



FOOD
WILL
WIN THE WAR
DON'T WASTE IT



The Mayor.

City Hall. n.y.



30805594

NEW YORK CITY

*Museum
of
Complaint*



MUNICIPAL COLLECTION

1751 - 1969

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In its cavernous Hall of Records, the City of New York has preserved thousands of pages of correspondence to its mayors. Selected from archives dating from 1751 to 1969, the following letters are distinguished for their aesthetic, historical, and compelling interest, and together constitute the Municipal Collection of the New York City Museum of Complaint.

Complaint is an essential element of civic discourse, and helps to regulate and define it. These letters are offered as a retrospective glance at one city's experience of hearing the grievances of its citizens. Although the selection contains only a tiny fraction of the ire, persuasive and otherwise, that has been directed at the city by its inhabitants, it offers a tangible imprint of the public concerns of New York and New Yorkers. Each one identifies a specific injustice or impending crisis and, at its most fundamental level, captures the ephemeral qualities of the human voice caught in the ancient drama of civil society. The creation and delivery of each letter marks a decisive moment when a direct, sometimes intimate appeal was made.

How these communiqués were responded to is largely unknown. Although fragmentary, their gestures, sentiments, styles, tones, remain; and we can consider them now as examples of public objection. Reflecting the challenges of urban living, the letters sound the gamut, from dead animals in the street to fallen heroes, broken hearts, civil rights, prices, mesh swimsuits, stolen baseballs, and errant blasting. As one would suspect, the primary test usually comes from other people and the horrible things they are doing—or, as is often the case here, the public responsibilities that they are failing to fulfill.

Urban life, bounded by architecture and economy, remains fundamentally a condition of human proximity. In an increasingly mediated era, it is still the daily physical and social contact between human beings that defines the character of a city. Whether the polis flourishes or flounders, problems of all stripes emerge, along with those who are to blame for them. Culprits might live uptown, they might live downtown; on the east side, or the west; next door, or even in one's own home. The New York City Museum of Complaint was created to celebrate the mechanism by which citizens in democratic societies address their individual and collective concerns. We present this project with the notion that to articulate dissatisfaction is an essential foundation of any resistance to tyranny, at all levels; and that the review of such dispatches from moments past may serve as a practical guide to life in cities today.

Matthew Bakkom

To Edward Holland Esq^r. Mayor of the City of
New York, and to the Corporation.

The humble Petition of
Andrew Ramsey

Most humbly sheweth that Petition^r, by sundry misfortunes is
very much reduced as apparently appears

That Petitioner lost two Negroes last Winter, This winter
lost two of the Ferry Boats, and That Petitioner
was oblig'd to hire two Crafts in their room which was
very expensive to Petitioner

That the report of the small Pox being in this city hinders
the Country People from coming to Market, which
together with the River 'being frozen hindered my business

That Petition^r: for all most these two Months past has not
received as much money by the Ferry as woud support his
Servants, May it therefore please your Honour, and
the Corporation to consider my sundry losses and
grant Petition^r. something toward his Support

And Petitioner as in duty bound will ever
pray
Andrew Ramsey

New York February 25th: 1751/2

To Edward Holland Esq. Mayor of the City of
New York, and to the Corporation...

The humble Petition of
Andrew Ramsey

Most humbly sheweth that Petitioner's sundry misfortunes is
very much reduced as apparently appears

That Petitioner lost two Negroes last Winter, This winter
lost two of the Ferry Boats, and That Petitioner
was oblig'd to hire two Crafts in their room which was
very expensive to Petitioner

That the report of the small Pox being in this City hinders
the Country People from coming to Market, which
together with the River being frozen hindered my business

That Petitioner for all most these two Months past has not
received as much money by the Ferry as would support his
Servants, May it therefore please your Honour, and
the Corporation to consider my sundry losses and
grant Petitioner something towards his Support

And Petitioner as in duty bound will ever
pray

Andrew Ramsey

New York February 25th 1751/2

To the Worshipfull

The Mayor, Recorder, Alderman and Common
Councill of the City of New york in Common Councill
Conveens

The Humble Petition
of the Vestrymen of the Said City

Most Humbly Showeth that your
Petitioners In Consideration of the Great Grievance
the Publick Labours under, by Reason of the
Present Keepers of the Alms House not Performing
the Duty of his Station as he Ought to Do is not
Regarding the orders & Instructions from time to
Time Given him by the Justices & Vestry, as also
Behaving In a Surly and Abusive Manner to
the Justices & Vestry, Threatning Daily to Leave
the House if things were not Regulated
Agreeable to his Sentiments, So that if the
Present Keeper of the Alms House be not
Removed. the Vestry Cannot Attend their
Monthly Meetings with that Alacrity and
Chearfullness as they would Willingly do for the
Publick Good.

