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American Masculinities

A Historical Encyclopedia

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California State University – Stanislaus

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Contents

LIST OF ENTRIES

vii

READER'S GUIDE

ix

FOREWORD

xiii

INTRODUCTION

1

AMERICAN MASCULINITIES: A HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

5–514

BIBLIOGRAPHY

515

CONTRIBUTORS

533

INDEX

537

List of Entries

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Abolitionism | <i>Catcher in the Rye, The</i> | Fashion | ▷ Individualism |
| Adolescence | Character | ▷ Fatherhood | ▷ Industrialization |
| <i>Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> | Chivalry | ✗ <i>Father Knows Best</i> | Insanity |
| Advertising | Citizenship | ✗ Father's Day | ✗ <i>Invisible Man</i> |
| ✗ Advice Literature | ✗ Civil Rights Movement | ✗ Fathers' Rights | Irish-American Manhood |
| African-American Manhood | Civil War | Feminism | <i>Iron John: A Book About Men</i> |
| Agrarianism | ✗ Class | Fishing | ✗ Italian-American Manhood |
| Alcohol | Cold War | Fitzgerald, F. Scott | Jackson, Andrew |
| Alger, Horatio, Jr. | ▷ <i>Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, The</i> | Football | James, William |
| American Dream | Confidence Man | Franklin, Benjamin | Jesus, Images of |
| American Revolution | Conscientious Objection | Fraternal Organizations | ✗ Jewish Manhood |
| Antiwar Movement | Consumerism | Fraternities | <i>Jungle, The</i> |
| Apprenticeship | <i>Contrast, The</i> | Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory | ✗ Juvenile Delinquency |
| Art | Cooper, Gary | Gambling | Kellogg, John Harvey |
| Arthur, Timothy Shay | Cop Action Films | Gangs | Kerouac, Jack |
| Artisan | Counterculture | Gangsters | King, Martin Luther, Jr. |
| ✗ Asian-American Manhood | Cowboys | ✗ Gays in the Military | ✗ <i>Kramer vs. Kramer</i> |
| Atlas, Charles | Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John | Gilded Age | Labor Movement and Unions |
| Automobile | ▷ Crisis of Masculinity | Graham, Sylvester | ✗ Latino Manhood |
| Bachelorhood | Crockett, Davy | Grant, Cary | Lawrence, D. H. |
| Baseball | Cult of Domesticity | <i>Grapes of Wrath, The</i> | Leatherstocking Tales |
| Beat Movement | ▷ Darwinism | ✗ Great Depression | ✗ <i>Leave It to Beaver</i> |
| Beecher, Henry Ward | Dean, James | Gulick, Luther Halsey | Leisure |
| <i>Birth of a Nation</i> | <i>Death of a Salesman</i> | Guns | Lincoln, Abraham |
| Bisexuality | <i>Deliverance</i> | Hall, Granville Stanley | London, Jack |
| ✗ Black Panther Party | ✗ Democratic Manhood | Health | <i>Lone Ranger, The</i> |
| ✗ Body | Detectives | Hemingway, Ernest | Malcolm X |
| Bodybuilding | ✗ Divorce | Heroism | Male Friendship |
| Bogart, Humphrey | Douglass, Frederick | ✗ Heterosexuality | Manifest Destiny |
| Boone, Daniel | Dueling | Higginson, Thomas | Market Revolution |
| Boxing | Eastwood, Clint | Wentworth | Marlboro Man |
| Boyhood | ✗ <i>Easy Rider</i> | Hoboes | ✗ Marriage |
| Boy Scouts of America | Education | ✗ Hollywood | Martial Arts Films |
| Brando, Marlon | Emancipation | <i>Home Improvement</i> | ✗ Masculine Domesticity |
| ✗ Breadwinner Role | Emerson, Ralph Waldo | ✗ Homosexuality | Masturbation |
| Buddy Films | Emotion | Hudson, Rock | Medicine |
| Bureaucratization | ✗ Ethnicity | Hunting | Men and Religion Forward Movement |
| Business/Corporate America | ✗ Eugenics | Immigration | |
| California Gold Rush | ✗ Evangelicalism and Revivalism | Imperialism | |
| Capitalism | | | |

