

Similarly, though with less emphasis on social activism, participants in the 1960s counterculture sought personal liberation from mainstream institutions in an effort to recover what they considered an authentic, natural masculinity.

Masculinity and individualism remained closely associated during the 1970s. As a turn away from the social activism of the 1960s and a growing cultural emphasis on self-examination and self-realization led the writer Tom Wolfe to dub this period the “me decade,” American men sought to assert their masculinity through attention to personal health and physical fitness. Bodybuilding, once deemed narcissistic, enjoyed a new popularity among men seeking extreme physical forms of self-realization.

Ronald Reagan’s presidency suggested that rugged individualism once again became a primary element of American manliness in the 1980s. Reagan sought to project an image of virile masculinity, an image he consistently associated with personal responsibility, individual initiative, and self-assurance. His probusiness and antiwelfare policies, which appealed particularly to male business leaders and other white men, likewise signaled a return to traditional individualism. That Reagan and his conservative political supporters simultaneously ended feminists’ hope for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1982 suggests that his was a particularly male brand of individualism.

Yet the twentieth century also witnessed a gradual erosion of the traditional association between individualism and (white) masculinity. The growing success of movements advocating the rights of women and nonwhite men meant that white males ceased to maintain their domination of the political and economic worlds, and that others besides white males participated in established American patterns of individualism.

By the late 1980s and 1990s, the traditionally close relation between masculinity and individualism was further challenged by new intellectual trends. Influenced by postmodernism, scholars in gender studies emphasized that gender definitions are socially constructed rather than innately connected to biological sex, and that masculinity thus varies across human societies. In addition, the unified notion of selfhood that had informed the traditional concept of individualism in American culture gave way to a fragmented sense of self that included multiple, and sometimes conflicting, self-identities. With the concepts of both masculinity and individualism called into question, the nature of the relation between them—or whether there was any meaningful relation at all—became unclear. The sense of a fixed, hegemonic model of individualism associated with white men continues to be eroded by a dynamic, diverse model that recognizes differing

individual experiences of masculinity along racial, ethnic, class, and sexual-preference lines.

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#### RELATED ENTRIES

Abolitionism; African-American Manhood; American Revolution; Bodybuilding; Business/Corporate America; Capitalism; Confidence Man; Counterculture; Crockett, Davy; Darwinism; Douglass, Frederick; Great Depression; Market Revolution; Men’s Movements; Men’s Studies; *Organization Man, The*; Postmodernism; Reagan, Ronald; Reform Movements; Republicanism; Self-Made Man; Slave Narratives

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## INDUSTRIALIZATION

The process of industrialization, which began in the United States during the early nineteenth century, had an enormous impact on American constructions of masculinity. It complicated preindustrial notions of manhood based on male patriarchal control over family and household, while also generating new and often class-based definitions of gender. For some segments of the male population, industrialization eroded two critical foundations of preindustrial male patriarchy: It reduced the importance of property ownership and

moved productive, income-generating labor out of the home. In doing so, it opened up opportunities for social and cultural experimentation with definitions of manhood both in and outside the workplace. Men were able to shape these new articulations of masculinity to some extent, but the impact of industrialization on their work and on the economic foundations of their lives also set the parameters for their redefinition of themselves as men.

### **Household Production, Proto-Industrialization, and Patriarchy**

Through the late eighteenth century, most American households were sites of preindustrial production grounded firmly in patriarchal authority, which in turn was a fundamental component of masculine identity. Between 1790 and 1815, however, the nature of both household production and household patriarchy began to shift. Commodity production in the countryside and in urban households intensified as merchants increased investment in domestic markets and the development of manufactures. This early commodity production, or proto-industrialization, actually relied on the patriarchal family unit and its social relations to organize, mobilize, and discipline a spatially dispersed workforce and produce goods for expanding markets. In and around Lynn, Massachusetts, for instance, merchants and artisans began in the 1780s to create a thriving shoe industry based on a “putting out” system in which entrepreneurs supplied raw materials to widely dispersed farm families working out of their own homes. Such forms of household-based commodity production actually reinforced domestic patriarchy, since the father/husband mediated the relation between the income-generating family members and the artisan or merchant who supplied the raw material.

Eventually, however, the success and profitability of this form of household production enabled master artisans, merchants, and shopkeepers to relocate and concentrate work processes into workshops, thus undermining traditional household patriarchy. This process was uneven in its application. In the 1790s, Samuel Slater hired whole family units for his textile mills in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and even purchased land for heads of households to support a combination of industrial labor and subsistence agriculture. He then sought to incorporate household patriarchy and the family as a productive unit, and to channel the social discipline these relations helped to generate into industrial manufacturing. But while the Slater Mills relied on the patriarchal family unit to maintain industrial discipline among its workers, the textile mills at Waltham and Lowell,

Massachusetts, which were built later, involved no similar effort to preserve preindustrial patriarchal relations.

