by a political non-apprentice. Unlike John Lincoln, though, Lilburne was aware of the apprentices' collective potential on holidays, and sought to exploit it.

During the first week of May, 1640, rumors were circulating around London that there would be attacks on the archbishop's palace at Lambeth if the Short Parliament were dissolved. The dissolution took place on May 5. On May 9, A letter was posted to the door of the Exchange encouraging apprentices to sack the palace. The letter was anonymous, as were the pamphlets that were circulated with the same message. Five hundred apprentices reportedly marched on the palace, but because the palace guards had been warned by people who had seen the broadsides,

the apprentices “were repulsed, and some of them afterward made an example for their insolence.”⁹ Three days later, the king and the common council warned the lord mayor to be ready for another attack on Lambeth. The apprentices attacked the following day, but not at the archbishop’s palace. They struck at the White Lion Prison, where their peer John Archer—arrested during the march on Lambeth—was being held. The rioting only ceased after the London and Middlesex trained bands intervened.¹⁰

Apprentices were highly visible in the anti-bishop riots that took place toward the end of 1641 outside of Parliament, but there is a good deal of evidence suggesting that they were not self-motivated. Brian Manning cites masters who armed their apprentices and told them to go to Westminster because “the best-effected party were likely to be overborne by the others.”¹¹ Contemporaries suspected the apprentices’ involvement to be the result of sectarian persuasion. The Reverend Richard Baxter remembered that “the remnant of old separatists and anabaptists in London was then very small, and scarce considerable, but they were enough to stir up the younger and inexperienced sort . . . it is hard finding any sort of people in the world, where many of the more un-experienced are not indiscreet, and proud and passionate.”¹² According to one pamphlet, there was a “great uprore” between the Bishop of Lincolne and some London apprentices in the last week of December. As the bishop was making his way into the Parliament House, a group of youths expressed their desires to have “bishops removed, no bishops.” Three hours later, Colonel Lunsford, the recently appointed lieutenant for the Tower, passed by the

⁸ Pauline Gregg, *Free-born John: A Biography of John Lilburne*. (London: George C. Harrap & Co. LTD., 1961), 77-78.

⁹ *Vox Juvenilis* (1681) {Image 1}

¹⁰ Steven Smith, “Almost Revolutionaries: the London Apprentices During the Civil Wars,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 42 (Autumn 1979), 313-328.

¹¹ Brian Manning, *The English People and the English Revolution 1640-1649*. (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1976), 51.

¹² *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696) {Image 29}

same group of hecklers with 30 of his men. As the antibishop comments reached the soldiers, “all drew their swords and rapiers and fell upon the people with great violence.” The pamphlet maintains that members of Parliament saw the attack and encouraged the apprentices to fight back in any way possible. “Those citizens and apprentices, having no weapons about them, had brought downe brick-battes in the lappes of those blokes, which they had pulled up in the Court of Requests, and with the throwing of said Brick-batts, did immediately cause Lunsford, and his Company to Retreat, and forced them to flee.”¹³

1641 was a year of rapid growth for the apprentices as political actors. London saw two petitions that year that claimed to be written and signed by the London apprentices. *The Apprentices of Londons Petition* proclaimed “that the injuries, and abuses done unto us are many,

and the grievances, and the oppressions which here upon we have suffered at sundry times are manifold: werefore we in the generall, and universall name of us all, do presume to present our pressures, and impendent injuries to your Honours, of whom only onely we can expect redresse, and of none other.

It addressed three primary grievances: the presence of foreign craftsmen in London, the abuses perpetrated by Papists in Ireland, and the insults dealt by bishops to the lower clergy and laity. The complaint against foreign traders was a manifestation of the same grievance that sparked the Evil May Day: “Those which are meere strangers do snatch this freedom from us, and pull the trades out from under our owne hands.” The petition warned about the conspiring papists, saying that “their malice could never take fire here in England, until now they are come to a full flame in Ireland, whose rebellious actions are so inhumane, that it would draw tears from any adamantine eye to think of their bloody, and tyranicall proceedings.” The “third grief” was against the bishops, “who triumph with too much arrogant insolence over us, and their poor

¹³ *A Bloody Masacre Plotted by the Papists intended First Against the City of London and Consequently Against the Whole Land* (1641) {Images 2-4}

