

WOMEN IN CULTURE AND SOCIETY

A series edited by Catharine R. Stimpson

MANLINESS

& CIVILIZATION

**A CULTURAL HISTORY OF GENDER AND
RACE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1880-1917**

GAIL BEDERMAN

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Remaking Manhood through Race and "Civilization"

At 2:30 P.M. on July 4, 1910, in Reno, Nevada, as the band played "All Coons Look Alike to Me," Jack Johnson climbed into the ring to defend his title against Jim Jeffries. Johnson was the first African American world heavyweight boxing champion. Jeffries was a popular white former heavyweight champion who had retired undefeated six years before. Although it promised to be a fine match, more than mere pugilism was at stake. Indeed, the Johnson-Jeffries match was the event of the year. Twenty thousand men from across the nation had traveled to Reno to sit in the broiling desert sun and watch the prizefight. Five hundred journalists had been dispatched to Reno to cover it. Every day during the week before the fight, they had wired between 100,000 and 150,000 words of reportage about it to their home offices. Most had assured their white readership that Jeffries would win. On the day of the fight, American men deserted their families' holiday picnics. All across America, they gathered in ballparks, theaters, and auditoriums to hear the wire services' round-by-round reports of the contest. Over thirty thousand men stood outside the *New York Times* offices straining to hear the results; ten thousand men gathered outside the *Atlanta Constitution*. It was, quite simply, a national sensation.¹

Ever since 1899, when Jeffries first won the heavyweight championship, he had refused to fight any Negro challengers. Jack Johnson first challenged him as early as 1903. Jeffries replied, "When there are no white men left to fight, I will quit the business. . . . I am determined not to take a chance of losing the championship to a negro."² Jeffries' adherence to the color line was not unique. Ever since 1882, when John L. Sullivan had won the title, no white heavyweight champion had fought a black challenger, even though black and white heavyweights had previously competed freely.³ Sullivan had announced he would fight all contenders—except black ones. "I will not fight a negro. I never have and never shall."⁴ It was in this context that Jack

Johnson began his career, and eventually defeated every fighter, black or white, who faced him.

For two years Jeffries refused to fight Johnson, but when Jeffries retired in 1905, the remaining field of white contenders was so poor that the public temporarily lost interest in prizefighting. Finally in 1908, the reigning white champion, Tommy Burns, agreed to fight Johnson. By accepting Johnson's challenge, Burns hoped to raise both interest and prize money. Johnson promptly and decisively thrashed Burns, however, and won the title. Faced with the unthinkable—a black man had been crowned the most powerful man in the world!—interest in pugilism rebounded. The white press clamored for Jeffries to return to the ring. "Jeff must emerge from his alfalfa farm and remove that smile from Johnson's face. Jeff, it's up to you," implored Jack London in the *New York Herald*.⁵ In April 1909, the *Chicago Tribune* printed a drawing of a little blond girl begging the former champion: "Please, Mr. Jeffries, are you going to fight Mr. Johnson?"⁶ Across America, white newspapers pleaded with Jeffries to vindicate Anglo-Saxon manhood and save civilization by vanquishing the upstart "Negro."

Eventually the aging, reluctant Jeffries agreed to fight, reportedly explaining, "I am going into this fight for the sole purpose of proving that a white man is better than a negro."⁷ From its inception, then, the Johnson-Jeffries fight was framed as a contest to see which race had produced the most powerful, virile man. Jeffries was known as the "Hope of the White Race," while Johnson was dubbed the "Negroes' Deliverer."⁸ With few exceptions, predictions of the fight's outcome focused on the relative manliness of the white and the black races. For example, *Current Literature* predicted Jeffries would win because "the black man . . . fights emotionally, whereas the white man can use his brain after twenty rounds."⁹ White men were confident that Jeffries's intrinsic Anglo-Saxon manhood would allow him to prevail over the (allegedly) flightier, more emotional Negro.

