

when women, driven by economic necessity and the impact of feminism, entered the job market. This symbolic emasculation of American men can be found in releases from *The River* (1980), *Nebraska* (1982), and *Born in the U.S.A.* (1984).

Springsteen's most characteristic themes are working-class populism, male bonding, and the will to overcome difficulties. These themes overlapped with, and sometimes reinforced, the resurgent conservatism of the 1980s. His antiwar song "Born in the U.S.A.," for example, was reinterpreted (or misinterpreted) by the public as a nationalist anthem, and President Ronald Reagan hailed him as an example of the self-made individual that Reagan's administration supported. Springsteen's masculine image in his performances also coincided with the conservative religious belief that gender differences are "divinely ordered." Yet Springsteen himself resisted such conservative constructions, and instead expressed an emergent "sensitive male" ideal that embraced pacifism and accepted homosexuality. For example, he kissed E-Street band saxophone player Clarence Clemmons onstage and added an antimilitaristic introduction to Edwin Starr's "War" on his recording *Live 1975–1985* (1986)—but these actions received much less public notice.

After the mid-1980s, Springsteen's liberal attitudes on race, ethnicity, and sexuality became increasingly central to his work. Nonwhite and non-English-speaking workers ("American Skin," on *New York City Live*, 2001), gay men ("My Lover Man," on *Tracks*, 1998), and poor working women ("Spare Parts," on *Tunnel of Love*, 1987) became his protagonists, replacing the unemployed or class-resentful males who had once been his focus of attention.

Masculinity is thus an important marker of social relations in all of Bruce Springsteen's music, though in a far more subdued form in his work in the 1980s and 1990s. The changing archetypes of men featured in his songs reflect changing perceptions of gender in America throughout the last quarter of the twentieth century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Garman, Bryan K. *A Race of Singers: Whitman's Working-Class Hero from Guthrie to Springsteen*. Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2000.

FURTHER READING

Alterman, Eric. *It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive: The Promise of Bruce Springsteen*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1999.

Cullen, Jim. *Born in the USA: Bruce Springsteen and the American Tradition*. New York: Harper Collins, 1997.

Lipsitz, George. *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

Mackey-Kallis, Susan, and Ian McDermott. "Bruce Springsteen, Ronald Reagan, and the American Dream." *Popular Music and Society* 16, no. 4 (1992).

Scheurer, Timothy E. *Born in the U.S.A.: The Myth of America in Popular Music from Colonial Times to the Present*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.

Shelvin, David, Janet Zandy, and Larry Smith, eds. *Writing Work: Writers on Working-Class Writing*. Huron, Ohio: Bottom Dog Press, 1999.

RELATED ENTRIES

American Dream; Antiwar Movement; *Grapes of Wrath, The*; Heroism; Heterosexuality; Homosexuality; Individualism; Labor Movement and Unions; Male Friendship; Nationalism; Patriotism; Race; Rambo; Reagan, Ronald; Self-Made Man; Sensitive Male; Vietnam War; Working-Class Manhood

—Juan José Cruz

STRENUOUS LIFE

Emerging out of the historical context of western expansion in the 1840s, the ideal of a "strenuous life" was initially articulated in opposition to the humanitarian idealism of antebellum reform movements. In the aftermath of the Civil War, this ideal—emphasizing duty, military valor, and perseverance in overcoming obstacles—came to shape middle-class masculinity in U.S. society. By the late nineteenth century, contemporaries agreed on key masculine virtues, though they tended to disagree on the exact form and outlets that the strenuous life should take.

The concept had its origin in the social thought of the historian and naturalist Francis Parkman. A scion of Boston's upper class, Parkman and others of his class resented what seemed an erosion of status barriers and an increase in social and political egalitarianism in Jacksonian America. Parkman particularly scorned the political softness and sentimentalism of antebellum reform movements that, heavily influenced by women, advocated gender and racial equality and the admission of lower-class white men to the political process. Parkman felt that upper-class white men could retain their power and influence in U.S. society only by adopting a new ideal of manliness. Traveling to the Oregon territory in 1846—a journey he subsequently chronicled in *The Oregon Trail* (1847)—Parkman believed he found this model of manliness in the example of the frontiersman, who possessed endurance, physical courage, and social usefulness in blazing trails for civilization to follow.