Brethren of the Clergie.”¹⁴ *The Humble Petition of the Apprentices of London* also voices the grievance against foreigners who “keep their residence within the liberty of this City” and “take away our Custome”; but in addition, it expresses two new griefs. The first was lodged against the authority of a mistress in a master’s house: “Whereas we are bound in our halls only to our masters, yet of late have our Mistresses gotten such predominancy over us, as if that we were bound to them, not to our Masters.” The second complaint was directed at the people who accused the apprentices of being harmful to the city during the festivals of May Day and Shrove Tuesday. “The trained bands of late years have been commanded to safeguard the city for fear lest we should do it any wrong, whose bloods are mingled with the nobility, although it were our fortunes to be younger brothers.” Though the actions may have been violent, the petition argued, they did not constitute “villany” or “scandall.” The apprentices were merely enacting their tradition of disorder, which they called their “fortunes” as “younger brothers.”¹⁵

A petition from apprentices was a new entity for Londoners in the early 1640s. Never before had the indentured young men seen fit to collectively express their grievances. Two explanations seem likely as to why the petitions emerged at this time. First, through the political unrest of the times, the apprentices had come into contact with petitions from other groups. Lilburne’s letter to the apprentices may have sparked an interest in the petitions that Lilburne himself had written, for example. Second, the crowd events that took place in 1641 made the apprentices aware of themselves as a group. They may not have been aware of the powerful force that they represented until they saw themselves as a political mob.

A set of petitions and pamphlets from 1642 suggests that solidarity in the London

¹⁴ *The Apprentices of Londons Petition* (1641) {Images 2-4}

¹⁵ *The Petition of the Women of Middlesex . . . The Humble Petition of the Apprentices of London* (1641) {Image 3}

apprentices did not last long into the first civil war. As King Charles I gathered military force in the north, two different petitions were produced by London apprentices. They reflected two different strategies for protecting the city, but both were addressed to the combined houses of Parliament. *The Humble Petition of the Well-Affected Prentices and Young-men of the City of London and Suburbs* was delivered on January 3, and came to be known as the “Peace Petition.” It beseeched Parliament to “leave no just way unattempted which may conduce to the settlement

of the differences that the undiscerning sword be not umpire to decide controversies of so neere concernment, neither give audience to the fomentors of this Warre, whose only ayme (we fear) is to pray upon the Lives and Livings of his Majesties loving subjects.¹⁶

A pamphlet that followed the petition, entitled *An Humble Declaration of the Apprentices, and other Young Men of the City of London, who were Petitioners for Peace*, narrated the story of the apprentices presenting the petition to Parliament, and related several attempts made to sabotage them. These attempts included accusations that the Peace Petitioners were armed, and that they planned to tear down houses.¹⁷ *The Humbel Petetion of the Prentices of London* was a counter petition to the Peace Petition in the strictest sense. It began: “There hath lately been presented to this Honorable Assembly a Petition for Peace, under the name of Apprentices of London, which we conceive, was contrived by some malignant spirits.” It went on to address the subject of the petition that it was opposing: “As for peace, we referre ourselves to this Honourable Assembly, being the great Counsell of the Land, and when this Honourable House shall be pleased to call a muster, we poore humble petitioners, whose names are underwritten, shall be ready to show

¹⁶ *The Humble Petition of the Well-Affected Prentices and Young-men of the City of London and Suburbs* (1642) {Image 1}

¹⁷ *An Humble Declaration of the Apprentices, and other Young Men of the City of London, who were Petitioners for Peace* (1642) {Images 1-3}

ourselves.”¹⁸

The Malignants Conventicle was a pamphlet that claimed to be produced by non-apprentice petitioners for peace, but that claim was merely a propaganda stratagem. The fact that its printer is listed to be “Anti-Dam-Mee, in Tell-troth Lane, at the Signe of the Holly-wand” suggested that it was a satire mocking its ostensible authors. The satirized peace petitioner, addressing “his Society” of “Citizen-Malignants, Papists, Priests, Apprentices, and Wenches,” revealed the Peace Petitioners’ “first designe” to “frame a cunning Petition in pretence of peace, to gaine an opportunity of mutiny in the City.” The pamphlet also accounts for the apprentices’ peace petition: “we caused our Apprentizes to combine as we did before them, that they might see if they could cozen the Parliament by violent petitioning, we ourselves would be neare hand, if they wanted aid, and indeed poor silly soules they were as earnest for us as we could desire.” There is a statement near the conclusion of the pamphlet that, taken in the context of the satire, expresses a great concern about the collective power of the apprentices: “we have now gained a good opportunity to plunder the City if our Apprentices can but obtaine this present opportunity of equall power with the best citizens to dispose of state matters, which will be a great means of mutiny.”¹⁹ The real author was warning his London audience that the apprentices had become a potentially disruptive force in the city. There is a hint of disgust at the idea of an apprentice obtaining the “opportunity of equall power with the best citizens.”

