

## Introduction

### POLITICAL ECONOMY: FROM PUBLIC TO PRIVATE

*Feeding Gotham* presents the story of New York's transition from a tightly regulated public market system of provisioning in the Early Republic to a free-market model in the antebellum period.<sup>1</sup> It examines what a municipal market system was and how it worked to supply urban dwellers, how and why access to food moved from the public to the private domain by the 1840s, how these two distinctive political economies shaped the physical and social environments of a booming city, and, above all, what the social consequences of deregulation were for residents of America's first metropolis. On the whole, the book offers a comprehensive account based in political economy and the social and geographic history of the complex interplay of urban governance, market forces, and the built environment in provisioning New Yorkers.

The narrative follows the expansion of free-market relations in this vital sector of the urban economy and public policy. It explores how the rise of unregulated exchange in the selling and buying of food amounted to a "market revolution" in provisioning, to borrow from a leading interpretation of the antebellum United States.<sup>2</sup> To situate this transition in context, however, it is important to recognize a countervailing development in the political economy of the period: the expansion of government activity in a range of infrastructures, services, and regulatory bodies, the theme of which is particularly evident when looking at urban history. Facing unprecedented challenges from accelerating growth, municipalities expanded robustly in the domain of public goods.<sup>3</sup> They increased infrastructural investments and brought critical aspects of the built environment under their police power. Like many other sectors of the economy, food provisioning underwent deregulation in antebellum New York City. But this transition occurred in the broader setting of expanding municipal services to address other pressing problems.

To make these contrary trends more concrete, consider two other basic necessities of urban life besides food provisioning: the supply of water and housing. Sanitation, in fact, presents the most prominent case in which antebellum city councils, among them New York, expanded the public realm by building extensive water and sewer networks.<sup>4</sup> The Croton aq-

2 • INTRODUCTION

ueduct, opened with great fanfare in October 1842, amounted to Gotham's largest public works until that moment and by an enormous margin. Bringing in clean water from a huge distance, the aqueduct also signified a profound increase of municipal capacity to address intensifying urban challenges. Lacking the authority to require that landlords subscribe to Croton water undoubtedly resulted in uneven access, which weakened the system's public benefits and especially hurt the tenement poor. Further, the Croton put additional pressure on New York's flimsy sewers, driving intensifying investments in that infrastructure after 1850. Still, the project was a landmark achievement, a major leap toward a broadened public domain. Yet in January 1843, within a few months of this enormous municipal venture, the city liberalized the food system and left provisioning in the hands of unregulated markets. So close a conjunction of the contrary strategies to expand the public domain in one arena and to shrink regulation in another demonstrates how the boundary between public and private goods was endlessly negotiated in the antebellum political economy.

Housing offers another instructive case.<sup>5</sup> In this sector, newly emerging and fully unregulated real estate markets reigned supreme, while Gotham's relentless growth created virtually insatiable demand. The conditions of crowded and unsanitary living in antebellum New York are familiar from both contemporary and historical accounts. In fact, the tenement evil became the defining trope of public health treatises. Decades of consistent critique at last resulted in some legislative steps, even if as timid as the first Tenement Housing Act of 1867. Twenty years later, Jacob Riis still denounced the suffocating environment of Lower East Side tenements, and only the Tenement House Act of 1901 had enough teeth to bring the housing market under meaningful regulatory control. Still, the chronology is telling. For even as social reformers and public health experts mobilized from the 1840s to extend the state's police power over the housing sector, access to food became marginalized in municipal policy. By 1867, the food economy was wholly liberalized, all surviving regulations were a dead letter, and the only development to speak of was to push slaughterhouses into the city's outskirts. The contrast with the housing question epitomizes the realignment of public priorities, whereby shelter gained urgency and provisioning fell out of the agenda.

