



PASSIONATE MANHOOD

Introduced into historical analyses of American men and masculinities by E. Anthony Rotundo in 1993, the concept of “passionate manhood” refers to four connected articulations of middle-class manliness: (1) the body, (2) forms of “primitive” masculinity, (3) martial and military virtues, and (4) competition in sports and business. These articulations of manliness emerged after 1850 and became increasingly influential in the 1880s and 1890s.

This shift toward a passionate manhood represented a decisive departure from earlier ideals of manliness. During the late eighteenth century, the American Revolution had generated an ideal of manhood emphasizing moral, social, and political qualities, such as independence, autonomy, virtue, and distrust of hierarchies and inherited status, that were considered conducive to responsible democratic citizenship and public order. After 1850, urbanization, industrialization, the development of a competitive market economy, and, later, the impact of Darwinian biology created a new ideal of manliness emphasizing bodily strength and more passionate, aggressive, and less self-restrained forms of expression—traits that an earlier generation had considered dangerous to the social fabric and the body politic. Whereas antebellum middle-class Americans valued sentimental self-expression, emotional candor, and rational thought as essential qualities of a man, by the late nineteenth century true manhood was increasingly associated with the absence of sentiment and complex feelings, as well as with an aversion to deep, rational thought and reflection. Instead, masculinity became defined in terms of decisive and assertive action unencumbered by grand moral or ethical considerations.

As a part of this shift, men of the latter half of the nineteenth century increasingly expressed their manhood through attention to their physique and physical strength. Even before the Civil War, the body—particularly one’s dress, diet, posture, and gestures—was considered a reflection of one’s character. By the 1880s, however, the emphasis on the body, especially a man’s physical strength, became even more pronounced in gauging manly character. A man who lacked physical stamina or strength was perceived as lacking character and the ability to enforce his decisions. Not coincidentally, it was during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that such bodybuilders as Eugen Sandow and Charles Atlas achieved national prominence. Advocates of

“muscular Christianity,” a late nineteenth-century Protestant movement closely akin to passionate manhood, went so far to argue that physical strength and moral conduct were inseparable.

Critical to this new emphasis was the discovery and positive valuation of the “primitive” in men. After about 1850, American middle-class men became increasingly concerned with the allegedly effeminizing effects of urban, industrial civilization. They therefore sought to revitalize masculinity by attempting to recover a rugged masculine self through boxing and other athletics, outdoor activities (especially in the West, considered a landscape unsullied by eastern “overcivilization”), and strenuous activity in general. Advice to recover a primitive masculine passion and savage energy was directed particularly at men in routine white-collar occupations.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, middle-class American men also began to value military discipline and martial valor. In the 1880s and 1890s, influenced by social Darwinist ideas of “survival of the fittest,” men saw life as a combat-like struggle in which success required self-control and physical strength. Whereas some, such as the philosopher William James, hoped to harness military discipline and valor toward peaceful purposes, others, such as Theodore Roosevelt, felt that war, as a release of passion through violence, would most effectively reinvigorate masculinity. Men who shared Roosevelt’s attitude linked passionate manhood to imperialism, nationalism, whiteness, and a racial theory of Anglo-Saxon superiority and capacity for self-government and discipline. They also strongly supported U.S. involvement in the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Evidenced in the 1880s by mushrooming membership in male fraternal organizations, which were characterized by hierarchical organization and primitive rituals, the embrace of military discipline led men to abandon older republican ideals of manliness that questioned inherited or ascribed status and resisted concentrations of power in the hands of the few. Instead, promoters of military discipline valorized an unquestioning submission to authority and touted the virtues of hierarchical bonds between men. This development involved an incorporation of the individualistic competitive impulses of entrepreneurial manhood into a “team spirit” approach that was considered necessary among men in an increasingly corporatized and bureaucratic society.

Similarly, organized sports were increasingly promoted as an outlet for men’s competitive impulses. To be sure, economic

competition had been an accepted, even an expected and encouraged, aspect of manly behavior since the late eighteenth century—one sanctioned by the economic theories of Adam Smith and the political writings of James Madison. However, after midcentury, competition for its own sake became a pervasive principle directing all aspects of men's lives in U.S. society, generating among men an obsession with competitive sports. Team sports enabled men, whether participants or spectators, to balance new demands for disciplined conduct and submission of the individual to the collective will with a culturally inscribed mandate of personal competitiveness. Games such as baseball, football, basketball, and volleyball promised to build character, develop military virtues, and foster self-control, while also enabling men to act passionately through aggressive competition.

Passionate manhood meshed well with such fundamental changes in the late nineteenth-century United States as urbanization, the growth of modern bureaucratic and administrative apparatuses, and the shift from entrepreneurial to corporate capitalism (with its emphasis on professional hierarchies, routinized career paths, and a division of labor). These developments destabilized older foundations of manliness and required new articulations of masculinity that would socialize men into a changing social and political matrix. The emphasis on bodily strength and male passions encouraged forms of behavior that earlier men might have considered antisocial, but passionate manhood adapted men and masculinity to a new world of depersonalized and dispersed authority.

Passionate manhood continues to influence cultural definitions of masculinity in contemporary U.S. society. Although no longer limited to men, this influence is evident in such body-centered leisure activities as mountain climbing and bicycling, as well as in the ongoing appeal of aggressive athletic competition. It is further reflected in Americans' consistent admiration of assertiveness and resolute action, particularly in their presidents. Finally, passionate manhood has been exemplified most recently in the mythopoetic men's movement and, more generally, in the persistent appeal of achieving contact with a more true and pure inner self.

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RELATED ENTRIES

Atlas, Charles; Baseball; Body; Bodybuilding; Boxing; Boy Scouts of America; Bureaucratization; Character; Crisis of Masculinity; Darwinism; Football; Fraternal Organizations; Gilded Age; Gulick, Luther; Hall, Granville Stanley; Imperialism; Individualism; James, William; Middle-Class Manhood; Militarism; Muscular Christianity; Nationalism; Outdoorsmen; Progressive Era; Republicanism; Spanish-American War; Sports; Strenuous Life; Violence; War; Western Frontier
—Thomas Winter

PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy—the governance of the household and its members by the male *paterfamilias* (father of the family), and the social relations this arrangement entails—has empowered men in both private and public life and defined male gender identity throughout U.S. history. A male-governed household has often been perceived as a model of good public order. Patriarchy,