Thus, when Johnson trounced Jeffries—and it was a bloody rout—the defenders of white male supremacy were very publicly hoist by their own petards. They had insisted upon framing the fight as a contest to demonstrate which race could produce the superior specimen of virile manhood. Johnson's victory was so lopsided that the answer was unwelcome but unmistakable. After the fight, the black *Chicago Defender* exulted that Johnson was "the first negro to be admitted the best man in the world."¹⁰

The ensuing violence showed what a bitter pill that was for many white American men to swallow. Race riots broke out in every Southern state, as well as in Illinois, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Colorado, and

the District of Columbia. Occasionally, black men attacked white men who were belittling Johnson. In most of the incidents, however, rampaging white men attacked black men who were celebrating Johnson's victory.¹¹ In Manhattan, the *New York Herald* reported, "One negro was rescued by the police from white men who had a rope around his neck. . . . In Eighth Avenue, between Thirty-Seventh and Thirty-Ninth Streets, more than three thousand whites gathered, and all the negroes that appeared were kicked and beaten, some of them into insensibility. . . . Three thousand white men took possession of Eighth Avenue and held against police as they attacked every negro that came into sight."¹² Contemporary reports put the overall national toll at eighteen people dead, hundreds more injured.¹³

Even the United States Congress reacted to the implicit aspersions Johnson's victory cast on white manhood. Before the Johnson-Jeffries fight, Congress had refused even to consider a bill suppressing motion picture films of prizefights. The prospect of the filmic reenactment of the "Negroes' Deliverer" thrashing the "White Hope" in hundreds of movie theaters across the nation was too much for them, however. Within three weeks, a bill suppressing fight films had passed both houses and was soon signed into law.¹⁴

Soon after Johnson won the championship, an even more scandalous public controversy arose: the "Negroes' Deliverer" was making no secret of his taste for the company of white women. White men worried: Did Johnson's success with white women prove him a superior specimen of manhood? The spectacle of dozens of white women in pursuit of Johnson's favor pleased Johnson and infuriated many whites. These women were mostly prostitutes, but racial etiquette held all white women were too "pure" for liaisons with black men.¹⁵ It seemed bad enough that Johnson's first wife was white, although antimiscegenist doomsayers felt smugly vindicated when she committed suicide in 1912.¹⁶ But when authorities discovered Johnson was having an affair with an eighteen-year-old blond from Minnesota, Lucille Cameron, they charged him with violating the Mann Act—that is, with engaging in white slavery. The white American public, north and south, was outraged. In Johnson's hometown, Chicago, a man threw an inkwell at him when he made an appearance at his bank. Effigies of Johnson were hung from trolley and electric poles around the city. Wherever Johnson went he was greeted with cries of "Lynch him! Lynch the nigger!"¹⁷ It didn't matter that Lucille Cameron insisted she was in love with Johnson and soon married him. It made no difference that she turned out to have been an established prostitute, not a seduced virgin. It didn't even matter that no violations of the Mann Act had occurred, and the original charges had to be

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dropped. By winning the heavyweight championship and by flaunting his success with white women, Johnson had crossed the line, and the white public demanded punishment.¹⁸

The national Bureau of Investigation was ordered to conduct a massive search to find *something* to pin on Johnson. After an expensive and exhaustive inquiry, it dredged up some old incidents in which Johnson had crossed state lines with a long time white mistress. Although the government usually invoked the Mann Act only to combat white slavery and commercial prostitution, officials made an exception for Johnson. He was convicted of crossing state lines with his mistress and of giving her money and presents. For most American men, these were perfectly legal activities. Johnson, however, was sentenced to a year in prison and a thousand-dollar fine. Hoping to get rid of him, government employees tacitly encouraged him to jump bail and leave the country, which he did. For the next seven years, all Johnson's efforts to make a bargain and turn himself in were rebuffed. Only in 1920 was Johnson allowed to return to the United States to serve his sentence, an impoverished and greatly humbled former champion.¹⁹ The photograph of him losing his last championship bout to white fighter Jess Willard in Havana in 1915 was a standard feature in white bars and speakeasies for many years thereafter.²⁰

By any standard, white Americans' response to Jack Johnson was excessive. Why should a mere prizefight result in riots and death? What was it about Jack Johnson that inspired the federal government to use the Bureau of Investigation to conduct a vendetta against him? That moved Congress to pass federal legislation to mitigate his impact? That impelled prominent leaders like former President Theodore Roosevelt to condemn him in print?²¹ That caused so many respected Americans to describe Johnson's activities as "a blot on our 20th century American Civilization?"²² That caused American men to celebrate his ultimate defeat in their saloons for decades?

The furor over Jack Johnson was excessive, yet it was not unique. During the decades around the turn of the century, Americans were obsessed with the connection between manhood and racial dominance. This obsession was expressed in a profusion of issues, from debates over lynching, to concern about the white man's imperialistic burden overseas, to discussions of child-rearing. The Jack Johnson controversy, then, was only one of a multitude of ways middle-class Americans found to explain male supremacy in terms of white racial dominance and, conversely, to explain white supremacy in terms of male power.