In February, 1646, the apprentices’ petitions took on a new function. Two petitions were produced that month requesting the creation of a holiday for apprentices and servants. Religious holidays had been curtailed during the interregnum, and the petitioners argued for the necessity

¹⁸ *A True Remonstrance of the Upright Apprentices of London . . . with a Full Copy of their Honest Petition* (1642) {Images 4-5}

¹⁹ *The Malignants Conventicle* (1642) {Images 3, 5}

of sanctioned recreation. The first petition was delivered to Parliament on February 9, and the second was delivered to the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Common Council on February 11. The petition to Parliament begins by calling for the remembrance of “certaine Annuall Festivals (the onely days then used for Recreation of youth) which for their superstitions, and riotous abuses, are now generally slighted.” It then explained the serious detriment that the removal of recreation had posed to the apprentices, and by extension, to the nation:

Your Petitioners by these means, are not onely deprived of the benefit of visiting their friends and kindred, but also of all set times of pleasure, and lawfull Recreations. By restraint whereof it often hapneth, that youth of the worst inclinations take erroneous and forbidden paths to walk in; some descert and run from their Masters into lewd and unwarrantable courses, to their own Ruin; others covertly prophane the Sabbaths and fasts, stealing time from them, to recompence and supply the want of their ordinary Recreations, to the dishonour of God, and scandal of Religion.²⁰

The producers of the petition drew a connection, through the apprentices, between recreation and the nation’s economic and religious well-being. They were asking Parliament to recognize the importance of the apprentices to the nation. In the second petition, the authors, “having already (with good hope and promise of successe) petitioned the Honorable Lords and Commons in Parliament for some Convenient time of lawful Recreation,” turned to a most familiar subject of apprentice petitions: foreign craftsmen. The grievance expressed was against the “ordinary inroachment of forraigners upon the Liberties of this City, for freedoms by Redemption; which they probably purchase at a far cheaper value than is given with the most of your petitioners in their Apprentice-ships.”²¹ It is possible that the authors of the petition thought that a reminder of their grievances would aid their holiday request’s chances of success.

By the spring of 1647, the apprentices had not been told anything about the fate of their

²⁰ *Two Humble Petitions of the Apprentices of London* (1647) {Image 4}

²¹ *Two Humble Petitions of the Apprentices of London* (1647) {Image 7}

petitions. On April 20, in an effort to push their grievances back into the spotlight, a group of them met at Covent Garden and marched from there to the House of Commons to inquire about the petition. In response, Commons assembled a committee to review the apprentices' petition and write an ordinance for the holiday. Still, more than a month passed without an ordinance. The creators of the petition called for a massive demonstration of all London apprentices on June 8. On that day, the threat of the apprentices' collective action caused the committee to write the ordinance, which passed through both houses of Parliament. The second Tuesday of each month would be a day of recreation for "Scholars, Apprentices, and Servants."²²

Urban literature shows that there was division among the apprentices again in the summer of 1647. This time the Army was the chief subject of debate. A broadside entitled *Seasonable Considerations from the Gentlemen Apprentices and young men of the City of London to the Army* was published on July 9 and it accused Parliament of mistreating the Army: "The two houses having attempted all means by force to suppress the Army, and not prevailing therein, do now apply themselves to disband them by fraudulent promises, knowing that when they disband, they are at their mercy."²³ Four days after the broadside first appeared, a group of apprentices presented Sir Thomas Fairfax, Captain General of the Army, with *The Humble Petition of the Well-Affected Young Men and Apprentices of the City of London*. The authors of the petition not only expressed their favor of the Army over the Parliament, but implored Fairfax and his forces to protect them from Parliament's malignant persuasion:

(We desire) that you would be pleased to look upon us, who bear the name of the well-affected Young men and Apprentices of the City of London, as such who vary not from

²² *House of Commons Journal* Volume 5: 8 June 1648, *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 5: 1646-1648* (1802), pp. 589-90; Steven Smith, "Almost Revolutionaries," 321; *House of Lords Journal* Volume 9: 8 June 1647, *Journal of the House of Lords: volume 9: 1646* (1802), pp. 246-49.