Parkman's ideals failed to spark interest until the Civil War united men around a national crisis. The realities of combat

convinced many Northern men who volunteered for military service that war had less to do with moral ideals and humanitarian commitments than with duty and perseverance. Even the transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) began to perceive war as a manifestation of men's vigor and the nation's vitality, extending his concept of self-reliance from its original meaning of manly intellectual independence to include duty and service in a larger cause.

After the war, the ideal of the strenuous life—temporarily shorn of Parkman's emphasis on physical endurance—became a middle-class social ideal, defining manhood in terms of an active and socially useful life. For a post-Civil War generation of middle- and upper-class men, public service in peacetime required self-discipline and the ability to overcome obstacles, just as military service in wartime did. By the 1880s, however, as growing numbers of Americans embraced imperialist foreign policy goals and perceived the world in terms of a Darwinian struggle for racial and national survival, this ideal regained its earlier focus on physical strife, as well as a heightened emphasis on military valor among men. On April 10, 1899, Theodore Roosevelt exhorted his all-male audience at Chicago's elite Hamilton Club to embrace a strenuous life conceived in these terms. What had been a prescription for the restoration of upper-class male hegemony in the days of Parkman became a doctrine of masculine, national, and Anglo-Saxon racial superiority.

Not all contemporaries agreed with this interpretation of the strenuous life. The Harvard philosopher and anti-imperialist William James was a particularly prominent spokesman for an alternative understanding of strenuous living. James agreed that American men—especially young men—required discipline and a higher cause to direct their energies toward, but his reading of the strenuous life involved moral and intellectual, rather than physical and military, exertion. In "The Moral Equivalent of War" (1910), James suggested that the strenuous discipline and martial valor used to fight wars could be pragmatically applied to the solving of social and ethical problems.

For several reasons, the ideal of a strenuous life faded in the aftermath of World War I. First, the war, and particularly its results, was somewhat unpopular among the American public, and therefore was unable to serve to unite Americans behind a cause, suggesting that victory and defeat on the battlefield were viewed as being decided more by mutual attrition than by individual military valor and discipline. Second, the isolationist mood of the 1920s and early 1930s proved inhospitable to an ideal of masculinity grounded in valorization of war and notions of imperialist exploit. Lastly, the burgeoning consumer culture of the 1920s provided new outlets and opportunities for men to establish their manliness. James's version of the

strenuous life, however, which stressed a moral dimension, persisted in the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps, which put unemployed youth to work in conserving natural resources. This ideal was also revived in John F. Kennedy's Peace Corps in the 1960s, and in increasing calls toward the close of the twentieth century for men to participate in national service.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Fredrickson, George M. *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union*. New York: Harper & Row, 1965.
- Gorn, Elliott J. *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Townsend, Kim. *Manhood at Harvard: William James and Others*. New York: Norton, 1996.

FURTHER READING

- Budd, Michael Anton. *The Sculpture Machine: Physical Culture and Body Politics in the Age of Empire*. New York: New York University Press, 1997.
- Hoganson, Kristin. *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American War*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Kasson, John F. *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2001.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996.
- Putney, Clifford Wallace. *Muscular Christianity: Sports in Protestant America, 1880–1930*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Roberts, Gerald Franklin. "The Strenuous Life: The Cult of Manliness in the Era of Theodore Roosevelt." Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1970.
- Rotundo, E. Anthony. *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1993.

RELATED ENTRIES

Body; Capitalism; Civil War; Crisis of Masculinity; Darwinism; Democratic Manhood; Gilded Age; Imperialism; James, William; London, Jack; Middle-Class Manhood; Muscular Christianity; Nationalism; Passionate Manhood; Progressive Era; Roosevelt, Theodore; Spanish-American War; Sports; Tarzan; Victorian Era; War; Western Frontier; Whiteness

—Thomas Winter