This book will investigate this turn-of-the-century connection between

manhood and race. It will argue that, between 1890 and 1917, as white middle-class men actively worked to reinforce male power, their race became a factor which was crucial to their gender. In ways which have not been well understood, whiteness was both a palpable fact and a manly ideal for these men. During these years, a variety of social and cultural factors encouraged white middle-class men to develop new explanations of why they, as men, ought to wield power and authority. In this context, we can see that Johnson's championship, as well as his self-consciously flamboyant, sexual public persona, was an intolerable—and intentional—challenge to white Americans' widespread beliefs that male power stemmed from white supremacy. Jack Johnson's racial and sexual challenge so upset the ideology of middle-class manhood that both the white press and the United States government were willing to take extraordinary measures in order to completely and utterly annihilate him.

The Jack Johnson controversy, then, simply exemplifies one of many ways Progressive Era men used ideas about white supremacy to produce a racially based ideology of male power. Hazel Carby has called for "more feminist work that interrogates sexual ideologies for their racial specificity and acknowledges whiteness, not just blackness, as a racial categorization."²³ This study attempts precisely that task.

In order to understand why turn-of-the-century middle-class Americans were so interested in using race to remake manhood, we need to outline a larger historical and analytical context. Thus, the rest of this chapter will consider three points. First, it will consider a question which is not as self-evident as it appears: precisely what do we mean by "manhood," and how do we study its history? Second, it will outline what was happening to middle-class manhood at the turn of the century, and why the middle class believed manhood needed to be remade. Finally, it will introduce a central set of ideas that turn-of-the-century Americans frequently used to tie male power to racial dominance—the discourse of "civilization."

"Manhood": What Is It, and How Does It Work?

What do we mean by manhood? This question is not as simpleminded as it appears. Although most people can easily identify certain human beings as men, manhood has been defined quite differently in different times, places, and contexts.²⁴ Moreover, historians of American manhood have based their analyses on very disparate assumptions about the meaning of manhood,

which has led to confusion and misunderstanding. (I am purposely using the term "manhood" instead of "masculinity" here because, as we will see, the noun "masculinity" was only beginning to be widely adopted by 1890 and had very specific connotations which have been largely forgotten today.)

Many historians have simply assumed that manhood is an unproblematic identity—an unchanging essence—inherent in all male-bodied humans. These historians see manhood as a normal aspect of human nature, transparent and self-evident, which simply needs to be expressed without inhibiting factors like "anxiety." Although they recognize that manhood might be expressed differently at different times, they nonetheless assume that its underlying meaning remains basically the same. Historians using this sort of theoretical approach have tended to write about what men have done, historically, to express their manhood. For example, they have written fine accounts of men's activities in fraternal organizations and in the Boy Scouts. Moreover, these historians, by raising such questions as whether the Progressives experienced a "masculinity crisis," were among the first to identify male gender issues as proper subjects of historical analysis—in itself, a major contribution. However, their approach has the drawback of *assuming* what it ought to *investigate*. What did "masculinity" mean to men in organizations like the Boy Scouts? Why was it so important to them? Why would its presumed loss be painful enough to cause a "crisis"? Does power or authority have anything to do with manhood? By ignoring these historically important questions, this approach leaves the impression that manhood is a transhistorical essence, substantially unchanging over time, rooted in biology, and therefore not amenable to historical analysis—or to human efforts to change gender relations.²⁵

Other historians have seen manhood as a culturally defined collection of traits, attributes, or sex roles. For example, one historian renders the Victorian definition of manhood as a list of adjectives: "a man was self-reliant, strong, resolute, courageous, honest."²⁶ These historians often analyze how the traits or occupations which are seen as masculine change from period to period or class to class. For example, colonial American men were socialized to be strong patriarchal fathers, while nineteenth-century middle-class men were shunted off to a "separate sphere" to be competitive businessmen. By investigating how manhood changes over time, historians using this approach encourage readers to see gender relations as mutable and improvable. Yet this approach, too, has its limitations. Attempting to define manhood as a coherent set of prescriptive ideals, traits, or sex roles obscures the complexities and contradictions of any historical moment. For example, some historians argue that middle-class Progressive manhood was most characterized

by chest-thumping virility, vigorous outdoor athleticism, and fears of feminization. Others disagree, and stress Progressive men's growing interest in erstwhile "feminine" occupations like parenthood and domesticity. Envisioning manhood as a unified set of traits gives us no way to consider the relations between these two coexisting but contradictory aspects of Progressive manhood, nor does it give us a way to understand how men themselves negotiated the contradictions.²⁷