²³ *Seasonable Considerations From the Gentlemen Apprentices, and young men of the City of London to the Army* (1647) {Image 1}

what we have always declared ourselves to be, which that we may be able to manifest, we shall expect, and humbly desire your Excellencies and the Armies protection, in case we shall by the power of some malevolent spirits here, be inforced to anything inconsistent with the principles of free-borne subjects of England.”²⁴

On June 26, the Army had impeached eleven Presbyterian leaders from Parliament. On July 19, Parliament received a copy of the “Solemn Engagement,” a pro-Presbyterian document that encouraged peace with Charles I, and was signed by London apprentices among others.

Apprentices who signed the Solemn Engagement were in opposition to apprentices who lobbied for Fairfax’s protection. When Parliament showed support for the Army and declared signers of the Solemn Engagement to be traitors, the pro-Presbyterian apprentices responded. Steven Smith’s interpretation of the events of July 26, at its most dramatic, shows apprentices seizing control of the government:

The young men forced their way into the House of Commons, intimidated the Speaker and the members, and forced them to reverse their votes on the militia and the Solemn Engagement. Some witnesses reported that part of the crowd remained after these votes, forced the speaker back into his chair, held him there, and required the House to approve a resolution calling on the king come to London. Thus the apprentices had dramatically intervened in the normal political processes and forced Parliament to accept the Presbyterian program.²⁵

The Journal of the House of Commons provides a more orderly narrative of the interactions:

The House being informed, that divers young Men and Apprentices of London, were at the Door, to present a Petition; Sir Thomas Soame and Colonel are appointed to go out, and to bring in the Petition. They returning, and acquainting the House, That the young Men desire, that some of themselves might be admitted to present it; They were called in; and did Present a Petition.²⁶

The petition was clear on its’ signers feelings about Parliament’s treatments of the Solemn Engagement. They “desired that the City of London may be immediately vindicated against a

²⁴ *The Humble Petition of the Well-Affected Young Men and Apprentices of the City of London* (1647) {Images3-4}

²⁵ Smith, “Almost Revolutionaries,” 319.

late pretended Declaration of both Houses . . . and that the said Declaration bee now presently reversed and canceld.”²⁷

An account of apprentice violence in the spring of 1648 claims that a riot was undertaken as a demonstration in support of Charles I. According to an historical narrative in *Vox Juvenilis*, a pamphlet from the early 1680s, the apprentices were reacting to “so vile an act” as the imprisonment of the king. The youths were clever in their rioting; they split into groups and created different stages of the attack. A group of them struck Whitehall in order to draw the trained bands to one location. Then, after a delay, other groups attacked the prisons at Newgate and Ludgate. In the morning they broke into the ammunition storage at Leadenhall and continued to fight off the trained bands. There were reportedly two killed and twenty wounded in this offensive. Throughout the strike, the apprentices were calling out for “God and King Charles.”²⁸ It was becoming clear to Londoners at this point that apprentice riotousness could be harnessed to powerful political ends, whatever those ends might be.

Collective action of London apprentices in late 1659 had a profound effect on the urban opinions of the Army on the eve of Restoration. *The Remonstrance of the Apprentices in and About London* was published on November 15. It was claimed to be written by apprentices and one of the first items that it addressed was the public memory of apprentice support of the Army in the early 1640s: “We could take an estimate of ourselves from the repute the Parliament had of Us in the years 43, 44, 45, &c. were it not that we take no pleasure in the remembrance of our unhappy Valour, having wasted a great deal of brave Blood in the purchasing of our shame.” The

²⁶ *House of Commons Journal* Volume 5: 26 July 1647, *Journal of the House of Commons: volume 5: 1646-1648* (1802), pp. 258-59.

²⁷ *The Humble Desires of the Citizens, Young Men, and Apprentices, of the City of London* (1647) {Image 3}

²⁸ *Vox Juvenilis* (1681) {Image 1}; Smith, “Almost Revolutionaries,” 322.