This book is neither about the water supply nor housing, areas well covered by other historians. These pointed comparisons serve both to underscore the specific transition of food access from a public to private good in America's leading city and to provide benchmarks for the case within the political economy context. Historians have long grappled with the complex and dynamic interplay between government and markets, public and private matters in the Early Republican and antebellum United

States.<sup>6</sup> The most influential thesis to make the case for a strong government presence was developed by William Novak in his seminal book, *The People's Welfare*, which offers a useful point of departure.<sup>7</sup>

Novak's concept of the "well-regulated society" provides a comprehensive account of social and economic policy making and political culture in nineteenth-century America.<sup>8</sup> It is also particularly well suited for the nation's highly decentralized governmental regulatory structure. At the center of the well-regulated society were the widely asserted police powers of local governments, originating mainly from the common law tradition, which served to sustain the "people's welfare." Accordingly, state and local governments intervened in a wide array of policy arenas, limiting private property rights for "public safety," regulating market relations for the "public economy," seizing control of "public ways" to help economic development, asserting control over "public morality," and stepping up local policing for "public health." In Novak's view, nineteenth-century public power was vigorously exercised and ubiquitously felt. It was locally based, self-governing, and regulatory in character. Further, it sought to balance private interests and the public good, and did not recognize a clear division between the two.

Most pertinent for this book are the concepts of "public economy" and "well-ordered market," referring to the myriad regulatory interventions in economic relations meant to sustain the common good.<sup>9</sup> The public market model that structured the provisioning of New York and other northeastern cities in the colonial and Early Republican era sits particularly well with this framework. Local governments were expected to maintain well-ordered markets in urban food supplies to guarantee their availability in adequate quantities and quality to citizens.<sup>10</sup> Public markets served as privileged spaces designated for this purpose, bringing together vendors and customers to exchange life's necessities under the watchful eye of the municipal government. Participation was limited to licensed groups of vendors, including butchers, fishmongers, farmers, and hucksters, each with their own specific trade rights, places, and corresponding status within the marketplace. Where market-houses represented the infrastructural ground on which the model rested, market laws sanctioned its principles by extending the state's police power to regulate private interests for the public good. In theory, market laws curbed unethical trade practices;<sup>11</sup> enforced vendors' use of legal weights and measures; protected licensed vendors from unlicensed competition; regulated the daily conduct of marketing, ranging from the uses of market space to the fixing of market-days and hours; promoted welfare by various means, such as price controls in certain commodities or granting licenses to those in need; and, most important, safeguarded the wholesomeness of the food supply to preserve public health.

4 • INTRODUCTION

New York's version of the public market model emerged with the city's charters, reflecting the precedents of English municipal corporations and mirroring similar arrangements in other colonial American cities. It was fully institutionalized by the Montgomery Charter of 1730.<sup>12</sup> The public markets belonged to the City Corporation's property, much like its ferry rights and water lots, which also served important public purposes. The corporation managed its market property for the welfare of residents and licensed vendors; it also collected revenues to this end. Public and private interests overlapped. Much like the ferry rights, which were leased out to chartered companies, vendors paid rents for the exclusive right to retail at the public markets. In exchange for this privilege, they were to supply New Yorkers with adequate and wholesome provisions. As New York set a path toward a new era of urbanization after the late eighteenth century, the Common Council was responsible for expanding the market infrastructure for the welfare of its growing population.

The municipal provisioning model, therefore, exemplifies Novak's idea of the well-ordered market, at least in theory. It is also true that in New York City this framework was officially dismantled in 1843, when the Common Council repealed the key clause of the market laws that restricted the sale of meat to licensed butchers. Gotham's decision to deregulate its food system was followed by other cities at the time, pointing to a broader transition in political economy that modifies Novak's chronology. Further, the disintegration of the public economy of provisioning was a piecemeal process, well under way by the second quarter of the century. New York had already abolished its assize of bread in 1821, two decades prior to the general liberalization of its food economy.<sup>13</sup> The latter development also unfolded gradually, first taking place on the ground and only later being legitimized by municipal policy. Outside the public markets, a vigorous informal economy emerged by the 1830s.