This study is based on the premise that gender—whether manhood or womanhood—is a historical, ideological process.²⁸ Through that process, individuals are positioned and position themselves as men or as women. Thus, I don't see manhood as either an intrinsic essence or a collection of traits, attributes, or sex roles. Manhood—or "masculinity," as it is commonly termed today—is a continual, dynamic process. Through that process, men claim certain kinds of authority, based upon their particular type of bodies. At any time in history, many contradictory ideas about manhood are available to explain what men are, how they ought to behave, and what sorts of powers and authorities they may claim, as men. Part of the way gender functions is to hide these contradictions and to camouflage the fact that gender is dynamic and always changing. Instead, gender is constructed as a fact of nature, and manhood is assumed to be an unchanging, transhistorical essence, consisting of fixed, naturally occurring traits. To study the history of manhood, I would argue, is to unmask this process and study the historical ways different ideologies about manhood develop, change, are combined, amended, contested—and gain the status of "truth."²⁹

To define manhood as an ideological process is not to say that it deals only with intellectuals or ideas. It is, rather, to say that manhood or masculinity is the cultural process whereby concrete individuals are constituted as members of a preexisting social category—as men. The ideological process of gender—whether manhood or womanhood—works through a complex political technology, composed of a variety of institutions, ideas, and daily practices. Combined, these processes produce a set of truths about who an individual is and what he or she can do, based upon his or her body. Individuals are positioned through that process of gender, whether they choose to be or not. Although some individuals may reject certain aspects of their positioning, rare indeed is the person who considers "itself" neither a man nor a woman. And with that positioning as "man" or "woman" inevitably comes a host of other social meanings, expectations, and identities. Individuals have no choice but to act upon these meanings—to accept or reject them, adopt or adapt them—in order to be able to live their lives in human society.

Another way to say this is to define manhood as the process which creates

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"men" by linking male genital anatomy to a male identity, and linking both anatomy and identity to particular arrangements of authority and power. Logically, this is an entirely arbitrary process. Anatomy, identity, and authority have no intrinsic relationship. Only the process of manhood—of the gender system—allows each to stand for the others.

We can see more concretely how this cultural process works by returning to our discussion of Jack Johnson and considering how Johnson's championship was construed by his culture's historically specific way of linking male anatomy, identity, and authority. Late Victorian culture had identified the powerful, large male body of the heavyweight prizefighter (and not the smaller bodies of the middleweight or welterweight) as the epitome of manhood. The heavyweight's male body was so equated with male identity and power that American whites rigidly prevented all men they deemed unable to wield political and social power from asserting any claim to the heavyweight championship. Logically, there was no reason to see a heavyweight fighter's claim to bodily strength as a claim to public power. Yet the metonymic process of turn-of-the-century manhood constructed bodily strength and social authority as identical. Thus, for twenty-seven years African American men, whom whites saw as less manly than themselves, were forbidden to assert any claim to this pugilistic manhood. When Johnson actually won the heavyweight title, white men clamored for Jeffries to ameliorate the situation and restore manhood to what they believed was its proper functioning.

Yet Johnson was not only positioned by these cultural constructs—he also actively used them to position himself. Embittered by years of vainly seeking a title bout, Johnson consciously played upon white Americans' fears of threatened manhood by laying public claim to all three of the metonymic facets of manhood—body, identity, and authority. During his public sparring matches, Johnson actually wrapped his penis in gauze to enhance its size. Clad only in his boxing shorts, he would stroll the ring, flaunting his genital endowments for all to admire, displaying his superior body to demonstrate his superior manhood.³⁰ In his private life, Johnson also took great pleasure in assuming a more conventional middle-class manly identity, sometimes taking on the persona of a successful self-made man. In 1912, he publicly claimed the right to move into an exclusive white suburb until the horrified residents took steps to prevent him.³¹ He also dressed both his beautiful blond wives in jewels and furs and paraded them in front of the press. Johnson, who grew up in Texas, was well aware that throughout the South black men were regularly tortured and lynched for consorting with white women, and that even Northern whites feared that black men lusted

irrepressibly after pure white womanhood. Therefore, he made certain the public could not view his wives as pathetic victims of Negro lust. Instead, he presented his wives as wealthy, respectable women whose husband was successful and manly enough to support them in comfort and luxury.

