

Growing public acceptance of homosexuality became apparent during the 1992 presidential campaign, when Democratic candidate Bill Clinton pledged to remove the ban on gays in the military. Many gay rights advocates supported him in the hope that he would use his executive power to abolish the ban. Clinton's position aroused public opposition from such figures as Colin Powell, who was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time, and Republican senators Bob Dole and Strom Thurmond. Intense public debate over the issue led the Clinton administration to adopt the compromise measure popularly known as the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, which was drafted by Secretary of Defense Les Aspin in July 1993 and signed into law by President Clinton in November of that year. This policy prevented the military from questioning people about their sexuality, thus extending the rights of gay men to serve in the military without harassment, while instructing military personnel not to discuss their homosexuality with their employer, thus perpetuating their forced secretiveness.

Activity on the issue of gays in the military decreased in the late 1990s, and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy remained in effect into the early twenty-first century. Despite a high-profile court victory by Colonel Greta Cammermeyer, the highest-ranking U.S. military officer to challenge the policy, the military's stance on gays in the military remains a hostile one. Between March 1995 and February 1996, the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network documented 363 violations of the policy in which military personnel openly admitted that they were gay. This demonstrated that military leaders were resistant to implementing it by discharging these individuals. During periods of military conflict, the military has feigned ignorance about gays in uniform in order to keep as many soldiers available as possible. Although the military, by lifting the outright ban on gays, hinted at its ability to initiate a re-examination of gender expectations and be a chief social agent of change in contemporary society, it has remained bound by traditional definitions of masculinity in the United States.

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#### RELATED ENTRIES

American Revolution; Civil War; Heroism; Homosexuality; Male Friendship; Militarism; Military; Patriotism; Rambo; Sexual Harassment; Vietnam War; Violence; War; Whitman, Walt; World War I; World War II

—Michelle L. Robertson

## GILDED AGE

The Gilded Age (1873–1900) takes its name from the title of an 1873 novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner. The social transformations that prompted Twain and Warner to

characterize this period as materialistic, shallow, and corrupt also affected definitions of manliness. Amid the increasing pace and growing scale of urban industrial life, the Gilded Age witnessed the emergence of corporate and bureaucratic structures, new technologies, new forms of work, and changing career paths for men. Those who considered work, productive effort, and artisanal or entrepreneurial autonomy critical to their definitions of manliness found themselves in a social setting that no longer seemed to furnish men of different class backgrounds with a sense of achievement. The social transformations of the late nineteenth century put further pressures on men to articulate new definitions of manliness suitable to a rapidly changing social environment. Since the 1830s, the processes of urbanization, industrialization, class formation, and economic development had forced men across a range of social backgrounds to rethink concepts of male gender identity. In the late nineteenth century, these developments entered a new stage and inaugurated new articulations of manliness that would shape ideas of manhood, leisure, work, and consumption throughout the twentieth century.

### Urban-Industrial Life, Neurasthenia, and Middle-Class Manliness

With the emergence of corporations and the concomitant rise of white-collar career paths, the ideal of the “self-made man” became more and more difficult to realize in the realms of work, economic achievement, and the marketplace. Instead, growing numbers of middle-class men felt strained while fulfilling their societal obligations amid the increasing velocity, pace, and scale of urban-industrial society. According to doctors, this resulted in large numbers of middle-class men suffering from a form of overwork or fatigue known as neurasthenia. Defined by Dr. George M. Beard in 1869, neurasthenia afflicted men and women in mentally demanding occupations, such as artists, authors, scholars, and businessmen. Neurasthenia consisted of a wide range of psychological and physical symptoms, including headaches, nosebleeds, lack of concentration, and a general state of weakness. By far the most common psychiatric diagnosis of the time, neurasthenia affected 69 percent of all men between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five at some point in their lives. As a marker of hard work, neurasthenia served as a badge of middle-class manliness. The prescription for this condition was a period of rest followed by a return to an active life.

### Leisure and the “Strenuous Life”

As an antidote to the pace and scale of urban-industrial society, many middle-class men embraced an active life away from work. They discovered athletics, the great outdoors, a primitive

inner self, and a new ideal of the “strenuous life” (a notion popularized by Theodore Roosevelt in a speech before an all-male audience at Chicago’s Hamilton Club on April 10, 1899) as sources of a revitalized masculinity. By choosing this path, men expected to achieve a new balance between civilized manly conduct and an assertive masculinity that would enable them to compensate for the constraints of society. Men felt and acted more passionately about their masculinity, the foundation of which began to shift away from work and toward leisure and consumer behavior.