- Men's Clubs
- Men's Movements
- Men's Studies
- Middle-Class Manhood
- Militarism
- Military
- Ministry
- Minstrelsy
- Moby Dick*
- Momism
- Mother-Son Relationships
- Mr. Mom*
- Muscular Christianity
- Music
- Nationalism
- Nation of Islam
- Native American Manhood
- Nativism
- New Deal
- Noyes, John Humphrey
- Nuclear Family
- Odd Couple, The*
- Old Age
- Organization Man, The*
- Outdoorsmen
- Passionate Manhood
- Patriarchy
- Patriotism
- Playboy Magazine*
- Politics
- Populism
- Pornography
- Postmodernism
- Professionalism
- Progressive Era
- Promise Keepers
- Property
- Prostitution
- Race
- Rambo
- Reagan, Ronald
- Rebel Without a Cause*
- Reform Movements
- Religion and Spirituality
- Reproduction
- Republicanism
- Reverse Sexism
- Romanticism
- Roosevelt, Theodore
- Sandow, Eugen
- Sawyer, Tom
- Schwarzenegger, Arnold
- Seduction Tales
- Self-Control
- Self-Made Man
- Sensitive Male
- Sentimentalism
- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Revolution
- Shaft*
- Slave Narratives
- Slavery
- Social Gospel
- Sons of Liberty
- Southern Manhood
- Spanish-American War
- Sports
- Springsteen, Bruce
- Strenuous Life
- Suburbia
- Success Manuals
- Suffragism
- Sunday, Billy
- Superman
- Tarzan
- Technology
- Television
- Temperance
- Thoreau, Henry David
- Transsexuality
- Transvestism
- Travel
- Travel Narratives
- Twain, Mark
- Uncle Sam
- Urbanization
- Victorian Era
- Vietnam War
- Violence
- War
- Washington, George
- Wayne, John
- Western Frontier
- Westerns
- Whiteness
- White Supremacism
- Whitman, Walt
- Work
- Working-Class Manhood
- World War I
- World War II
- Wright, Richard
- Young Men's Christian Association
- Youth

Reader's Guide

This list is provided to assist readers in finding articles on related entries. It classifies articles into fourteen general thematic categories: Art and Literature; Body and Health; Class, Ethnic, and Racial Identities; Concepts and Theories; Family and Fatherhood; Historical Events and Processes; Icons and Symbols; Leisure and Work; Media and Popular Culture; Movements and Organizations; People; Political and Social Issues; Religion and Spirituality; Sexual Identities and Sexuality. Some article titles appear in more than one category.

Art and Literature

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
 Alger, Horatio, Jr.
 Art
 Arthur, Timothy Shay
 Beat Movement
Catcher in the Rye, The
Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care, The
Contrast, The
 Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John
Death of a Salesman
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo
 Fitzgerald, F. Scott
Grapes of Wrath, The
 Hemingway, Ernest
Invisible Man
Iron John: A Book About Men
 Jesus, Images of
Jungle, The
 Kerouac, Jack
 Lawrence, D. H.
 Leatherstocking Tales
 London, Jack
Moby Dick
Organization Man, The
 Romanticism
 Sawyer, Tom
 Seduction Tales
 Slave Narratives
 Thoreau, Henry David
 Travel Narratives
 Twain, Mark
 Whitman, Walt
 Wright, Richard

Body and Health

Atlas, Charles
 Body
 Bodybuilding
 Darwinism
 Eugenics
 Fashion
 Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory
 Graham, Sylvester
 Gulick, Luther Halsey
 Hall, Granville Stanley
 Health
 Higginson, Thomas Wentworth
 Insanity
 James, William
 Kellogg, John Harvey
 Lawrence, D. H.
 Masturbation
 Medicine
 Muscular Christianity
 Old Age
 Reproduction
 Roosevelt, Theodore
 Sandow, Eugen
 Schwarzenegger, Arnold
 Self-Control
 Strenuous Life
 Temperance
Class, Ethnic, and Racial Identities
 Abolitionism
 African-American Manhood
 Apprenticeship
 Artisan

Asian-American Manhood
 Beecher, Henry Ward
 Black Panther Party
 Breadwinner Role
 Business/Corporate America
 Civil Rights Movement
 Class
 Douglass, Frederick
 Ethnicity
 Graham, Sylvester
Grapes of Wrath, The
 Hall, Granville Stanley
 Immigration
Invisible Man
 Irish-American Manhood
 Italian-American Manhood
 Jewish Manhood
 King, Martin Luther, Jr.
 Labor Movement and Unions
 Latino Manhood
 Malcolm X
 Middle-Class Manhood
 Minstrelsy
 Nation of Islam
 Native American Manhood
 Nativism
 Populism
 Race
Shaft
 Slavery
 Southern Manhood
 Springsteen, Bruce
 Sunday, Billy
 Whiteness
 White Supremacism
 Work