From a broader perspective, the deregulation of the urban food sector was part of a larger transition toward a more liberal regime in a variety of industries in New York State and nationally. Best known is the case of banking, which fueled some of the most heated political debates of Andrew Jackson's presidency.<sup>14</sup> Following the president's veto in 1832 of the bill to recharter the Second Bank of the United States, portrayed by Jackson as an aristocratic monopoly, the late 1830s heralded what is often called the "free banking era," which lasted until 1864. One state after another moved to the free entry model, whereby setting up a bank no longer required a special charter from the state legislature. The intricate process of special chartering also gradually gave way to general incorporation laws not only in banking but across the nation's economy before the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> New York State, with one of the nation's earliest free

banking laws dating from 1838, was among the leaders in such liberal reforms.

One common thread between the case study of *Feeding Gotham*, and such national themes of antebellum economic history as free banking or the proliferation of private corporations, is the era's growing distrust of monopolistic privileges and greater embrace of open entry and free competition. Special charters guaranteed investors exclusive protections in exchange for provisioning quasi-public goods, like ferries, bridges, or banking, at an early stage of economic development. By the antebellum era, as the national economy expanded robustly, such monopolistic protections came to be regarded as no longer necessary and indeed as unfair. Free banking and general incorporation laws served to open up the process of setting up businesses to a wider constituency of citizens. Open access aimed to benefit the public by stimulating investments in goods and services and intensifying competition.

The analogy with New York's public market system and its deregulation is directly relevant. The public markets sustained a vital service for the city by supplying residents with life's necessities at an early stage of urban development. Much like special charters, the system instituted certain monopolistic protections: public markets were the only places where fresh food, meat in particular, could be retailed, and only licensed vendors, like the regular butchers, had the right to participate. Those selling food outside of the system were excluded from this lucrative economy. Similarly, those residing too far from a public market were inconvenienced in their daily routine of provisioning. In an emerging metropolis, with thousands of aspiring entrepreneurs and a vastly expanding customer base, such restrictions were beginning to lose legitimacy with the public, and so the voices in favor of open access and competition became ever louder. Tellingly, the critics of the public market system invariably exploited the antimonopoly rhetoric. By the 1830s the term "market monopoly" summed up all that seemed wrong with the municipal model, whether from the perspective of city officials, marginalized vendors, or dissatisfied customers.

To be sure, the penetration of market relations in economic and social life was a transformative development in Early Republican and antebellum history. At the same time, various layers of government were actively involved in building the infrastructures that made the market revolution possible.<sup>16</sup> The construction of turnpikes, canals, and railroads depended on all varieties of public and private partnerships, enabling the consolidation of far-reaching and more deeply integrated markets. Internal improvements like the era's vast canal networks, most famously, the Erie Canal, completed in 1825, required hitherto unprecedented scales of pub-

lic investments. Cities were among the leading sites of public works, and New York boasted some impressive achievements. The vitally important Croton Waterworks, Manhattan's ambitious street grid, the underground arteries of water and sewer mains, or Central Park's great urban outdoors were all major investments in the public domain.<sup>17</sup>

New York's prodigious urbanization depended on such public goods and services. Without the Erie Canal, linking up the nation's vast interior directly to the New York port, thereby reducing west-to-east transportation costs most dramatically, it may not have become America's gateway to the world, on which position thrived its commercial and industrial economy. Without the Croton, channeling in fresh water from farther upstate to quench the city's thirst, it could not have sustained its exponential growth, absorbing hundreds of thousands of immigrants. As urbanization altered the city's scale, turning a colonial port into a major city in one generation, and pushing it to the threshold of a metropolis in another, public officials faced novel challenges. The question was not whether or not the municipal government had an important role to play but rather in what areas of economic and social life public investments and regulatory oversight should be extended and where free-market relations should prevail. The point is that the balance of public and private goods was contested and open-ended, leading to opposing developments in the antebellum political economy. By necessity, America's cities were at the center of these deliberations, given the scale, novelty, and urgency of their problems.