Articulated largely by white Anglo-Saxon middle-class men concerned with revitalizing their manhood, and drawing on the increasingly influential concept of Darwinian struggle, the strenuous life carried connotations of racial and sexual survival of the fittest. By focusing on racial and sexual difference and defining white manhood as being apart from non-white and nonmale “others,” it provided another means by which Gilded Age men could assure themselves of the possibility of a stable masculine identity amid powerful social change. By the 1880s, definitions of (white) manliness became increasingly contingent on notions of difference along lines of race, gender, and sexuality.

### Difference, Masculinity, and Empire

White men became increasingly inclined to define themselves explicitly along lines of race and gender as women and non-white immigrants entered the workforce in growing numbers during the late nineteenth century. Gender distinctions were increasingly apparent in men’s tendency to define professions in law, politics, medicine, and science as male enclaves, and to exclude women from these areas of work.

Another crucial marker of difference was sexuality. Cities such as New York and Chicago witnessed the emergence of thriving same-sex subcultures. Whereas Victorian men had accepted, and even celebrated, close-knit male-male friendships (which frequently had physical dimensions such as the sharing of beds), same-sex relations became increasingly suspect by the late nineteenth century. By the end of the century, medical practitioners had “discovered” homosexuality and defined it as a deviant form of sexuality. Categorizing men who acted effeminate and desired male partners as homosexuals also served as an affirmation of a presumably stable, unified heterosexual manliness.

Further, at a time when large numbers of southern and southeastern Europeans and Asians emigrated to the United States, white men linked definitions of masculinity to a notion of Anglo-Saxonism. Influenced by the Darwinian idea of evolution, and by new scientific inquiries into racial descent,

white Euro-Americans depicted Anglo-Saxons as a superior race. Amid economic upheavals, labor radicalism, and rising levels of immigration, this ideological construct postulated the exceptionality and greatness of Anglo-Saxon nations, emphasizing a love of freedom and a capacity for self-government as supreme Anglo-Saxon virtues.

An emphasis on racial difference as a marker of manliness played a significant role in late-nineteenth-century western expansion and imperialism. Both of these endeavors afforded Anglo-Saxon men opportunities to prove their masculinity in a Darwinian struggle for survival against allegedly primitive races and lesser men, both at home and abroad. Defeating Native Americans in the wars on the Great Plains in the late nineteenth century and confining them to reservations secured for white Euro-American men not only control of vast natural resources, but also the belief that they were of a racially superior and more virile stock. The Spanish-American War (1898), the Philippine-American War (1900–02), and subsequent U.S. expansion abroad likewise reflected this aggressive masculinity.

### The Defense of Artisanal Manhood

Both middle- and working-class men sought to restore what they perceived as a loss of male identity grounded in work and economic independence. Working-class men resisted the quickening pace of production and their employers' workplace authority, seeing in both an intrusion on their traditional craft-based prerogatives. A nationwide series of strikes in 1877 and 1886, the 1892 steelworkers' strike at the Carnegie plant in Homestead, Pennsylvania, and the American Railway Union strike against the Pullman Car Company in Chicago in 1894 exemplified workingmen's defense of traditional notions of manhood. Yet, with the founding of the American Federation of Labor in 1886, the American labor movement de-emphasized notions of workplace authority and emphasized pay and benefits instead, shifting the foundations of working-class manliness toward breadwinning and an ability to participate in expanding consumer markets.

Similarly, some middle-class men chose to compensate for changing work settings and shifting career paths by turning to craftsmanship as a model of manliness. At a time when forces of industrialization and mechanization severely retrenched the control that skilled craft workers exercised on the shop floor, middle-class culture rediscovered the artisan and the craftsman (seen as embodying skill, autonomy, control, and simplicity) as a metaphor of manliness. This metaphor appeared in a variety of settings. The Social Gospel and muscular Christianity movements, which emerged in the Protestant churches in the Gilded Age, replaced the mid-nineteenth-century image of a

sentimental, androgynous, and nurturing Jesus with the image of a vigorous, manly carpenter and noble craftsmen. The prizefighter John L. Sullivan likewise owed his popularity, at least in part, to the image of the "heroic artisan" that he projected to his all-male audiences through his physique and Irish working-class background. After the cattle drives across the Great Plains ended in the 1880s, the figure of the cowboy, yet another heroic artisan and strenuous craftsman, gained popularity in popular culture through pulp fiction and novels such as Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902). The artisan metaphor was also at the foundation of the many fraternal orders that were established in the late nineteenth century and modeled on medieval craft guilds. Finally, the late-nineteenth-century arts and crafts movement, inspired by the British craftsmen and intellectuals John Ruskin and William Morris, encouraged men to adorn their homes with furniture made in the simple, presumably masculine, craftsman style.