Working-Class Manhood
 Wright, Richard

Concepts and Theories

Agrarianism
 American Dream
 Breadwinner Role
 Capitalism
 Character
 Chivalry
 Citizenship
 Class
 Conscientious Objection
 Consumerism
 Cult of Domesticity
 Darwinism
 Democratic Manhood
 Emotion
 Ethnicity
 Eugenics
 Evangelicalism and Revivalism
 Fathers' Rights
 Feminism
 Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory
 Heroism
 Imperialism
 Individualism
 Manifest Destiny
 Market Revolution
 Masculine Domesticity
 Men's Studies
 Militarism
 Momism
 Muscular Christianity
 Nationalism

Nativism
Passionate Manhood
Patriarchy
Patriotism
Populism
Postmodernism
Professionalism
Property
Race
Republicanism
Romanticism
Self-Control
Sentimentalism
Strenuous Life
White Supremacism

Family and Fatherhood

Adolescence
Bachelorhood
Boyhood
Breadwinner Role
*Common Sense Book of Baby
and Child Care, The*
Cult of Domesticity
Divorce
Fatherhood
Father Knows Best
Father's Day
Fathers' Rights
Freudian Psychoanalytic
Theory
Hall, Granville Stanley
Home Improvement
Leave It to Beaver
Marriage
Masculine Domesticity
Momism
Mother-Son
Relationships
Mr. Mom
Noyes, John Humphrey
Nuclear Family
Old Age
Patriarchy
Promise Keepers
Property
Reproduction

Suburbia
Youth

Historical Events and Processes

Abolitionism
American Revolution
Antiwar Movement
California Gold Rush
Civil Rights Movement
Civil War
Cold War
Emancipation
Gilded Age
Great Depression
Immigration
Imperialism
Industrialization
Manifest Destiny
Market Revolution
New Deal
Politics
Populism
Progressive Era
Reform Movements
Sexual Revolution
Spanish-American War
Suffragism
Urbanization
Victorian Era
Vietnam War
War
Western Frontier
World War I
World War II

Icons and Symbols

Alger, Horatio, Jr.
American Dream
Atlas, Charles
Automobile
Bogart, Humphrey
Boone, Daniel
Brando, Marlon
Confidence Man
Cooper, Gary
Cowboys
Crockett, Davy

Dean, James
Detectives
Eastwood, Clint
Franklin, Benjamin
Gangsters
Grant, Cary
Hoboes
Hollywood
Hudson, Rock
Jesus, Images of
Kerouac, Jack
Lincoln, Abraham
Lone Ranger, The
Malcolm X
Marlboro Man
Outdoorsmen
Rambo
Reagan, Ronald
Sawyer, Tom
Self-Made Man
Sensitive Male
Springsteen, Bruce
Suburbia
Superman
Tarzan
Uncle Sam
Washington, George
Wayne, John

Leisure and Work

Agrarianism
Alcohol
Apprenticeship
Artisan
Automobile
Baseball
Boxing
Breadwinner Role
Bureaucratization
Business/Corporate
America
Consumerism
Dueling
Fashion
Fishing
Football
Fraternal Organizations
Fraternities

Gambling
Hunting
Industrialization
Labor Movement and
Unions
Leisure
Male Friendship
Medicine
Men's Clubs
Ministry
Music
Outdoorsmen
Professionalism
Self-Made Man
Slavery
Sports
Suburbia
Success Manuals
Technology
Travel
Work
Working-Class Manhood
Young Men's Christian
Association

Media and Popular Culture

Advertising
Advice Literature
Automobile
Birth of a Nation
Bogart, Humphrey
Brando, Marlon
Buddy Films
Cooper, Gary
Cop Action Films
Cowboys
Crockett, Davy
Dean, James
Deliverance
Detectives
Eastwood, Clint
Easy Rider
Fashion
Father Knows Best
Gangsters
Grant, Cary
Hollywood

Home Improvement
Hudson, Rock
Kramer vs. Kramer
Leave It to Beaver
Lone Ranger, The
Marlboro Man
Martial Arts Films
Minstrelsy
Mr. Mom
Music
Odd Couple, The
Playboy Magazine
Rambo
Reagan, Ronald
Rebel Without a Cause
Schwarzenegger, Arnold
Seduction Tales
Shaft
Springsteen, Bruce
Success Manuals
Superman
Tarzan
Television
Wayne, John
Westerns