Johnson was equally insistent upon his masculine right to wield a man's power and authority. He treated minor brushes with the law—his many speeding tickets and automobile violations—contemptuously, as mere inconveniences which he was man enough to ignore.³² In his autobiography,



Fig. 1. An elegantly dressed Jack Johnson strikes a manly pose for a photographer in 1911, the year after he won the world heavyweight championship. Courtesy of Photos and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

he claims (falsely, according to his biographer) to have "mingled . . . with kings and queens; monarchs and rulers of nations have been my associates."³³ On a more sinister note, he physically beat and emotionally maltreated his wives and mistresses, implicitly claiming a man's right to dominate women.³⁴ In short he recognized that dominant white usage prevented him from being treated as the epitome of manhood, as a white heavyweight champion would be treated. Nevertheless he scornfully refused to accept this racial slight. Defiantly, Johnson positioned himself as a real man by laying ostentatious claim to a male body, male identity, and male power.

As Jack Johnson's example suggests, then, gender ideology, although coercive, does not preclude human agency. Numerous ideological strands of gender, class, and race positioned Johnson in a web which he could not entirely escape. He was inescapably a man, a black man, the son of a freed slave brought up in poverty, and so on. Yet although these discourses inescapably defined him, Johnson was able to take advantage of the contradictions within and between these ideologies in order to assert himself as a man and a pro-active historical agent. Recognizing that "Negroes" were considered less than men, he sometimes asserted his manliness in a race-neutral context, as a champion, a self-made man, and a world-famous hero. In other situations, he played upon his blackness, using his champion's body to present himself as an embodiment of highly sexed Negro masculinity. In all these ways, Johnson reinforced his claim to powerful manhood.

In other words, ideologies of gender are not totalizing. Like all ideologies, they are internally contradictory. Because of these internal contradictions, and because ideologies come into conflict with other ideologies, men and women are able to influence the ongoing ideological processes of gender, even though they cannot escape them. Men and women cannot invent completely new formations of gender, but they can adapt old ones. They can combine and recombine them, exploit the contradictions between them, and work to modify them. They can also alter their own position in relation to those ideologies, as Jack Johnson did. Thus, looking at manhood as an ongoing ideological process—instead of as an inherent essence, or a set of traits or sex roles—allows historians to study the ways people have been historical agents of change.³⁵

Class, Gender, and the Impulse to Remake Manhood

Historians have long been aware that turn-of-the-century middle-class men seem to have been unusually interested in—even obsessed with—

manhood. They have spoken of a "virility impulse" among the Progressives, a cult of the "strenuous life," and, most frequently, a "masculinity crisis" among American men, pointing to the popularity of cowboy novels, the craze for hunting and fishing, and the profusion of "he-man" rhetoric.³⁶ Other historians have denied such a "masculinity crisis" existed, correctly noting that despite virile, chest-thumping rhetoric, most middle-class men did not flee to the Western frontier but remained devoted to hearth and home.³⁷

Both positions have merit. Middle-class men were unusually obsessed with manhood at the turn of the century; yet I would hesitate to call this obsession a "crisis." For one thing, there is no evidence that most turn-of-the-century men ever lost confidence in the belief that people with male bodies naturally possessed both a man's identity and a man's right to wield power. They might not have been entirely certain *how* these three factors were related, but few seem to have lost confidence *that* they were related. Moreover, to imply that masculinity was in crisis suggests that manhood is a transhistorical category or fixed essence that has its good moments as well as its bad, rather than an ideological construct which is constantly being remade. Gender, which we have defined as an ongoing ideological process, implies constant contradiction, change, and renegotiation. Thus, change in the gender system—even extensive change—doesn't necessarily imply a "crisis." In any event, by 1890 a number of social, economic, and cultural changes were converging to make the ongoing gender process especially active for the American middle class. These factors were influencing middle-class views of men's bodies, men's identities, and men's access to power.