### **The Breadwinner Ideal**

Across class lines, men counteracted the limitations that industrialization imposed on patriarchy by monopolizing income-generating productive labor. Accompanying and justifying this development was a new definition of manhood, that of primary family breadwinner. This concept was grounded in an increasing emphasis on gender difference, and on the notion of men’s unique suitability for the new forms of work generated by industrialization. The breadwinner ideal had a mixed effect on male domestic authority and masculine identity. On the one hand, it made men, their manliness, and their ability to provide economic security for their families dependent on market forces beyond their control. By disrupting the link between men’s work and their households, moreover, it reduced the time that most fathers spent at home, which limited their control over their wives and children. It also rendered them less able to validate themselves by transmitting their skills to a son or apprentice or by steering their sons into their own career paths. Yet at the same time, the male breadwinner actually held a greater share of domestic economic power than had the preindustrial patriarch, and breadwinning reinforced men’s ability to provide for their wives and children.

### **Masculinity and Class**

Industrialization created a new social division between those who owned or managed business establishments (the emergent middle class) and those who worked under these owners and managers as working-class wage earners. Male experiences, and the definitions of masculinity that these generated, varied across this class line. In general, working-class men found that the craft-based skills in which they had traditionally grounded their ideas of manly labor were undermined and increasingly replaced by new technologies. Middle-class men, meanwhile, were able to form new definitions of masculinity around their work, particularly the appropriation and administration of entrepreneurial and organizational prerogatives formerly under the purview of artisans and small-scale producers. Both groups of men formed and expressed new class-based ideals of manhood inside and outside the workplace.

For working-class men, a heightened emphasis on male physical ability enabled them to reassure themselves of their manliness and respond to the pressures of industrialization. Although industrialization would ultimately result in the mechanization and de-skilling of many work tasks, early

industrialization, with its demand for productivity and its comparatively primitive machinery, actually increased the demand for physical strength in such industries as metallurgy, mining, and textiles. In many trades, working-class men expressed their class-based masculinity by asserting their independence, craft skills, and control over the shop floor, thus challenging managerial prerogatives and control of work processes. In trades such as steel, glass blowing, or printing, craft skills remained significant in many aspects of the production process, and craftworkers continued to define their identities as workers and as men around their craft-based autonomy on the shop floor.

Resistance at work represented another such outlet available to working-class men. Labor and crowd action, bread riots, and price riots did not represent a new phenomenon, but in the eighteenth century such social uprisings were community-based rather than work- or class-based, and they also included both men and women. While women workers in such industries as textiles and needlework went on strike just as men did, the nineteenth century witnessed a masculinization of such forms of protest, which were increasingly organized through labor and trade unions that grew out of men's homosocial workplace bonds.

Working-class men also defined and asserted their masculinity off the job. The industrializing city offered a range of boisterous amusements that became key settings for public demonstrations of manliness. Drinking alcohol—a traditional element of artisanal labor, but increasingly stigmatized by middle-class men as incompatible with productive efficiency—became for the new industrial labor force both an important badge of one's physical stamina and a rejection of middle-class morality. Theaters in working-class neighborhoods, where middle-class male patrons were often unwelcome and risked forced removal, served a similar function.

By the late nineteenth century, as advancing mechanization increasingly de-skilled more and more tasks and work processes and undermined craft-based prerogatives at work, working-class men's responses to industrialization began to change. More traditional segments of the working class, inspired by a craft-based ideal of manhood, sought to resurrect artisanal production and a community of producers by organizing the relatively short-lived Knights of Labor organization, which did not survive a series of strikes in 1886. A more accommodationist wing of the labor movement, represented by the American Federation of Labor, accepted the loss of workplace prerogatives and sought better financial compensation of its members to attain the newer breadwinner ideal. This mostly male labor organization paved the way for the

notion of the working man as a consumer that emerged in the twentieth century.