Movements and Organizations

Abolitionism
Antiwar Movement
Beat Movement
Black Panther Party
Boy Scouts of America
Civil Rights Movement
Counterculture
Eugenics
Feminism
Fraternal Organizations
Fraternities
Iron John: A Book About Men
Kerouac, Jack
King, Martin Luther, Jr.
Labor Movement and Unions
Malcolm X
Men and Religion Forward Movement

Men's Clubs
Men's Movements
Military
Muscular Christianity
Nationalism
Nation of Islam
Nativism
Populism
Promise Keepers
Reform Movements
Sexual Revolution
Social Gospel
Sons of Liberty
Suffragism
Temperance
White Supremacism
Young Men's Christian Association

People

Alger, Horatio, Jr.
Arthur, Timothy Shay
Atlas, Charles
Beecher, Henry Ward
Bogart, Humphrey
Boone, Daniel
Brando, Marlon
Cooper, Gary
Crèvecoeur, J. Hector St. John
Crockett, Davy
Dean, James
Douglass, Frederick
Eastwood, Clint
Emerson, Ralph Waldo
Fitzgerald, F. Scott
Franklin, Benjamin
Graham, Sylvester
Grant, Cary
Gulick, Luther Halsey
Hall, Granville Stanley
Hemingway, Ernest
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth
Hudson, Rock
Jackson, Andrew
James, William
Kellogg, John Harvey

Kerouac, Jack
King, Martin Luther, Jr.
Lawrence, D. H.
Lincoln, Abraham
London, Jack
Malcolm X
Noyes, John Humphrey
Reagan, Ronald
Roosevelt, Theodore
Sandow, Eugen
Schwarzenegger, Arnold
Springsteen, Bruce
Sunday, Billy
Thoreau, Henry David
Twain, Mark
Washington, George
Wayne, John
Whitman, Walt
Wright, Richard

Political and Social Issues

Abolitionism
Adolescence
Antiwar Movement
Citizenship
Civil Rights Movement
Class
Conscientious Objection
Crisis of Masculinity
Darwinism
Divorce
Education
Emotion
Ethnicity
Eugenics
Fathers' Rights
Feminism
Gangs
Gays in the Military
Guns
Health
Immigration
Imperialism
Insanity
Juvenile Delinquency
Medicine
Momism

Nativism
Old Age
Pornography
Promise Keepers
Race
Reform Movements
Reverse Sexism
Self-Control
Sexual Harassment
Social Gospel
Temperance
Violence
War
White Supremacism

Religion and Spirituality

Beecher, Henry Ward
Conscientious Objection
Emerson, Ralph Waldo
Evangelicalism and Revivalism
Gulick, Luther Halsey
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth
Iron John: A Book About Men
Jesus, Images of
Kerouac, Jack
King, Martin Luther, Jr.
Malcolm X
Men and Religion Forward Movement
Ministry
Muscular Christianity
Nation of Islam
Noyes, John Humphrey
Promise Keepers
Religion and Spirituality
Social Gospel
Sunday, Billy
Young Men's Christian Association

Sexual Identities and Sexuality

Bachelorhood
Bisexuality

Deliverance

Freudian Psychoanalytic

Theory

Heterosexuality

Homosexuality

Hudson, Rock

Marriage

Masturbation

Noyes, John

Humphrey

Playboy Magazine

Pornography

Prostitution

Reproduction

Seduction Tales

Sexual Harassment

Sexual Revolution

Transsexuality

Transvestism

Whitman, Walt

Foreword

“Scholarship is a product of the specialization.” This maxim is a cornerstone of the modern research university. Professors advise doctoral students to lay claim to a small piece of turf, the smaller the better. A scholarly monograph, senior scholars inform their charges, is a narrow one. Such folk often dismiss encyclopedias, which embrace the contrary principles of brevity and breadth, as of little importance.

They are wrong. A well-crafted encyclopedia is an important tool for advancing knowledge. This point was hammered home two and a half centuries ago when Denis Diderot and his bookish friends in France began work on the first great encyclopedia. Having witnessed a flowering of new ideas in science, mathematics, geography, literature, music, architecture, and many other fields, they perceived a need to transform these independent discoveries into the knowledge revolution. New ideas in one branch of knowledge field had implications for all of the others. Diderot conceived of the encyclopedia form as a means of synthesizing specialized knowledge and presenting it in a form readily accessible to diverse readers.

