

During the 1960s, the Vietnam conflict challenged ideas of American military power while political and social movements, such as the civil rights and feminist movements, questioned white men's dominance in American life and undermined confidence in American national unity. As traditional associations of national identity with masculinity, whiteness, and military strength became increasingly archaic, the image of Uncle Sam faded from prominence.

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RELATED ENTRIES

Artisan; Body; Citizenship; Civil War; Crisis of Masculinity; Heroism; Lincoln, Abraham; Middle-Class Manhood; Militarism; Nationalism; Patriotism; Politics; Republicanism; Vietnam War; War; Whiteness; World War I

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URBANIZATION

Urbanization has changed constructions of manliness in U.S. society since the 1830s, when the nation experienced its first surge of urban expansion. Urbanization (the growth of cities and the built environment) has affected codes of manliness in a variety of ways. Coinciding with processes of economic expansion, such as the market revolution, industrialization, and the emergence of a mass consumer society, as well as a relaxation of traditional communal mores, urbanization has expanded opportunities for articulating and enacting manliness and male sexuality. In addition, the replacement of open space with a built environment can be seen as an expression of

male domination of nature. In short, urbanization and articulations of manliness have significantly influenced one another over the course of U.S. history.

Manhood in Pre-Urban America

In the small, rural, farm-based communities of colonial America, face-to-face relations, patterns of deference, strict communal controls, and sanctions on individual conduct regulated social life. Seaport cities, such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, were only a fraction of the size of their European counterparts. In this social and demographic context, manliness was defined largely within an agrarian frame of reference. Commentators and politicians such as J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and Thomas Jefferson praised the ideal of the yeoman farmer—the independent, self-sufficient farmer and domestic patriarch—as the basis of civic society and the highest ideal to which a man could aspire. Mistrusting the city as a threat to manly virtue, they hoped America would remain an agrarian society of independent producers.

Still, urban-bound definitions of manliness began to appear in the late eighteenth century. Jefferson himself praised the artisan as the farmer's urban counterpart, and Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*, written between 1771 and 1789, presented the reader with an urban, rational ideal of manhood propelled by disciplines of time, capitalist accumulation, and credit. Urban-centered articulations of manliness became much more salient in the nineteenth century.

Urban Masculinity in Antebellum America

After 1815, urbanization drew increasing numbers of young men from the countryside into the nation's burgeoning cities. This migration, abetted by surging immigration after 1840, eroded previous forms of social control through family, community, and church. This process had an ambivalent impact on the men inhabiting these new urban environments. Among the emerging middle class, growing cities, as sites of commerce and manufacture, promoted codes of manliness rooted in individual autonomy, self-control, entrepreneurial activity, and economic performance.

At the same time, urbanization encouraged the emergence of less genteel, more hedonistic, and sometimes violent definitions and practices of manliness by offering an expanding range of leisure activities, fostering the growth of an industrial working class, and providing spaces for self-expression. Urban entrepreneurship itself produced the frighteningly hedonistic masculine type of the confidence man. The confidence man took advantage of other, often transient, young men, gaining their trust and luring them into the

emerging urban subculture of theaters, brothels, and gambling dens. Meanwhile, urban working-class men seeking to compensate for economic marginalization and other alienating aspects of industrial work formed subcultures consisting largely of single white men working in urban factories or as clerks in expanding merchant businesses. These men were fiercely egalitarian in their politics, belligerent in defending the equality of white men, and openly scornful of urban middle-class gentility. They also asserted their masculinity by claiming the right to control and coerce women, invading African-American neighborhoods, and reveling in their assaults on prostitutes and blacks. Many young white men articulated such codes of manliness by forming and joining youth gangs, such as New York's Bowery B'hoys. These codes of masculinity have remained an intricate part of urbanization and city life into the early twenty-first century.

The working-class and hedonistic models of masculinity generated by urbanization prompted anxious concern among many middle-class Americans, who feared that the absence of traditional moral restraints on male conduct in cities threatened to produce social chaos. They responded through various efforts to control and discipline such models of manliness. First, cities increasingly formed organized police forces—voluntary at first, then paid—to monitor and curtail male behaviors deemed dangerous to society. The police patrolman, mediating between rough male urban groups and legal standards of normative manhood, in turn became another new urban masculine type. Moral reform represented another attempt to define and enforce standards of manly conduct. Spearheaded by an evangelically inclined emergent middle class and usually aimed at the working class, moral reformers included temperance organizations, bible and tract societies, and antiprostitution groups, all of which began organizing in the 1820s.

Urban Masculinities in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Male urban subcultures further proliferated after 1880 as migration from rural areas intensified. At the same time, a new wave of immigration brought millions of men from southern and eastern Europe to the nation's cities, a "great migration" brought millions of African-American men from the South to northern urban centers, and improvements in transportation enhanced cities' significance as places of work and commerce. These men—arriving from other settings, settling in already crowded cities that lacked infrastructure appropriate for integrating them, and acculturating to varying degrees to urban industrial life—formed masculinities

grounded in their work and business habits and in the holidays, festivals, and honor- and community-bound codes of manliness they brought from their previous cultural environments. Thus, urbanization produced a growing diversity of ethnically and racially defined American masculinities.