Certainly, public opinion shifted as New Yorkers gradually endorsed free-market relations in one of the largest and most critical sectors of the economy. The provisioning of food, deemed an essential municipal service by generations, was increasingly thought best left to private initiative. Formerly symbols of Gotham's well-regulated and abundant food supplies, the public markets were ever more often criticized by shoppers, food purveyors, and municipal officials for being outmoded and restrictive institutions in which to exchange life's necessities. Where before fairness in trade was to be enforced by municipal oversight, dissatisfied customers and excluded food vendors now protested such unwarranted meddling in the transactions between buyers and sellers. Similarly, where before the urban community sanctioned the legitimate rights and due obligations of licensed vendors, the market model's many critics now decried these as monopolistic privileges that favored the few over the many, who deserved an equal opportunity to open a shop and make a living.

Yet again, New Yorkers, who by and large demanded the deregulation of the market system, voted in favor of the Croton bonds in 1835, \$5 million in value, thereby raising the city's debt several times.<sup>18</sup> Similar expansions of public services, from policing to park space, surged ahead in the

antebellum decades. The municipal government expanded and professionalized, with specialized departments addressing its broadening responsibilities. Most spectacularly, public health emerged as one of the most critical and comprehensive areas of urban policy. The vitally important and wholly unregulated housing market was but one field where the state's police power was augmented, hesitantly at first, to assert a renewed awareness of public health. In short, the public domain was enlarged considerably in certain areas just as the market revolution was generally given freer rein in the urban economy. Access to food, the subject of this book, epitomizes the liberalizing trajectory from a public to a private good.

To appreciate the extent of this transition, it should be noted that in the area of food access, liberalization was pushed to an extreme. Considering the already discussed matrix of public and private goods, the Croton Waterworks belonged to the other end of the spectrum. To supply Manhattan with safe drinking water, the city established a publicly owned and operated monopoly. Labeling the public market system as a monopoly, while an effective critique, was in all fairness a misnomer, for the system is best described as a government-managed public marketplace. It was certainly not a free market, like free banking would become, for it lacked the features of open access and free competition. The point is that in theory, deregulation could have led to a transition from a municipally managed public market to a free-market environment with access open to all entrants under appropriate municipal health and trade regulations. Instead, liberalization was not matched by a new regulatory regime, either at the retail level or higher up in the provisioning system, at slaughter and wholesale, probably because this would have required creating an entirely new infrastructural and legal framework. And whereas antebellum health and social reformers were devoted to laying down the intellectual foundations for such a regulatory system for housing, they were not similarly engaged with food access as a matter of urban policy.

The provisioning of food in America's first metropolis at its defining moment of urbanization is an important problem in its own right. Set against the backdrop of shifting public and private goods, like water supply and housing, it also brings the subject in dialogue with larger questions of antebellum political economy, both within the urban setting and nationally. How did New York arrive at a fully unregulated food system? And what does this history reveal about the changing boundaries of public and private? A study of the development of New York's public market system, its expansion in the Early Republic and deregulation in the antebellum decades, in particular, why and how these changes of municipal governance and regulation occurred, provides new insights for urban economic and social history.

FOOD ACCESS: INFRASTRUCTURE,  
GEOGRAPHY, LIVING STANDARDS

Decades of public market investment followed by liberalization set the terms of New Yorkers' food access in the first half of the nineteenth century. Just as New York transformed into a burgeoning and heterogeneous metropolis, residents faced profound changes in the institutional setting and daily practice of household provisioning with direct consequences for their living standards. For this book, which foregrounds the economic, social, and geographic dimensions of food provisioning and access, the central questions are the following. How did the contrasting models of public market versus free-market provisioning perform under the pressure of rapid urbanization? How did these distinctive infrastructural arrangements shape the city's growth and its built and social environments? What were the welfare costs and benefits of the two models of food access? In particular, how did deregulation affect the material well-being and living standards of New Yorkers? Grappling with these questions, this book expands the scope of the scholarship from its preoccupation with the debates surrounding provisioning to the actual consequences of specific policy choices.