American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia encompasses another revolution in knowledge. Masculinity studies scarcely existed in the 1970s; it could be discerned, if at all, as a faint echo to the explosion of work on women. But since then, hundreds of scholars in scores of disciplines have been drawn to various specialized aspects of the topic. Issues of masculinity are highlighted at scholarly conferences, and the term pops up in countless book titles and scholarly papers and articles.

This encyclopedia marks an important step in the evolution of masculinity as a field of historical study. It not only tracks recent scholarship in masculinity studies but also, like all encyclopedias, suggests through its organization new ways of looking at the relation among essays. Diderot observed that the alphabetical arrangement of his encyclopedia produced “burlesque contrasts” by, for example, juxtaposing an article on art with another on artisans. Modern scholars might say instead that the inherent randomness of an encyclopedia format provides a means of “deconstructing” customary topics, thereby facilitating a creative rearrangement of the ideas.

So, too, the present volume. Consider the early pages. The article on “Adolescence” features Granville Stanley Hall’s 1904 book of that title, which contended that the teenage years, for boys especially, were tumultuous. The next entry is “*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,” a tale of adolescent boys who chafe at social constraints. The essay on “Alcohol” discusses the enduring centrality of drinking rituals among young males, ranging from the colonial tavern to contemporary frat parties. The article on “Alger, Horatio, Jr.,” details how that hack writer’s books encouraged generations of boys to transform their adolescent restlessness into a climb from “rags to riches.”

These essays, connected through their alphabetical proximity, outline a familiar rendering of boyhood and give it an interesting depth of detail. The essay on Alger also goes beyond the familiar account to show that this apostle of conventional boyhood was himself what we would now describe as gay. Other essays within the same cluster of pages further complicate the conventional picture of American masculinity. The essay on “Abolitionism” shows that many leaders of the movement embraced a masculine ethos of Christian love, as did the author of antebellum advice books, Timothy Shay Arthur (as described in the article about the writer). An essay on the “American Dream” similarly shows the broad range of gender-linked yearnings. Every reader of this volume will approach it from a different perspective, gleaning a host of interesting facts, but also assembling new insights from the wealth of synthesis.

Encyclopedias do not exist to freeze knowledge within the bound pages of a book, like a bug in amber, but to advance knowledge and push it in new directions. “An Encyclopedia should be begun, carried through, and finished within a certain interval,” Diderot insisted. “Our moment passes and hardly will a great [reference] enterprise be completed before our generation exists no longer.” Bret E. Carroll’s encyclopedia synthesizes one generation’s rendering of a new body of knowledge. Because of his labors, what will come afterwards will be all the better.

—Mark C. Carnes
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Introduction

This is an encyclopedia about American masculinities. Its purpose is to provide a reference guide and an introduction to the many ways in which men have defined, imagined, and experienced male identity in the social, cultural, and political contexts of the United States.

A work such as this would have been virtually unimaginable in 1980, when men's studies was only beginning to emerge as a field of scholarly inquiry. It would still have been unfeasible as recently as the early 1990s, when the first book-length history of American masculinity—E. Anthony Rotundo's *American Manhood* (1993)—appeared in the nation's libraries and bookstores. But the study of masculinity, both in and outside the United States, has blossomed and flourished since then, and it has been incorporated increasingly into academic curricula. The publication of *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, intended to serve professional scholars and students alike, is one sign that the field has reached maturity. This work serves as a marker of how the field has developed in the decade since Rotundo's seminal book used the analytical concept of masculinity to open new vistas for exploration and research into American history, society, and culture.

Masculinity Studies and the Encyclopedia: Assumptions and Scope

Scholars in several disciplines—including history, literary studies, anthropology, sociology, religion, and media studies—have cultivated this new field. This encyclopedia has been developed to reflect these diverse foundations, with articles examining men's family lives, work, sexuality, bodies, and behaviors; images of masculinity in literature, film, art, music, television shows, and cultural iconography; social and political ideologies and power structures; controversial issues; the relation between notions of masculinity and historical events, processes, and periods; and group identities in which gender has intersected with race, class, ethnicity, age, religion, and region. The encyclopedia's categories, as listed in the Reader's Guide, are intended to represent the range of exploration in the field as well as to guide users toward those dimensions of American masculinity that most interest them.