Your Petitioners therefore Humbly
Pray that this Worshipfull Board will take this
Affair under your Serious Consideration & do
therein what Soever in your Great wisdom you
Shall think of it and your Petitioners as in Duty
Bound Shall Ever Pray.

New York
May 22, 1755.

To the Worshipfull
The Mayor, Recorder, Alderman & Common
Councell of the City of New York in Common Councell
The Humble Petition
of the Vestrymen of the said City

Most Humbly sheweth that your
Petitioners In Consideration of the Great Grievance
the Publick Labours under, by Reason of the
Present Keeper of the Almshouse not Performing
the Duty of his Station as he Ought to do in not
Regarding the orders & Instructions from time to
Time Given him by the Justices & Vestry, as also
Behaving In a Surly and Abusive Manner to
the Justices & Vestry, Threatning Daily to leave
the House if things were not regulated
Agreeable to his Sentiments, so that if the
Present Keeper of the Almshouse be not
removed, the Vestry cannot attend their
Monthly Meetings with that Alacrity and
Cheerfulness as they would willingly do for the
Publick Good.

Your Petitioners therefore Humbly
Pray that this Worshipfull Board will take this
Affair under your serious Consideration & do
therein whatsoever in your great wisdom you
shall think fit, and your Petitioners as in Duty
Bound shall ever Pray.

Isaac van Hook
Joris Jansen
Abraham Durge
Dick Brinckhoff

Anthony Jendijck
Augustus Lurck
Myndert Seluyser
John Copper
Lukie van Praet
John Brovoet

New York
May 22, 1755.

To the Worshipful the Mayor Alderman
and Commonalty of the City of New York in
Common Council convened,

The Petition of the Freeholders and Inhabitants holding Lots
and living adjoining to the street which extends from the Market
in the Broadway to the North River

Humbly sheweth

That the said Street/or the greater part thereof, is not without
great Difficulty passable for Carts or other Carriages by Reason of its Declivity
and the pavements thereof being very much broken and out of Repair,
by which your Petitioners respective Estates adjoining thereto are
much impaired in their Value, and the Slip at the End of the said
Street is rendered of little Value to the Public.

That the Declivity of the said Street might at a very small Expence
be lessened and the said Street be made convenient for any Carriage by
digging out such part thereof as may require the same and erecting
a Wall across the Slip at the lower End thereof and filling up
that part of the said Street.

Your Petitioners therefore most humbly pray that
this Board may direct the leveling and repairing
the said Street in the manner above set forth, or in such,
other manner as this Board in their wisdom shall think
best and most convenient

and your Petitioners shall ever pray
John Thurman
David Abeely

To the Worshipful the Mayor Alderman
and Commonalty of the City of New York in
Common Council convened,

The Petition of the Freeholders and Inhabitants holding Lots
and living adjoining to the Street which extends from the Market
in the Broadway to the North River

Humbly sheweth

That the said Street (or the greater part thereof) is not without
great Difficulty passable for Carts or other Carriages by Reason of its Declivity
and the pavements thereof being very much broken and out of Repair,
by which your Petitioners respective Estates adjoining thereto are
much impaired in their Value, and the Slip at the End of the said
Street is rendered of little Value to the Public.

That the Declivity of the said Street might at a very small Expence
be lessened and the said Street be made convenient for any Carriage by
digging out such part thereof as may require the same and erecting
a Wall across the Slip at the lower End thereof and filling up
that part of the said Street

Your Petitioners therefore most humbly pray that
this Board may direct the leveling and repairing
the said Street in the manner above set forth, or in such
other manner as this Board in their Wisdom shall think
best and most convenient

And your Petitioners shall ever pray &c.