In this effort, *Feeding Gotham* is a history of food access in nineteenth-century New York rather than a history of food. Existing literature, including more recently Cindy Lobel's *Urban Appetites*, mainly concerns the city's food and restaurant cultures.<sup>19</sup> Though this scholarship has enriched our knowledge of urban eating and dining, it provides limited understanding of how food access, as a matter of governance and economy, shaped the city's built environment and impacted residents' living standards. By placing the problem of residents' access to food into the foreground, this book pursues a comprehensive account from both ends of supply and demand. As for supply, the discussion centers on how urban governance and changing policies shaped the institutional framework and built environment of provisioning. As for demand, the book explores how New Yorkers negotiated their daily access to supplies, and how changes in the infrastructural and geographic setting of the food system affected this vital aspect of their living standards. The three themes—infrastructure, geography, and living standards—therefore structure the book's research and analysis.

The history of urban provisioning infrastructures, and more recently of urban food systems planning, provides useful context.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the subjects of urban slaughtering and meat supplies have attracted considerable attention. Informative works on European and American cities explore the expansion of government and public health oversight of this key industry in some cities during the nineteenth century, especially at its latter end.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the history of public markets has become a more



widely researched topic. Scholars have detailed the expansion of municipal market-halls in certain European cities, like Paris, Berlin, Barcelona, and Budapest in the century's second half, or conversely, the decline of traditional marketplaces, more typical of northwestern Europe, including many cities in England.<sup>22</sup>

For American cities, the mid-nineteenth century brought about the general decline of public markets, despite their traditionally central role in food provisioning since the colonial era.<sup>23</sup> As already noted, New York's transition from a public to a free-market model is representative of other northeastern cities, like Philadelphia. Gotham's experience with deregulation has been explored in some detail by historians.<sup>24</sup> Thanks to these works the specifics of the narrative and the anchoring role of the meat trade in the American public market system, as well as the regulatory matters at stake, are largely familiar. In general, the liberalizing trajectory of New York City in the mid-nineteenth century is typical of America, even as it stands in contrast with many continental European cities, such as Paris. Whatever the balance of government involvement, the point to keep in mind is that major nineteenth-century cities faced similar challenges and engaged in similar policy debates about the organization and regulation of their food systems.

The infrastructural research, while rich in exploring the connections between urban governance and food systems, is far from complete. One limitation is the tendency to examine the individual elements of the infrastructure as discrete pieces. In general, more has been discovered about large-scale facilities, such as public abattoirs or central wholesale markets, than the smaller institutions at the retail end of food distribution. In the case of Early Republican and antebellum New York City, the different layers of the provisioning system are disjointedly covered by the literature. The history of slaughterhouses, for instance, is treated in only one article-length study focusing on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>25</sup> Gotham's wholesale and retail markets are more widely explored, albeit not primarily from the angle of provisioning history and food access.<sup>26</sup> As for the rest of the retail infrastructure of independent shops or unlicensed vendors, their contribution to the food system remains only patchily researched.<sup>27</sup>

Yet it was the retail spaces of food distribution—the public markets with their municipally managed stalls, the provision shops that proliferated under a free-market economy, and the street peddlers with their ambulatory trade—that constituted New Yorkers' daily points of access. The retail end also underwent the most consequential changes, fragmenting from a tightly managed world of municipal markets where customers negotiated a gathering of food vendors into a free-for-all landscape of private retailers where residents assembled provisions from dispersed lo-

cations. Overall, the book brings together the different layers of the urban food system in one comprehensive analysis.<sup>28</sup> The public market model and its deregulation present the main narrative. Yet just as important, the research attends to the wholesale markets and slaughterhouses, as well as the sprawling landscape of independent provision shops and street vendors. In fact, from the infrastructural perspective, the most intriguing question concerns the dynamic relations between the elements. Specifically, how did changing regulatory regimes in the midst of New York's metropolitan transition reconfigure the infrastructure and built environment of food access?

What holds the different layers of the food system together conceptually is space, a focusing lens of the book. The premise is that in the urban context, food access was to a large degree a matter of neighborhood geography. New Yorkers negotiated a complex landscape of markets, shops, and ambulatory vendors to procure food supplies. The spatial relations of food shopping not only transformed during this period but also increasingly differed by neighborhood, social class, and ethnicity, enabling some residents and constraining others in finding adequate, healthy, and affordable provisions. Just as current debates about "food deserts" highlight the adverse health effects of living too far from convenient access to affordable and nutritious food options, this book directs attention to the critical role of space in mediating food access.