Class issues underlay many of these changes. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, middle-class power and authority were being challenged in a variety of ways which middle-class men interpreted—plausibly—as a challenge to their manhood. Ever since the middle class had begun to define itself as a class in the early nineteenth century, ideals of gender and of "manliness" had been central to middle-class consciousness.³⁸ Between 1820 and 1860, as increasing numbers of men had begun to earn comfortable livings as entrepreneurs, professionals, and managers, the middle class had begun to differentiate itself from other classes by stressing its gentility and respectability.³⁹ Gender was central to this self-definition, as the middle class celebrated true women as pious, maternal guardians of virtue and domesticity.⁴⁰ True manhood was equally crucial to antebellum middle-class identity. Middle-class parents taught their sons to build a strong, manly "character" as they would build a muscle, through repetitive exercises of control over impulse.⁴¹ The middle class saw this ability to control powerful

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* masculine passions through strong character and a powerful will as a primary source of men's strength and authority over both women and the lower classes. By gaining the manly strength to control himself, a man gained the strength, as well as the duty, to protect and direct those weaker than himself: his wife, his children, or his employees.

The mingled honor, high-mindedness, and strength stemming from this powerful self-mastery were encapsulated in the term "manliness."⁴² Throughout the nineteenth century, ideals of manliness remained central to middle-class male identity. In the context of the market economy's unpredictability, a manly character built on high-minded self-restraint was seen as the rock on which middle-class men could build their fortunes. Middle-class men were awarded (or denied) credit based on others' assessment of the manliness of their characters, and credit raters like Dun and Bradstreet reported on businessmen's honesty, probity, and family life.⁴³ Manly control over impulse also helped the middle class develop their distinctive family practices. Celebrations of manly self-restraint encouraged young men to postpone marriage until they could support a family in proper middle-class style, to work hard and live abstemiously so that they could amass the capital to go into business for themselves.⁴⁴ In short, by the end of the century, a discourse of manliness stressing self-mastery and restraint expressed and shaped middle-class identity.

By the 1890s, however, both "manliness" and middle-class identity seemed to falter, partly because economic changes had rendered earlier ideologies of middle-class manhood less plausible. Middle-class manliness had been created in the context of a small-scale, competitive capitalism which had all but disappeared by 1910. Between 1870 and 1910, the proportion of middle-class men who were self-employed dropped from 67 percent to 37 percent.⁴⁵ At the same time, the rapid expansion of low-level clerical work in stores and offices meant that young men beginning their careers as clerks were unlikely to gain promotion to responsible, well-paid management positions, as their fathers had.⁴⁶ Moreover, between 1873 and 1896, a recurring round of severe economic depressions resulted in tens of thousands of bankruptcies and drove home the reality that even a successful, self-denying small businessman might lose everything, unexpectedly and through no fault of his own. Under these conditions, the sons of the middle class faced the real possibility that traditional sources of male power and status would remain closed to them forever—that they would become failures instead of self-made men.

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unprofitable. No longer would the dream of manly independent entrepreneurship be achievable for most middle-class men. In this context, Victorian codes of manly self-restraint began to seem less relevant. Increasingly, middle-class men were attracted to new ideals—ideals at odds with older codes of manliness.

Concurrent with middle-class men's narrowing career opportunities came new opportunities for commercial leisure. The growth of a consumer culture encouraged many middle-class men, faced with lowered career expectations, to find identity in leisure instead of in work.⁴⁷ Yet codes of manliness dictated they must work hard and become economically independent. The consumer culture's ethos of pleasure and frivolity clashed with ideals of manly self-restraint, further undermining the potency of middle-class manliness.⁴⁸ Economically based changes in middle-class culture were thus eroding the sense of manliness which remained so essential to nineteenth-century men's identity.

At the same time middle-class ideals of manliness were eroding from within, middle-class men's social authority faced an onslaught from without—from working-class men competing with them for control over the masculine arena of politics. During the nineteenth century, electoral politics had been viewed as part of the male sphere, as an exclusively male bailiwick. Indeed, as Paula Baker has shown, partisan politics were seen as a proving ground for male identity. Political campaigns were male rituals celebrating participants' identities both as party members and as men. At the same time, electoral politics dramatized and reinforced men's connection, as men, to the very real power of the government.⁴⁹ Men objected so strenuously to woman suffrage precisely because male power and male identity were both so central to nineteenth-century electoral politics. In this light, immigrant men's contestation for control of city governments can be seen, in a very real sense, as a contestation of manhood. As immigrants wrested political control from middle-class men in one city after another, a very real basis of urban middle-class men's manhood received both symbolic and material blows. Immigrant men's efforts to control urban politics were, in a very real sense, contests of manhood—contests which the immigrants frequently won.⁵⁰