remonstrance expressed two primary grievances: the decline of religion and the decline of trade. “We shrewdly conjecture,” stated the petition, “that the cry of *No Bishops* hath been sadly echoed with the complaint of *No Trade*.” The apprentices who penned the petition felt that the sects had led England from “Divine Worship” to “Mischief.” The economic diagnosis was even stronger: “these seven years past have almost devoured the Wealth and Credit that this City had for seven hundred years before.”²⁹ The Committee of Safety was angered by the Remonstrance, and when it received word that apprentices were collecting signatures to a petition during the last week of November, it took measures to head off the effort. The Committee published a proclamation on December 1 that prohibited “the contrivance or subscription of any Petitions or Papers for the promoting of designs dangerous to the peace of the Common-wealth.”³⁰ The apprentices defied the order of the committee and presented the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Common Council with their petition on December 5. The petition insisted “that a new election may be made, or else that those worthy Gentlemen chosen to serve as members in the late free Parliament, may be restored to their priviledges, and fit without disturbance or force from the Army.”³¹ Knowing the boldness that the apprentices exhibited by presenting the petition, the people of London gathered in the streets to await the reaction of the Committee. As the Committee’s sergeant at arms tried to post the proclamation against petitioning on the door at the Royal Exchange, he was met with a barrage of stones and trash thrown by the apprentices. When the assault began to frighten the soldiers, they fired into the crowd, killing between five and ten apprentices. The image of soldiers firing into a group of apprentices had a lasting impression on

²⁹ *The Remonstrance of the Apprentices In and About London* (1659) {Image 1}

³⁰ *A Proclamation Prohibiting the Contrivance or Subscription of any Petitions or papers for the Promoting of Designs Dangerous to the Peace of the Common-Wealth* (1659) {Image 1}

³¹ *The Most Humble Petition and Address of divers young men* (1659) {Image 1}

the Londoners gathered to see it. It was not only an image of men firing on boys, but also an image of boys drawing men into combat.

Tim Harris has written extensively on the apprentice-led Bawdy House Riots of 1668, calling them “the first major outbreak of political rioting in Charles II’s reign.” On the day after Easter, large groups of apprentices enacted the tradition that was usually reserved for Shrove Tuesday, tearing down the houses of ill-repute in London’s bawdy house districts. There was reportedly an irregular amount of organization to the attacks; the apprentices were divided into regiments and marched behind colors. The crowds were also abnormally large, reaching 500 by the end of the first day. On the second day of rioting, the king sent a letter to the lord mayor ordering him to assemble two companies of the militia. Arrests were made, but the apprentices responded by besieging Finsbury gaol and New Prison at Clerkenwell. Even after the heavy rioting was dispersed on the third day, the youths staged successful missions to rescue their peers. 15 ringleaders were captured and indicted for high treason. Lord Chief Justice Keeling could have followed the tradition of leniency for apprentices arrested on charges of collective violence, but instead he ordered the young men to be executed. “We are but newly delivered from rebellion,” he said, “and we know that that rebellion first begun under the pretense of religion and the law . . . that rebellion begun thus, therefore we have great reason to be very wary that we fall not into the same error.” Harris cites slogans of the rioters and timing of the riots as explanation for “the pretense of religion.” On the second day of rioting, the apprentices were heard to be threatening “a bloody May Day” if they were not given “liberty of conscience.” On the third day, they shouted “Reformation and Reducement.” These slogans suggest ties to nonconformist groups. Harris purports that the riot was organized in support of the

nonconformists, whom the king had slighted two weeks earlier by issuing a proclamation reinforcing the penal codes that persecuted dissenters.³²

There is a pivotal difference between the attack on the Cockpit Play-House in 1617 and the Bawdy House Riots of 1668. The earlier event was not politically motivated. The apprentices who riotously dismantled a Drury Lane theatre on Shrove Tuesday were doing so as an exercise of tradition. The apprentices who tore down bawdy houses and besieged prisons on Easter Monday were trying to let the government know that nonconformists were not going to take persecution lying down. The latter apprentices were assuredly influenced by contact with nonconformist preachers and agitators. It would be difficult to argue that the Bawdy House Riots were more an upholding of tradition than a political demonstration.

Popular literature from the period shows that collective apprentice actions in the seventeenth century began to look more like political action than traditional revelry. As is seen in the seminal episode with John Lilburne, the young men were introduced to politics by the non-apprentices who were trying hardest to spread their ideologies. As this evolution took place, the London populace was gradually less able to see the apprentices exclusively as excitable youths. Londoners were forced to consider them a powerful and potentially destructive political force. Violent encounters like the one between apprentices and Colonel Lunsford at Westminster in 1641 caused the printing of caveats about the young men in pamphlets like *The Malignants Conventicle*. More advanced forms of collective action drew more anxiety from London about the emerging body of political actors.

³² Harris, *London Crowds*, 85-92.

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