In Early Republican and antebellum New York, still primarily a walking city before the availability of modern refrigeration, food shopping constituted one of the most taxing daily household chores. Convenient access to varied and wholesome food supplies constituted a basic necessity, much like housing, water, or sanitation. Conversely, obstacles to access introduced substantial distress in urban living standards. How did the public market system facilitate the distribution of supplies across neighborhoods? Was municipal control a suitable arrangement to mediate the spatial challenges of food access under the pressure of urbanization? Deregulation profoundly altered the landscape of provisioning. How did the free-market geography of food distribution differ from the municipally managed one, and what were the costs and benefits? Further, how did these structural changes affect residents' daily routines of household provisioning?

Examining the city's complex, layered, and changing food geography and access demands a comprehensive mapping analysis. Specifically, geographic information system (GIS) research documents the public market system's evolution over time and its relations to New York City's expansion and constantly changing population distribution. GIS mapping extends to the spatial experience of food shopping, including the interior spaces of some marketplaces and the exterior environment of urban neigh-

borhoods. Tracing how deregulation restructured the daily conditions of household provisioning also entails the plotting of thousands of private food shops sprawling across the city. Further, the changing geography of the meat supply system, from slaughter to retail, is examined, nailing down the locations of this noxious industry, which alarmed contemporary public health reformers and puzzled historians. Overall, GIS mapping provides a theoretical framework, a methodological approach, and an empirical base on which the book's analysis rests. The numerous maps are not merely illustrations but provide the backbone of the book's arguments and conclusions.<sup>29</sup>

The third aspect of food access as an approach, besides infrastructural and geographic analysis, concerns the linkage between residents' unequal access to food supplies and their living standards. This is a central problem, often touched upon and assumed rather than carefully studied in food histories, including the literature on nineteenth-century New York.<sup>30</sup> Yet one field of scholarship, economic history, has extensively examined food consumption, its historically changing amounts, and its shifting composition. In the past few decades, joined by demographic historians, economic historians have explored the impact of changing nutritional conditions on the biological standard of living. Their interest was prompted by the counterintuitive discovery, commonly referred to as the antebellum puzzle, that the three decades prior to the Civil War in America were characterized by a combination of rapid economic growth and rising per capita income on the one hand, and worsening biological standards of living, in particular, declining physical stature and soaring mortality, on the other.<sup>31</sup> Research has documented that agricultural supply conditions by and large became unfavorable in the antebellum era, contributing to declining nutritional standards. The largest drop in per capita consumption rates occurred in the supply of meat, in part accounting for the widely observed decline in adult physical stature. Cities, generally dependent on agricultural imports for their food supplies, were especially affected.

This book extends the historical record by presenting new meat consumption estimates for the yet undocumented period of the Early Republic. Further, by exploring the interplay of municipal governance, political economy, and the changing infrastructure and geography of provisioning, it probes less-studied but equally pressing issues about the role of food supplies in residents' living standards. Beyond quantity, the book attends to the overlooked subject of food quality, especially in the contexts of an unregulated food economy and worsening urban disease environments. In addition, it traces the uneven geographies of food distribution across different neighborhoods, documenting how food access became an important and enduring factor of structural inequality, much like the more familiar problems of housing and sanitation. To be sure, the book's findings

are specific to New York City, while the antebellum puzzle draws on national-level research, which makes direct comparisons difficult. At the same time, this focused case study opens up new areas of inquiry and a more rounded approach to assessing how structural changes in access to food supplies impacted nineteenth-century urban living standards.