In addition to fostering racially and ethnically defined male subcultures, urbanization encouraged new patterns of male sexuality. Relatively free from strictures of community, family, and church, migrants and immigrants experimented with their own sexuality. By the 1880s, cities witnessed the rise of male homosexual communities, which offered gay men support, a means to express their sexuality and their preference for male partners, and a space in which to develop models of masculinity grounded in homosexuality. Heterosexual men, too, found the city, with its entertainments, brothels, and theater district, to be a place of experimentation with sexuality and sexual promiscuity free from communal surveillance. Late-nineteenth-century urbanization was the golden age of the bachelor, who could, if he had the discretionary income, choose from a wide range of activities and negotiate definitions of manhood through them.

Accompanying late-nineteenth-century urbanization was the large-scale organization of such sports as baseball and football. Organized sports served an important function in the urban setting by providing controlled settings in which men both expressed and channeled such potentially dangerous behaviors as competitiveness, aggressiveness, and hedonism. Most participants were spectators who found in the shared experience of spectatorship new sources of urban masculine identity grounded in friendship, camaraderie, pride in one's city or neighborhood, and a sense of ethnic, racial, or class solidarity. As commercial displays of male competition, organized sports constituted a form of consumption that served to appropriate unruly masculine impulses.

Attempts to control proliferating urban male subcultures produced new, distinct, and powerful masculine types. One was the political "boss," who assumed patriarchal control over large numbers of urban men by providing services, assistance, and jobs in exchange for loyalty, support, and votes. Another was the urban philanthropist, described by the historian Kathleen McCarthy as a "masculine civic steward" (McCarthy, 53). While there were important women who contributed to a variety of philanthropic causes, most philanthropists were men who established their manliness by influencing a sprawling urban society and culture through their support of such institutions as theaters, museums, and moral-reform societies. A third urban male type was the city planner, who, believing that the chaos and artificiality of the city could have a negative

influence on human behavior, sought to master the urban environment, order the conduct of those living in it, and express his professional expertise through rational arrangement and the addition of “natural” features. Frederick Law Olmstead, for example, designed for the city of Boston a system of lakes and parks surrounding the core city in the late nineteenth century.

There were also more broadly based institutional efforts to mold urban society by offering male migrants and immigrants prescriptions of manliness conducive to middle-class perceptions of good public morale and civic order. One such urban institution, aimed specifically at men, was the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). First established in the United States in 1851, and initially targeting native-born middle-class men, the YMCA began in the 1870s to approach railroad workers (especially in urban areas) as well as urban industrial workers (both native- and foreign-born) and African-American migrants. The YMCA sought to regenerate urban society and shape urban manhood by offering programs and activities of moral uplift and an ideal of manliness grounded in service, piety, cleanliness, temperance, and middle-class respectability.

Another such institution was the settlement house. Established by middle-class reformers in several American cities during the late nineteenth century, settlement houses sought to replace ethnic- and working-class-based codes of masculinity (often grounded in loyalty to a group) with codes grounded in individual autonomy and self-restraint. By the early twentieth century, Progressive reformers targeted urban bosses and the political machines through which they controlled city politics, seeking to replace their arbitrary power with forms of masculine civic administration grounded in bureaucratic rationality and professional expertise. Other Progressive reform efforts aimed to improve public health, targeting, in particular, bachelors who patronized prostitutes—and thus threatened to spread sexually transmitted diseases.

Both new opportunities for leisure and consumption and the attempt to shape to urban society generated what may be the most urban of male archetypes: the male flaneur, who asserted his masculine authority by scrutinizing and assessing public life. With urbanization came boulevards, parks, cafes, beer gardens, and department stores, all spaces for the flaneur’s masculine gaze and his consumption of urban life. This figure could be a reformer who investigated urban vice districts and published his reports for an expanding urban readership, a journalist uncovering crime and corruption in municipal governments, or merely the man-about-town who enjoyed urban scenes and sights.

Urban Masculinities in the United States since 1945

Most American cities and urban masculinities were strongly affected after World War II by suburbanization, which separated where men lived from where they worked and made leisure activities, entertainment, and retail stores increasingly available to them outside of urban settings. The many middle-class and working-class men who relocated from urban residences to suburbia developed new ideals of manliness apart from city life, while continuing to view cities as places of concentrated entertainment and leisure activity.

Those poorer urban men unable to join the flight to suburbia continued to participate in male urban subcultures and street gangs, whose rough qualities were intensified by the abandonment and collapse of the inner city. The aftermath of 1960s urban race riots, mostly associated with African-American males between eighteen and twenty-four years of age, combined with deindustrialization in the 1970s and 1980s and the continuing relocation of businesses to the suburban fringe, produced an image of socially scarred inner cities. Yet the inner city with its central business district remains a powerful site for the enactment of bureaucratic and corporate articulations of masculinity in government and business. Urban nonwhite men, however, having experienced a paucity of meaningful work and career opportunities, have cultivated a countercultural masculine style that has often been expressed through gang activity and various forms of popular music, such as rap and hip-hop. These subcultures reflect anger, social and economic problems, and the specific issues of inner city life, while also celebrating libidinal and consumer excess.

Conclusion

Throughout U.S. history, urbanization has enabled men to live and choose from a widening range of definitions of manliness. Yet the proliferation of urban masculinities has raised concerns about moral order in American life almost from the time urbanization began. The recent growth of gang activity and intensifying middle-class anxieties about the perceived dangers of urban male behavior suggest that the historical tension between the proliferation of urban masculine identities and the maintenance of social order persists.

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RELATED ENTRIES

African-American Manhood; Confidence Man; Democratic Manhood; Gangs; Heterosexuality; Homosexuality; Immigration; Individualism; Industrialization; Middle-Class Manhood; Prostitution; Sexual Revolution; Suburbia; Temperance; Working-Class Manhood; Young Men's Christian Association

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