The contributors to this volume share the assumption that men's lives have been grounded fundamentally in gender; that is, in their awareness of themselves as males. Their concern is with men not merely as politicians, scientists, intellectuals,

professionals, leaders of social movements, or military officers—the stuff of traditional scholarship—but as *men*. They owe this approach to the women's studies scholars of the 1970s and 1980s, who revealed the importance of gender as a category of social, cultural, and historical analysis. Some view masculinity studies as a threat to women's studies, fearing that it might be a means by which men can remain at the center of scholarly inquiry, and that the study of masculinity will blur, if not eclipse, the study of women. But because constructions of manhood and womanhood are, and have always been, relational—each necessarily being defined with reference to the other—the two fields are very much interrelated and mutually dependent.

The contributors also understand that masculinity is not monolithic and not simply dependent on biological sex. Rather, it is historically, socially, and culturally rooted. It is variable across time, and it is conceptualized and lived in ways that shape and are shaped by men's differing self-perceptions, needs, and aspirations. Nowhere is its variability clearer than in the dynamic and multiform culture of the United States. Nor is understanding masculinity simply a matter of examining the images and masculine types conveyed by popular culture and the media. Such images are certainly influential in U.S. society, which is highly dependent on the media, and they are by no means neglected in this book, but these representations often tell us more about what men are *supposed to be* than about what they actually *are*. This encyclopedia is informed by a sensitivity to the similarities and differences—and to the complex interrelations—between image and reality, prescription and practice.

Although, or perhaps because, this encyclopedia aims to convey the state of the art in gender studies, there is much that it *cannot* do. Since the field of American masculinity studies is continually developing and redeveloping, the encyclopedia necessarily omits topics that have not yet received much scholarly attention. The encyclopedia may also appear to privilege some periods over others, with entries on the Victorian and Progressive eras specifically, but not one on the colonial era. This reflects scholars' conviction that some periods have clearly defining cultural characteristics. Of course, they continue to search for synthetic understandings of other periods or groups whose defining cultural characteristics (if there are any) remain unclear. Finally, limitations of space required selectivity in choosing entry topics. This encyclopedia is not

2 INTRODUCTION

intended to be exhaustive, but rather to convey a sense of the scope of the field.

The encyclopedia, then, is offered to its users as a tool. Each entry offers suggestions for further reading, including academic books and scholarly journal articles, and each directs the user to related entries in the encyclopedia. At the end of the encyclopedia, a comprehensive bibliography provides readers with a list of sources—organized according to important thematic categories in the field—that will provide additional directions for further study. An extensive index offers users an additional means of locating topics of interest. By encapsulating the current state of scholarly interpretation, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* is intended to help students and scholars advance their studies, develop new questions for research, and stimulate new ways of exploring the history of American life.

Masculinity and U.S. History

Perhaps the primary lesson of masculinity studies as applied to U.S. history is that because American history (like all history) has been fundamentally about relations of power (e.g., political, economic, social, cultural), it has also been fundamentally about the social and cultural constructions of gender and masculinity used to support or seek power. In particular, white males of the middle and upper classes virtually monopolized power and public life until well into the twentieth century, and they have continued to dominate them into the early twenty-first. Thus, concepts and experiences of masculinity, infused with related concepts and experiences of race and class, have been at the heart of American life. They are the proverbial elephant in the closet, figuring prominently, but sometimes so obviously as to be overlooked.

White men in power have deployed race- and class-based ideologies and rhetorics of manhood in an attempt to justify their hold on power, to maintain their power, and to address challenges to their power. Since the initial establishment of the United States, this group of men associated American citizenship, patriotism, and even national identity itself with white masculinity, using implicitly and explicitly gendered metaphors to describe these associations. At the same time, in a democratic and increasingly multiracial and multicultural society in which existing power arrangements have continually been contested and reconfigured, masculinity has also been contested and reconfigured. Women and nonwhites have challenged or attempted to claim constructions of (white) masculinity in their efforts to attain power, and white males have responded through defensive reactions couched in terms of perceived threats to their manhood. In short, one may view the sweep of U.S. history

as, in large part, the establishment and ongoing erosion of the power of white men and white masculinity as an initially preindustrial and agrarian American society became modern and industrial, and then postmodern and postindustrial. Viewing U.S. history through the lens of gender and masculinity—while recognizing and examining the elephant in the closet—has yielded new insights into American culture, called our attention to previously overlooked facets of the American experience, and revealed new dimensions of familiar events, movements, and institutions.