While immigrant working men were challenging middle-class men's manly power to govern the cities, other laboring men were challenging their manly power to control the nation. Beginning with the Great Uprising of 1877, the Gilded Age had seen an abundance of labor unrest. Between 1881 and 1905 there were nearly thirty-seven thousand strikes, often violent, in-

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volving seven million workers—an impressive number in a nation whose total work force in 1900 numbered only twenty-nine million.⁵¹ To many, class war seemed imminent. The strength of socialist and anarchist movements reinforced these fears. Middle-class men worried that they were losing control of the country. The power of manhood, as the middle class understood it, encompassed the power to wield civic authority, to control strife and unrest, and to shape the future of the nation. Middle-class men's inability to fulfill these manly obligations and exercise this manly authority, in the face of challenges by working class and immigrant men, reinforced their focus on manhood.

Immigrant and working-class men were not the only ones challenging middle-class men's claims on public power and authority. Concurrently, the middle-class woman's movement was challenging past constructions of manhood by agitating for woman's advancement. "Advancement," as these New Women understood it, meant granting women access to activities which had previously been reserved for men. Small but increasing numbers of middle-class women were claiming the right to a college education, to become clergymen, social scientists, and physicians, and even to vote. Men reacted passionately by ridiculing these New Women, prophesying that they would make themselves ill and destroy national life, insisting that they were rebelling against nature. As one outraged male clergyman complained, feminists were opposing "the basic facts of womanhood itself. . . . We shall gain nothing in the end by displacing manhood by womanhood or the other way around."⁵² Yet the New Woman did "displace manhood by womanhood," if only because her successes undermined the assumption that education, professional status, and political power required a male body. The woman's movement thus increased the pressure on middle-class men to reformulate manhood.⁵³

These challenges from women, workers, and the changing economy not only affected men's sense of identity and authority, they even affected men's view of the male body. White middle-class men now learned that they were threatened by a newly discovered disease, "neurasthenia." According to doctors, neurasthenia was spreading throughout the middle class, due to the excessive brain work and nervous strain which professionals and businessmen endured as they struggled for success in an increasingly challenging economy.⁵⁴ This discovery of neurasthenia led many to fear that middle-class men as a sex had grown decadent. Working class and immigrant men, with their strikes and their "primitive" customs, seemed to possess a virility and vitality which decadent white middle-class men had lost.

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Not coincidentally, while some doctors were focusing their attention on the neurasthenic male body, other physicians and medical investigators began to pay a great deal of attention to male homosexuals. After the 1880s, medical experts ceased to see homosexuality as a punishable act, and began to see it as an aberrant and deficient male identity, a case of the male body gone wrong through disease or congenital deformity.⁵⁵ Attention to the figure of the homosexual man—newly dubbed the "invert"—was one way to investigate, medicalize, and contain the wider social, cultural, and economic forces that threatened the potency of middle-class manhood.

Although some medical experts were discovering new identities and illnesses which threatened men's bodies, other middle-class men were finding new ways to celebrate men's bodies as healthy, muscular, and powerful.⁵⁶ Even the popular imagery of a perfect male body changed. In the 1860s, the middle class had seen the ideal male body as lean and wiry. By the 1890s, however, an ideal male body required physical bulk and well-defined muscles. A prime example would be Jim Jeffries' heavyweight prizefighter's body.⁵⁷ Middle-class men's new fascination with muscularity allowed strongmen Eugene Sandow and Bernarr McFadden to make fortunes promoting themselves and marketing bodybuilding magazines like *Physical Culture*.⁵⁸ By the 1890s, strenuous exercise and team sports had come to be seen as crucial to the development of powerful manhood. College football had become a national craze; and commentators like Theodore Roosevelt argued that football's ability to foster virility was worth even an occasional death on the playing field.⁵⁹

Between 1880 and 1910, then, middle-class men were especially interested in manhood. Economic changes were undermining Victorian ideals of self-restrained manliness. Working class and immigrant men, as well as middle-class women, were challenging white middle-class men's beliefs that they were the ones who should control the nation's destiny. Medical authorities were warning of the fragility of men's bodies, and athletes like Jim Jeffries, boxing's "White Hope," were providing new models of muscular manhood to emulate. All this activity suggests that men were actively, even enthusiastically, engaging in the process of remaking manhood. Yet although older meanings of manhood were gradually losing their persuasiveness, masculinity was hardly in crisis. Middle-class men were clearly still convinced that manhood was powerful, that it was part of their identity, and that all beings with healthy male bodies had it. Indeed, the passions inspired by Jack Johnson's heavyweight championship and his interracial marriages demonstrate the vitality of the ongoing process of remaking manhood.