Whereas industrialization imposed more rigid forms of workplace discipline and control over working-class men, it generated outlets for masculine self-expression at work for middle-class men. With the onset of new technologies, administrative and scientific functions (such as engineering, accounting, and chemistry) gained significance in industry around the mid-nineteenth century. As new machinery replaced craft and physical skills, it generated demands for administrative skills and produced an inclination among middle-class men to distinguish between their intellectual labor and what they considered the inferior, and even animalistic, physical labor of working-class men. Middle-class men increasingly defined their masculinity in terms of those qualities that characterized business in industrializing America: rationality, competitiveness, efficiency, and frugality. With the growing bureaucratization of American business that accompanied advancing industrialization later in the nineteenth century, definitions of middle-class manhood expanded to include teamwork, loyalty, and professionalism. Off the job, middle-class men of the nineteenth century cultivated a genteel model of manly deportment that—in conscious distinction from working-class behavioral patterns—embraced temperance, social etiquette, and refinement.

Industrialization also generated new patterns of fathering in the middle class. Whereas working-class fathers had to worry about how they might prepare their sons for the new industrial workplace, middle-class fathers had to provide their offspring with more formal education to enable sons to choose their own career paths. Middle-class men, in particular, measured their manhood through their ability to ensure their sons' upward social mobility, and thereby preserve their families' often tenuous middle-class status. For these men, the role of the breadwinner included the expectation to provide their children with increasing numbers of years of schooling. Their sons, meanwhile, enjoyed greater autonomy than had their preindustrial counterparts in choosing their own careers, and they viewed their freedom in determining their professional life as an expression of their own achievement of manhood.

### Gender Hierarchy in the Industrial Workplace

Industrialization posed a potential threat to the traditional gender hierarchy of preindustrial patriarchy by creating opportunities for women to enter the labor force and achieve economic independence. But in such industries as textiles and needlework, which relied heavily on female workforces, men held supervisory positions, in effect restoring some measure of patriarchal

control. Furthermore, in those industries that tended to rely on women as a cheap labor supply, male workers and middle-class reformers demanded a reduction in working hours for women on the grounds that women either lacked men's physical strength and stamina or were required in their homes as mothers. Working men who supported such laws most probably had the well-being of their daughters and wives in mind, yet their aspiration to the domestic power of the sole breadwinner was probably also a factor. Middle-class men, on the other hand, justified the gender division of labor and their dominance of emerging entrepreneurial, professional, and bureaucratic work not on technological or physical necessity, but on what they considered to be women's lack of capacity for rational thought and self-control. New codes of manliness that emphasized expertise, knowledge, and mental power supported this belief.

### Masculinity and Sexuality in Industrializing America

Industrialization and the accompanying process of urbanization provided one final arena for defining and demonstrating masculinity: sexuality. During the nineteenth century, sex became an increasingly important signifier of manliness (particularly among working-class men) and the age at which men tended to become sexually active dropped from twenty-five to eighteen. No longer able to rely on property as a means of patriarchal control and with work often no longer an integral part of household activities, sex became a last resort for the exercise of patriarchal power among men. As industrialization made the achievement of manhood through work dependent on the shifts in labor markets, and as the acquisition of property became uncertain, men could validate themselves through sexual domination of women. Indeed, antebellum New York City witnessed an increase in rapes and sexual assaults on women. Industrialization made sex available as a compensatory outlet for men in more direct ways as well: Female needle workers, working out of their own homes in New York under abysmal conditions in the 1830s and 1840s, frequently had to resort to casual prostitution to make ends meet.

For middle-class men, meanwhile, sexuality became a new territory for asserting the self-control so crucial to middle-class definitions of manhood. Advice writers such as William Alcott, Sylvester Graham, Augustus Kingsley Gardiner, and John Todd counseled self-restraint in all bodily matters, and especially in all sexual matters. Masturbation, while never encouraged in preindustrial society, was now condemned as wasteful of potentially productive male energy. Sexual activity, contemporary observers advised, was best restricted to procreation only. Middle-class men, then, were admonished to synchronize their

bodies and their bodily conduct with an emerging capitalist regime of accumulation and delayed gratification. As middle-class men emphasized self-restraint and self-control to the point of repressing their libidos, they also linked definitions of manliness to class difference, as working-class men did not follow the same mandates.

### Conclusion

Industrialization affected definitions and cultural constructions of manliness by undermining patriarchal control over the household, cutting the spatial link between work and home, and prompting the formation of new class-based masculinities. Men redefined manliness through the role of the breadwinner, by generating new codes of manliness on the job, and through sexuality. While the separation of masculinity from property ownership and household patriarchy cut across class lines, industrialization also affected men and masculinity in class-specific ways. Middle-class men had more cultural and economic resources at their command to actively generate new articulations of manliness than did working-class men. As a social and cultural construct, American masculinity took new forms as industrialization generated the social and cultural dynamics of a modern society.

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