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RELATED ENTRIES

Alcohol; Arthur, Timothy Shay; Breadwinner Role; Cult of Domesticity; Fraternal Organizations; Industrialization; Middle-Class Manhood; Patriarchy; Progressive Era; Reform Movements; Self-Control; Suffragism; Victorian Era; Work; Working-Class Manhood

—*Elaine Frantz Parsons*

THOREAU, HENRY DAVID

1817–1862

Philosopher and Author

Henry David Thoreau shared with Ralph Waldo Emerson and other transcendentalists an ideal of manhood grounded in scholarly activity, self-awareness, and self-reliance. More radical in his advocacy of dissent, Thoreau espoused an environmentally conscious definition of manhood that encompassed, at least in part, the tenets of capitalism. Whereas Emerson initially eschewed market capitalism, only to embrace it wholeheartedly after 1860, Thoreau accepted market exchange, but rejected the exploitation of both labor and nature.

Thoreau graduated from Harvard in 1837, and then returned to his native Concord, Massachusetts, to take a position as a teacher in the town's public school. During the 1840s, he observed that the market revolution was undermining Concord's identity as a small fishing village. The town experienced firsthand the selective forces of capitalism when, in

1843, the opening of the Boston & Fitchburg Railroad reduced traffic along the Middlesex Canal (which served the town) and forced the filling in of a section of nearby Walden Pond.

Thoreau responded to these changes in 1854 by moving to Walden Pond, where he tried to realize an agrarian ideal of manliness that valued productive labor as the true basis of wealth. While he accepted market exchange and economic gain, he also saw nature as an aesthetic, sensual, and invigorating antidote to industrial civilization. He sought, not seclusion, but a critical juncture between nature and industrial change where he could live a life embedded in social patterns of obligation, exchange, and communal reciprocity. For instance, Thoreau partially built his cabin himself, while part of it was contracted out, and he worked in a variety of jobs to make ends meet, as well as planting vegetables for sale and consumption. Thoreau did not resist market capitalism, but he sought to explore the conditions of subsistence during a time of rapid change.

In *Walden* (1854), the literary product of this sojourn, Thoreau added a spiritual dimension to this masculine ideal, conceiving of manhood as a transcendental awareness of the inner self as discovered through nature. His naturalist and travel writings, such as *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), *Cape Cod* (1855) and "Walking" (1862), reflect his belief that an excursion into nature is a journey into the self.

Thoreau's understanding of manliness also emphasized an unwavering commitment to the principles discovered in the inner self—both as the root of moral action and civic consciousness and as the only acceptable foundation for political society. This understanding of individual autonomy led him, in 1848, to oppose the Mexican-American War by refusing to pay his poll tax (for which he spent a night in jail) and to write "Resistance to Civil Government" (1849; now known by the title "Civil Disobedience"), in which he elevated the authority of the conscience over that of the state.

Like other transcendentalists, Thoreau supported the abolitionist movement. In 1859, he spoke out in support of what he considered the moral heroism of John Brown, who had been sentenced to death for leading an attack on the Harpers Ferry Armory and attempting to incite a slave rebellion.

Thoreau's commitment to individual integrity, the environment, abolitionism, and women's political equality helped to lay the foundations for a democratic, tolerant, and nonsexist concept of manhood that remains influential. Environmentalists, leaders of the 1960s counterculture, Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg, and African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr., have cited Thoreau as an influence and as a model of firm moral commitment.

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RELATED ENTRIES

Agrarianism; Beat Movement; Capitalism; Counterculture; Emerson, Ralph Waldo; Individualism; Kerouac, Jack; Market Revolution; Middle-Class Manhood; Reform Movements; Religion and Spirituality; Self-Control; Self-Made Man; Travel Narratives; Victorian Era

—Thomas Winter

TRANSSEXUALITY

Transsexuality, in which members of one biological sex assume the identity of the other, existed before there was a

word for the phenomenon. Transsexuality emerged as a separate identity during the mid-twentieth century when practitioners of medicine and psychology, who had sought to define gender and sexual identities since the late nineteenth century, began to distinguish it from homosexuality (sexual attraction to the same sex) and transvestism (wearing the clothing of the opposite sex). Typically, doctors and psychologists, seeking to maintain gender norms they considered necessary to social order, defined these identities negatively, contrasting with what they considered a normative heterosexual masculinity. The history of transsexuality has therefore been closely intertwined with that of masculinity in American culture.

Transsexuality in Western society has been defined with reference to a sharp gender dichotomy: An individual is understood as either male or female, and a transsexual is one who moves from one to the other of these identities. Yet the earliest Americans, like many other non-Western societies, recognized more than two sexes. In many indigenous American cultures, for example, transsexuality as such does not exist, and individuals regarded as neither "masculine" nor "feminine" are not considered aberrant. At one time, many Native American cultures acknowledged not simply two genders, but also an additional, third gender that anthropologists often refer to as *berdache*. Such persons, far from being considered abnormal, enjoyed enhanced status. Among the Cheyenne, berdaches served as medicine people. Navajo berdaches were holy people who acted as mediators in community disputes, and among the Crow they were tribal historians. Among Euro-Americans, however, the same bigendered social system that created gender inequalities privileging men and masculinity over women and femininity has also led to a stigmatization of those who, like transsexuals, challenge that system, and are thus perceived as a threat to masculinity and male power.

The growth of medical technology in the twentieth century allowed individuals in the United States to express their identities through a change of anatomical structure. The earliest cases of sex reassignment surgery (SRS) occurred in Scandinavia, and the first known transsexual in the United States, Christine Jorgenson, had to travel there for SRS in 1952. The combination of media attention and the conservative cultural climate of Cold War America—where fear of communism often intertwined with fears of perceived sexual deviance and a self-conscious defense of patriarchal nuclear-family structures—prevented Jorgensen from successfully reintegrating into society. But Jorgensen's high profile did increase Americans' awareness of the difference between transsexuality and transvestism, prompting hospitals in the United States to begin offering SRS, at least to men. Women