John Furman
David Abulz

New York June 7th 1797
To the Honourable the Corporation
of the City of New York

The petition of us Sundry
Inhabitation of the Sixth ward Humbly Show-
eth, That most of your petitioners live Adjacent to
a pond at the foot of what is Commonly Called pot-
baker's hill. That from the present Stagnated State
of its waters appears to be a Public Nuisance. The
Stream that formerly led from it into the Fresh-water-pond
being filled up a number of Dead animals being thrown
into it now in a State of putrefaction together with
a pernicious matter running from a Glue Manufactory
Causes your petitioners to be Apprehensive that if left
as at present during the hot Season it may prove
fatal to the Health of the Inhabitation that live near
the Same, Your petitioners therefore pray that your
Honourable Body may Cause Such measures to be pursued
as Appear to you most Conducive to the preservation of
the Health of us and our fellow Citizens .

New York June 7th 1797

To the Honourable the Corporation
of the City of New York

The petition of us Sundry
Inhabitance of the Sixth ward humbly shew-
eth, That most of your petitioners live adjacent to
a pond at the foot of what is commonly called pot-
baker's hill, That from the present Magnified State
of its waters appear to be a Public Nuisance, The
Dran that formerly led from it into the Fresh-water pond
being filled up a number of Dead animals being thrown
into it now in a State of Putrefaction together with
a pernicious matter running from a Glue Manufactory
Causes your petitioners to be Apprehensive that if left
as at present during the hot Season it may prove
fatal to the Health of the Inhabitance that live near
the Same, Your petitioners therefore pray that your
Honourable Body may cause such measures to be pursued
as appear to you most Conducive to the preservation of
the Health of our fellow Citizens

John Crolius

Wm Cook

Henry Remmey
Wm Remmey

John B. Long

John Remmey

George Streight

Isaac Vanhook

John Gibon

Genival

John Sparks
Anthony Boyer

Leonard Minuse

Henry Brooks

Friedrich Marchant

James Hyer

Peter B. B.

Wm L. B.

John Thompson

Thomas Eames

John Boy

Henry Shuck

Peter Embury

John Osborn

John Osborn

Henry

Elias Kiviland

John Machet

John Pritchett

George Buchham

Abraham B. B.

Rich. McKenney

Robert Snow

To the Hono^{ble}

The Mayor & Common Council
of the City of New York.

The Prayer of the undersigned, owner,
of Property residents of the 17th ward of the City
of New York – respectfully sets forth, that the
neighbourhood of that ward comprised between
7th & 10th Streets & between 3 avenue & avenue
A, has, for some nights past been a scene of
Robbery and Burglary – and much valuable
property Stolen and destroyed: Your petitioners
believe that the watch in that neighbourhood
is insufficient, from the Extensive district
allotted to the present watch, – and that the
appointment of additional watchmen would
add materially to the safety of your Petitioners
property: and therefore pray of your Hono^{ble}
body, the appointment of additional watchmen
to this district – and as in duty bound will
Ever pray. N.York August 14th 1839.

To the Honorable

The Mayor Common Council
of the City of New York.

The Prayer of the undersigned, Owners
of Property & residents of the 17th Ward of the City
of New York - respectfully sets forth, that the
neighbourhood of that Ward comprised between
7th & 10th Streets & between 3 Avenue & Avenue
A, has, for some nights past been a scene of
Robbery and Burglary - and much valuable
property stolen and destroyed: Your petitioners
believe that the watch in that neighbourhood
is insufficient, from the extensive district
allotted to the present watch, - and that the
appointment of additional Watchmen would
add materially to the safety of your Petitioners
property: and therefore pray of your Honorable
body, the appointment of additional Watchmen
to this district - And as in duty bound will
Ever pray &c. N. York August 14th 1839.

J. B. Jones

7th St. near 1st Avenue

Robt. Patterson

1st Ave & 10th Street

John Peters

Second Avenue & 7th St

Thos B. O'Call

44 Seventh St

Eli. Benedict 2^d Ave

between 7 & 8 St

Robert van Rensselaer

J. Thompson 7th St.

George T. Pomroy

94. 7th Street

David Pitt 2^d Avenue

between 8th & 9th St.

W. B. Allen pro Mayor

80 Seventh St

2^d Ave

near 7 & 10th St.