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Multiple Strategies to Remake Manhood: Sex, Class, Race, and the Invention of "Masculinity"

Facing a variety of challenges to traditional ways of understanding male bodies, male identities, and male authority, middle-class men adopted a variety of strategies in order to remake manhood. Uncomfortable with the ways their history and culture were positioning them as men, they experimented with a host of cultural materials in order to synthesize a manhood more powerful, more to their liking. In the process, they began to formulate new ideologies of manhood—ideologies not of "manliness" but of "masculinity."

→ Many men tried to revitalize manhood by ~~celebrating all things male~~. Millions joined fraternal orders like the Red Men, the Freemasons, and the Oddfellows.⁶⁰ Others concentrated on making boys into men through organizations like the Boy Scouts and YMCA.⁶¹ Many, as we have already seen, glorified the athletic male body through muscular sports like prizefighting, college football, and bodybuilding.⁶² Some wrote books about old-fashioned manliness, like Senator Albert Beveridge's popular, platitude-filled *The Young Man and the World*.⁶³

→ Other men believed they could revitalize manhood by opposing excessive femininity. Some focused on strong-minded women as the problem, and complained about feminism, coeducation, divorce, and the suffragists.⁶⁴ Others worked to safeguard little boys' masculinity by recruiting more male teachers.⁶⁵ Still others warned that Victorian culture itself was "effeminate" and insisted that men must re-virilize their society. As Henry James had Basil Ransom put it in *The Bostonians* (1886),

The whole generation is womanized; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, nervous, hysterical, chattering canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities. . . . The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is. . . . that is what I want to preserve; or rather. . . . recover; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt!⁶⁶

Conversely, other men, perhaps feeling that women had appropriated too much of the male sphere, worked to take control of erstwhile "feminine" occupations away from women. For example, men began to take a greater in-

terest in fatherhood and to claim an active role in raising their children.⁶⁷ At the same time, the mainline Protestant denominations tried strenuously to "masculinize" the churches through organized activities like the Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911–12, which aimed to find "1,000,000 missing men" to virilize the churches.⁶⁸

Class, too, provided materials to remake manhood. Just as some men were remaking middle-class manhood by appropriating activities which had been deemed feminine, others appropriated activities which had been deemed working-class. Throughout the nineteenth century, many working-class men had embraced a "rough" code of manhood formulated, in part, to resist the respectable, moralistic manliness of the middle class. This rough, working-class masculinity had celebrated institutions and values antithetical to middle-class Victorian manliness—institutions like saloons, music halls and prizefights; values like physical prowess, pugnacity, and sexuality.⁶⁹ Since the 1820s, advocates of this rough working-class manhood had ridiculed middle-class manliness as weak and effeminate, while respectable middle-class men had derided this rough masculine ethos as coarse and backward. By the 1880s, however, as the power of Victorian manliness eroded, many middle-class men began to find this rough working-class masculinity powerfully attractive. In fashionable New York, for example, luxurious "lobster palaces" and Broadway restaurants provided daring middle-class men with a genteel analogue to the working man's saloon.⁷⁰ Boxing and prizefighting, too—long associated with the working class—became fascinating to middle- and upper-class men. Amateur sparring became popular and respectable enough for even YMCAs to offer instruction. By the time Jack Johnson became champion in 1908, many middle-class men had come to accept boxing champions like Jim Jeffries as embodiments of their own sense of manhood.⁷¹

As men worked to remake manhood, they adopted new words which could express their dynamic new understandings of the nature of male power. During the 1890s, they coined the new epithets "sissy," "pussy-foot," "cold feet" and "stuffed shirt" to denote behavior which had once appeared self-possessed and manly but now seemed overcivilized and effeminate.⁷² Indeed, the very word "overcivilized" was coined during these years.⁷³ Most telling, however, was the increasing use of a relatively new noun to describe the essence of admirable manhood. This newly popular noun was "masculinity."

Although historians usually use the terms "manly" and "masculine" interchangeably, as if they were synonymous, the two words carried quite

Take on working-class activities

Football

Whitman

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