### CASE STUDY: NEW YORK CITY AND THE FOOD ECONOMY

New York presents an optimal case for addressing these large questions. Gotham's unparalleled growth, from a population of 30,000 in 1790 to 800,000 in 1860, turned the former colonial port into America's largest and the Western world's third-largest metropolis after London and Paris, putting into sharp focus the challenges of meeting residents' most essential needs. New York not only became the most populous but also the most heterogeneous American city, with large and diverse populations of immigrants arriving from overseas and across the nation, and a society increasingly stratified along various socioeconomic groups. It is in this context of immigration-driven urbanization and rising inequality that dismal housing conditions and their adverse health effects constituted key areas of urban policy, reverberating across America's cities, or that the Croton aqueduct was built, inspiring similar public waterworks elsewhere. Even if food was a far more ambiguous matter, New York faced novel but by no means unusual challenges about how to manage the proper provisioning of residents. By definition, municipal concerns centered on issues of distribution, quality, and slaughter, while the decision to liberalize food markets in 1843 not only fueled Gotham's most heated public debates but was also paralleled by developments elsewhere. Subsequently, in a liberalized food economy, the problem of food access by and large fell out of the domain of urban governance and policy. Certainly, New York was, and has ever been, a unique city in America: the largest, most complex, and heterogeneous. Yet a study of food access in New York during the city's onset of modern urbanization highlights central issues of urban development with both specificity and wider relevance.

*Feeding Gotham* also offers more than a case study in urban history. It is equally a focused history of a vital industry that experienced rapid growth and profound regulatory changes. The city's food economy was transformed by demographic developments, the transportation revolution, and, much less recognized, by liberal political economy reforms. In fact, one may read this book's account of food provisioning as a case study in one of the largest and most critical sectors of the urban economy. To keep the scale in perspective, about one-third of commercial businesses in mid-nineteenth-century New York operated in the food trade. Readers

interested in economic history, but more familiar with other sectors like manufacturing or finance, will find informative parallels in this less-studied field. In fact, the food economy presents a distinctive opportunity to explore larger themes, such as how regulatory changes reshaped an entire industry, how an insurgent informal economy challenged established businesses, how rapid growth and open access altered the city's land use and commercial geography, and what these and other changes meant to New Yorkers.

Within the food economy, one industry in particular, meat provisioning, is featured prominently. There are several good reasons for this. To begin with, it was the most critical sector of the municipal model, the anchoring trade on which the public market monopoly rested legally and economically. This reflected the prominent status of butchers as craftsmen, and the central role of meat in the diet of urban Americans. Early Republican cities sustained high levels of meat consumption by any standard, with fresh beef becoming a staple for ordinary citizens. Moreover, butchery and the meat trade were the most affected by political economy changes in the antebellum era. The growth of informal commerce and the disintegration of the market monopoly were both concentrated in this sector. As the public markets' anchoring business shattered, the free-market regime reconfigured the geography and daily routine of household provisioning. Further, antebellum dietary pressures were most evident in the supply of meat. As will be shown, this entailed not only declining quantities of meat consumption but also deteriorating quality. Public health concerns about nuisance trades and food supplies also centered on butchers, especially their practice of slaughtering. All in all, at each juncture—from regulation to infrastructure, geography, and living standards—meat provisioning occupied prime importance, thus exemplifying larger developments in Gotham's food system in that period.

At last, a brief note on sources. Among America's cities, New York offers the best-documented case for its nineteenth-century food system, especially as concerns the public markets and meat supplies. This is in part thanks to the Jefferson Market butcher Thomas F. De Voe (1811–92), who in his free time devoted himself diligently to reconstructing the history of Gotham's food markets from their earliest days through his own time. His two published books, along with the corresponding archives, present a rich and exceptional resource, complementing more conventional municipal and other records available for other cities as well.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, the book's GIS analysis requires the availability of geospatial data. Most of these data were created by the author, but the process was greatly enhanced by the New York Public Library (NYPL) and the New-York Historical Society's (N-YHS) recent efforts to digitize some of their collections. The NYPL has done extraordinary work, relying on crowdsourcing to con-

struct a database of georeferenced historical maps.<sup>33</sup> Their digitization of the Perris Fire Insurance Atlas (1852–54) made it possible to build a reliable address locator necessary to geocode historical addresses.<sup>34</sup> In turn, pulling the addresses for specific trades or professions was expedited by the N-YHS's initiative to make their collection of city directories electronically searchable.<sup>35</sup> Creating the book's geospatial data for a city as large as New York was a considerable investment, which only a few years ago may have proven excessively difficult.