S. Baldwin

96 Seventh St

Ally Woodcock 90 Seventh St

W. C. Curtis 70 Seventh St

A. B. Bunt 7th St

N. Lamson 7th Street

W. H. Mearns

Thomas Davis

8th St between 1st Ave & A

over

To the Honourable the Corporation of the City
of New York.

The petition of Joseph Kuler respectfully sheweth; that on the night of the 16th instant, a female entered his house pursued to two men, who then overtook and abused her in an unmerciful manner that while the said female was receiving violent abuses from her pursuers; M^{rs}. Kuler in the absence of your petitioner entreated the persons aforesaid to desist from abusing an unprotected female; who was then prostrate, and suffering from the infliction of severe blows – That two watchmen entered deponent's house, who were requested by the wife of your petitioners to take all the persons then away; that the watchmen disregarding the appeal of petitioners wife and assisting the assailants seized the person of M^{rs}. Kuler and were proceeding to drag her from her domicile, until the infant daughter of your petitioner, besought them to let her mother be unmolested. Your petitioner also states with positive certainty, that the assailants were permitted to go at large, free from arrest by family insulted and his house abused in the presence and hearing of said watchmen, whose names are Austin and Sanford (Christian names unknown) that the conduct of said watchmen, was unjust insolent-disorderly and abusive inasmuch as that when the friend of your petitioner attempted to remonstrate with them; surly and desperate threats were uttered and oaths taken that his friends for their interference should be put in prison invincing a degree of contempt for the law which your petitioner considers unwarrantable – dangerous and intolerant. Your petitioner requests your Honourable body to have them removed from office, as unfit to fill the station they hold

New York Oct. 21st. 1839.

Joseph Kuler

To the Honourable the Corporation of the City
of New York.

The petition of Joseph Kuler respectfully shew-
eth; that on the night of the 16th instant, a female
entered his house pursued to two men, who then over-
took and abused her in an unmerciful manner
that while the said female was receiving violent
abuse from her pursuers; Mrs Kuler in the absence
of your petitioner entreated the persons aforesaid
to desist from abusing an unprotected female; who
was then prostrate, and suffering from the infliction
of severe blows - That two Watchmen entered
deponent's house, who were requested by the wife
of your petitioner to take all the persons then
away; that the Watchmen disregarding the appeal
of Petitioner's wife and assisting the assailants
seized the person of Mrs Kuler and were proceed-
ing to drag her from her domicile, until the infant
daughter of your petitioner, besought them to
let her mother be unmolested. Your Petitioner also
states with positive certainty, that the assailants
were permitted to go at large, free from arrest by
family insulted and his house abused in the presence
and hearing of said Watchmen, whose names are
Austin and Sanford (Christian names unknown)
that the Conduct of said Watchmen, was unjust
insolent-disorderly and abusive; inasmuch as that
when the friends of your petitioner attempted to re-
monstrate with them, surly and desperate threats
were uttered and oaths taken that his friends for
their interference should be put in prison incurring
a degree of Contempt for the law which your petitioner
considers unwarrantable dangerous and intolerant. Your
Petitioner requests your Honourable body to have them
removed from office, as unfit to fill the station they hold

New York Oct. 21st 1839.

Joseph Kuler

City and County of New York C;

George Richmond of No 168 Duane st.
in the City of New York being duly sworn doth
depose and say that on Friday the 22nd
day of January last he hired the coach
No 366 in Greenwich street in the city of
New York agreeing to pay two dollars and
a half for carriage to the New Haven Rail-
road depot, which sum he then and there paid.
That said coach was used
by Deponent for about seven hours and
that between the time of the hiring of the said
coach and the arrival of the deponent at said
depot. the further sum of five dollars was
demanded of deponent for
the use of said coach and the same was
paid by him; and that after his arrival
at said depot the further sum of five
dollars was demanded of deponent for the
use of said coach, and deponent was
compelled to pay the same before he
could get possession of his valise which
was in the custody of the driver of said
coach. Thus making a total
of twelve dollars and a half which depo-
nent was compelled to pay for said
coach an excess of five dollars over
the rates allowed by law.

Sworn to before me
this 29th day of Jany 1864
George Tenvilliger
Notary Public
For City & County of New York