Despite the fact that the image of the artisan as a metaphor for a revitalized manliness was grounded in work and skill, it also firmly tied articulations of masculinity to leisure and the growing consumer culture of the Gilded Age. Craftsman-style furniture, cowboy novels, or fraternal regalia had to be purchased before they could be used, and masculinity became increasingly tied to consumption.

### Conclusion

In the Gilded Age, definitions of masculinity shifted away from their traditional moorings in work and economic achievement and became slowly bound up with the leisure and consumerism of a commercializing society. Men would find ways to reintegrate ideas about work with ideas of manliness through notions of the corporate or bureaucratic team player, the breadwinner, or the worker-as-consumer. Yet the Gilded Age witnessed a fragmenting of paths to masculinity. Men came to embrace the notion that manhood was not a stable core that one possessed, but that it could be created through performance and outward representation.

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#### RELATED ENTRIES

Artisan; Body; Bureaucratization; Capitalism; Class; Consumerism; Cowboys; Crisis of Masculinity; Darwinism; Fraternal Organizations; Heterosexuality; Homosexuality; Imperialism; Individualism; Jesus, Images of; Labor Movement and Unions; Middle-Class Manhood; Muscular Christianity; Passionate Manhood; Professionalism; Progressive Era; Race; Self-Made Man; Social Gospel; Strenuous Life; Urbanization; Victorian Era; Western Frontier; Whiteness; White Supremacism; Work; Working-Class Manhood

—Thomas Winter

## GRAHAM, SYLVESTER

1794–1851

Health Reformer and Minister

Sylvester Graham, a Presbyterian minister and antebellum health reformer, addressed medical, dietary, and sexual aspects

of manhood. Graham's emphasis on restraint in these areas meshed well with Victorian concerns about physical purity and bodily discipline in all aspects of life. While Victorian Americans valued self-control and bodily discipline in general, they were particularly inclined to identify these with ideal manhood.

Ordained in 1830, Graham began lecturing that same year for a temperance organization, the Pennsylvania Society for Discouraging the Use of Ardent Spirits. Graham was suddenly propelled into a position of cultural influence in 1832, when, amid fears of a cholera outbreak, he advised Americans of the preventive value of proper eating habits and food preparation. The physical self-restraint that Graham preached represented for him the essential quality of middle-class Victorian manhood. Graham began to consider the subject of sexuality in his 1834 *A Lecture to Young Men*. Graham advised his audiences, consisting largely of Northeastern white middle-class men, against any form of sexual indulgence, especially masturbation.

Graham feared that a loss of male self-control threatened Victorian society, and he therefore urged men to avoid any form of excitement. To cleanse the body and prevent debilitating overstimulation of the nervous system, he encouraged physical exercise, sleeping on a hard bed, avoidance of meat and spicy foods, and consumption of water and a coarse bread made of unsifted flour. (His original bread recipe eventually found a more appealing successor in the Graham Cracker.) Most importantly, Graham urged the utmost sexual restraint, even in marriage.

Influenced by the perfectionist impulse of the Second Great Awakening, which emphasized the possibility and duty of achieving total freedom from sin, Graham cast sin in a physical framework by defining it in terms of bodily appetite and desire. He urged men to embrace an antierotic, antilibidinal definition of manhood, identifying bodily self-restraint as the way to salvation. Graham's male ethos reflects the contradictions of an age that witnessed the first wave of industrialization and the emergence of a national market economy. On the one hand, his resistance to sensual indulgence can be interpreted as a critique of the materialism he feared would result from the nascent industrialization and market capitalism of the 1830s. On the other hand, his condemnation of self-indulgent behavior reflected a quintessentially capitalist ethos of delayed gratification.

A highly sought-after speaker in the Northeast, Graham was very influential. In 1837, his followers formed the American Physiological Society, with William Alcott, the author of *The Young Man's Guide* (1846), as its first president. The society published the *Graham Journal of Health and Longevity*, which ceased publication in 1839. While the society used his name and ideas, which became widely shared among contemporary reformers, Graham himself played no leading role in it.