### PLAN OF THE BOOK

*Feeding Gotham* is organized in three parts. The first part consists of one chapter, covering the book's entire chronology and setting up its narrative. First, it provides a new account of the political economy of the public market system of provisioning, exploring how the common good of citizens' access to food was forged out of the conflicting and converging interests, rights, and responsibilities of the three constituent parties involved: residents, market vendors, and city officials. Second, it then discusses the process of market deregulation, exploring how and why citizens' access to food was gradually pushed from the public to the private domain through the expansion of informal retail from the 1830s, followed by the market laws' repeal in 1843. Further, chapter 1 details the shifting ground of public and private goods, outlining the fiscal connections between the liberalization of New York's formerly tightly regulated food economy and the city's huge investments in the Croton Waterworks.

The book's second part, comprising three chapters, shifts the discussion from the institutional framework of the public market system to its daily functioning and performance in supplying New Yorkers, focusing on the period between the 1790s and 1820s. Presenting new meat consumption estimates and using GIS mapping, chapter 2 examines the geography of food access. It establishes that Early Republican New York drew on sufficiently expanding supplies, while the public market system also succeeded in distributing provisions to residents across all neighborhoods in a rapidly growing city. Additionally, a case is made that the municipal model had meaningful redistributive effects, because it played a central role in ensuring basic food quality standards.

Chapter 3 addresses the problem of time by examining the temporal geography of household provisioning, a more unconventional subject. It scrutinizes the seasonal, weekly, and daily schedules of food shopping, outlining how complementary rhythms provided steady supplies to customers, while also sustaining permanent and stable trade at the public

markets. Last, chapter 4 examines the neighborhood setting, which provided the immediate economic, social, and cultural contexts of the public markets. Through a case study of Catharine Market, the chapter documents the piecemeal process by which the neighborhood marketplace was assembled, along with the consolidation of its economic agglomeration, internal social and spatial order, everyday functioning, formal and informal management, and daily relations to customers. Overall, this three-pronged approach of space, time, and neighborhood serves to fully appreciate the complex dynamics, benefits, and trade-offs that defined the municipal model of provisioning in the Early Republic.

The third part propels the discussion into the antebellum period. It interrogates the geographic, social, and economic consequences of a changing political economy of food access with the decline of the public market system and its replacement by a free-market regime of provisioning. Chapter 5 provides a systematic GIS analysis of the city's food infrastructure, encompassing the wholesale and retail public markets and the newly sprawling landscape of private provision shops. Additionally, it maps the retail food economy in relation to the city's land-use environment and broader commercial geography while also situating food access within its local neighborhood context. In general, the analysis reveals the development of a novel, highly fragmented, and differentiated provisioning landscape, whereby residential location increasingly defined one's options of food access. At the end, the narrative returns to Catharine Market in the mid-nineteenth century, finding the public market's status as the economic, social, and cultural hub of its area compromised by the emerging retail corridor of Catharine Street as the new center of consumption and public space in the neighborhood.

If the underlying premise of chapter 5 is that political economy and geography are closely connected, chapter 6 completes the discussion by looking at the impact of these changes on the living standards and social inequalities of New Yorkers. At a time of worsening supply conditions and rising food prices, the final chapter contends that the city's surrender of oversight of the entire provisioning system contributed to the deterioration of food quality, thereby putting additional pressure on urban diets, especially among poorer residents. Layer by layer, the GIS research exposes how in a rapidly growing, immigrant, and working-class city, unequal access to adequate quantity and quality of food supplies mapped onto an ever more segregated landscape, compounding other sociospatial inequalities such as class, ethnicity, sanitation, or housing. The book provides evidence of how growing disparities in food access coalesced with better-known ones in health and housing to become structural sources of inequality that defined and shaped the nineteenth-century urban environment.