The lens of gender and masculinity studies has revealed that the founders of the United States were heirs to a European worldview grounded in an agrarian, preindustrial economy and in patriarchal social arrangements that assigned males the responsibilities and privileges of public and domestic power and consigned women to subordination. Viewing this system as an expression of a divinely ordained natural order, the earliest European colonizers sought to re-establish it in colonial America—and, with only a few exceptions, they largely succeeded. Their notions of masculinity shaped not only gender hierarchies but also racial hierarchies. They concluded from the very different gender arrangements of Amerindian and African peoples that the men of these groups were aberrantly masculine, and thus fit for subjugation. Yet colonizing a new environment forced them to adapt European patriarchy to new patterns and perceptions of land availability, and to the relative absence of European institutional infrastructures. Europeans also brought with them developing political, economic, and religious notions, such as the Protestant emphasis on individual experience, the political ideology of republicanism, and the developing economic system of market capitalism, that eventually transformed the patriarchal social and political order.

The founding of the United States was led by a generation of white male patriot leaders who were both inspired by and fearful of democracy's subversive potential. This dual outlook shaped their conceptions of the new nation's political and social structure, as well as the definitions of manhood upon which they grounded it. Determined to legitimate their own seizure of power and maintain the patriarchal system they deemed essential to order, they confined the exercise of political power to white property-owning males and developed a conception of republican citizenship that privileged the qualities they associated with manhood and whiteness. It is no coincidence that the most well known of the Revolutionary-era patriot organizations called itself the Sons of Liberty, that George Washington quickly became known as the "father of his country," that later generations of Americans would refer to those who established the

nation as “founding fathers,” or that the most prominent personification of the United States became, and remains, the decidedly white male figure of Uncle Sam. At the same time, the American Revolution inspired other men—namely those who did not own property and belonged to what were sometimes called the “lower orders”—to incorporate into their lives different understandings of republicanism and manliness, which helped them press their own claims to power during the political and social upheaval of the Revolutionary period.

Because the American political system developed amid an exaltation of republican manhood and assumed its modern features as the right to vote was being expanded to include all adult white males, it is hardly surprising that ideologies and rhetorics of masculinity became central to American political culture. The presidential election of 1828 set a key pattern of American electioneering. Andrew Jackson was presented to voters as a frontier-dwelling, Indian-fighting, heroic military general with a decided penchant for physical confrontation and defending his wife’s honor. In the elections that followed, every campaign sought to emphasize a candidate’s manliness. Similarly, American political leaders seeking to justify domestic and international applications of their power have historically used the rhetoric of manliness to underscore the presumed moral righteousness, and ostensibly protective purposes, of their policies. Beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and continuing into the twenty-first century, the U.S. government has cast itself in its domestic and foreign policies as a paternal and chivalric protector (often of emasculated dependents) while labeling perceived internal and external enemies as either demasculinized conspirators or as hypermasculine brutes.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, another important pattern emerged: Americans conceptualized in masculine terms the capitalist economic system that was becoming virtually synonymous with national life. This development was hardly surprising, since the national market economy was, like the democratic political system, confined largely to white men. In defining white men alone as possessed of the qualities of self-control, rationality, competitiveness, and ambition necessary to succeed, and thus naturally suited to the amoral roughness of the marketplace, Americans effectively defined the public world of economic exchange as a masculine sphere of activity, and financial success was thus seen as a masculine achievement. In the South, slave-owning southern men grounded their particular brand of capitalist production in an ideology of gender and racial hierarchy that cast white male slave-owners as paternalistic patriarchs presiding over their profitable plantations and enslaved laborers.

Even in the twentieth century, as women and nonwhites increasingly enjoyed access to economic opportunity, many Americans continued to gender the nation’s economic system male—and to color it white. Most Americans remained less likely to think that the rough-and-tumble world of economic competition had become feminized than to think that successful women had become masculinized. Similarly, economically successful nonwhite men have often been assumed to lose their racial or ethnic identities—to become “white.” Like American national identity itself, the so-called American Dream began, and remains, ideologically linked to white masculinity.

The social and cultural use of gender to underwrite male power during the nineteenth century was by no means confined to those areas of life called “public.” In domestic life, too, men assumed and usually sought to monopolize family leadership, typically by appealing to the same ideologies of masculinity that they used to justify their public political and economic power. While the market and industrial revolutions of the nineteenth century undermined the household economy on which patriarchy had rested in the preindustrial United States, these transformations also generated new ideologies of the family that preserved, and even enhanced, male domestic power in the “private” sphere of the home. Older patriarchal practices survived among those groups, such as yeoman farmers and the industrial working class, who resisted or were dislocated by the wrenching social and economic changes of the period. But during the early decades of the nineteenth century an emerging middle class produced a “cult of domesticity,” as well as new and more modern ideals of masculinity (the “breadwinner” and the “family man”), which located the father at the apex of the nuclear family. These ideals eventually spread well beyond the white middle class, and they have retained enormous influence into the twenty-first century.

Although the advent of an urban-industrial society in the nineteenth century benefited white middle-class men, it became clear by midcentury that these men were also troubled by the transformation. They feared that the transition from nature’s rhythms and vigorous physical labor to corporate work environments and urban and suburban living alienated them from important foundations of masculine identity. In response, they developed new ideals intended to accommodate the new order. One of them, which found scientific support in Darwinian biology and in contemporary psychological theories of human development, was an emphasis on strenuous exercise, outdoor activity, martial spirit, and the romantic ruggedness of nature (particularly in the West). The growing identification of manliness with physical strength, virility, and prowess was evident throughout American culture by the late

nineteenth century, and it remained strong throughout the twentieth. Indeed, the cultural premium on masculine toughness found new sustenance during the twentieth century in the growth of leisure time and a consumer economy, and it acquired new impetus and urgency as a result of the nation's rise to global power, the two world wars, the Cold War, and growing threats from domestic and global terrorism.

Other new ideals were intended to empower men for success in the emerging corporate and bureaucratic world. If earlier men had required an inwardly wrought individual "character," men of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries were increasingly advised to cultivate "personality" and external appearance and to practice teamwork in order to achieve success amid increasingly large organizations and bureaucratic chains of command. Manliness in the twentieth century increasingly meant being a "team player," a successful businessman, or an effective salesman. It required men to cultivate a winning manner and to "dress for success" by wearing "power" clothes.

White men in power asserted these new concepts of masculinity with particular urgency, for their power was being increasingly challenged. Waves of immigration—which started in the mid-nineteenth century, accelerated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and resumed after 1965—began to deprive whites of northern and western European descent of their numerical dominance as the nation became more multiracial and multiethnic. Nativist groups appeared in response, casting racial and ethnic "others" as un-American intruders in a white masculine America, and labeling them as either hypersexualized beasts (as in the case of southern Europeans, Jews, or Latinos) or effeminate (as in the case of Asians and, again, Jews). Even those who did not join nativist organizations often accepted these stereotyped images. During the late nineteenth century, in particular, whites of self-proclaimed Anglo-Saxon ancestry, drawing on theories of social Darwinism, anxiously perceived themselves as losing a competitive struggle for survival among the races. These men placed their hopes in the ideals of manly vigor and strenuous living—and in reproduction by racially responsible white couples. Physicians, psychologists, and other cultural authorities agreed that "normal" male sexuality was oriented toward procreation, and any other form was viewed as deviant.

The most direct challenges to the power of white males during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries came from organized groups of women and nonwhite men who—with particular intensity and success during the late twentieth century—were seeking power of their own. Women's rights activists and feminists sought to end the identification of citizenship and economic and professional opportunity with masculinity; civil rights activists and ethnic and racial militants sought to end their identification with *white* masculinity; and gay rights activists sought to end their identification with *heterosexual* masculinity. These groups were supported by white men of the counterculture and political left who were increasingly critical of American political, economic, and social institutions, and thus sought new ways to distribute power in American society. All of these groups sought to redefine the relation between manliness and American life by offering their own visions of manhood.

By the end of the twentieth century, these movements had made considerable headway in creating an American nation that was not for white men only, and not so thoroughly grounded in concepts of masculinity and whiteness. Furthermore, traditional male power was increasingly undermined during the late twentieth century by growing divorce rates, economic circumstances that prompted a growing incidence of dual-income families, and postmodern questioning not only of white male power, but of whether masculinity and whiteness had any objective existence or meaning at all. In response, a growing number of white men defensively asserted in film, television, and talk-show radio what they considered to be traditional American values—that is, those ideas that supported the power of white masculinity—and they turned to conservative political and religious groups, and sometimes to right-wing militia and patriot organizations, in an effort to express and defend these values.

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, then, the meaning of American masculinity—or masculinities—is hotly contested. The masculinity-whiteness-heterosexuality-Americanism complex has eroded, generating a search for new ways to conceptualize the relation between manhood and American life. That search pervades the nation's political and religious life, has infused its popular culture, is powerfully evident in academia, and is at the heart of this encyclopedia.

—Bret E. Carroll