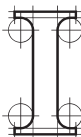


Understanding Manhood in America: The Elusive Quest for the Ideal in Masculinity

Robert G. Davis, 33°

The search after the great man is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of manhood.... Man can paint, or make, or think, nothing but man. He believes that the great material elements had their origin from his thought.... Other men are lenses through which we read our own minds. Each man seeks those of different quality from his own, and such as are good of his kind; that is, he seeks other men.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson
“Uses of Great Men,” *Representative Men*, 1850

T IS NATURAL for us to believe in great men. Indeed, much of the progress of the world has been defined around the lives and accomplishments of great men. The story of man is the story of spectacular technological and military triumphs; of enormous feats of daring; of unprecedented industrial productivity and creative energy. It is the display of astonishing physical strength and remarkable courage. It is the story of deep intellect, astounding know-how and advancement. It is the exuberance of emotion, passion, and energy. It is the deep feeling of compassion, bonding; brotherhood, and camaraderie. Paradoxically, it is also loneliness and isolation.

In America, we cannot begin to understand our own history without understanding manhood. Even those with the most uncertain understanding of the past cannot fail to see the influence of the male in our society. It is no wonder, then, that men lean toward dominance, authority, and control. Men believe (or earnestly wish to believe) that the future depends on them; that deep within them rests an inherent ability to sire, or mentor, great men who will become the heroes of sons yet unborn. As men, it is our quiet longing that even our own sons might become, or at least associate with, such heroes.

In every generation in America, manhood has been at the center of life and progress. It constantly strives to uphold its own traditions while anxiously trying to redefine itself. It is our nature to search for new frontiers, to be different than our fathers. How we do this, while staying within the bounds of manhood, has always been our deepest challenge.

Today we live in a complex world of few norms where gender roles are increasingly difficult to define. The meaning of manhood is determined by each man, in his experience; we are no longer formed in molds. Manhood is constantly under siege by feminists, religious fundamentalists, political and gender stereotyping, governmental decisions. Still, we endure. Manhood, as stressful as it is, does not change our genetic nature. We must always be about consciously understanding our roles as men and taking responsibility for our actions. We know that how we play out our role as men in our own time will largely determine the kind and quality of life that succeeding generations will have.

Freemasonry is an organization that instructs men how to control their lives in responsible ways. It was created not to mold men; but to mold their actions.

This paper examines masculinity and its changing role in America. It will look at how Freemasonry has moved in and out of the center of society's understanding of the masculine. It will offer a brief overview of manhood over the past two hundred years of American history, but will focus particularly on the rapid changes in definitions of masculinity during the post-WW II Era.

It is hoped that, by better understanding how manhood is influenced by the cultural perceptions of masculinity, we might better position Freemasonry, as a leading American institution of men, in a role which will facilitate how the best ideals of masculinity and manhood might be embraced today and in the future.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SELF-MADE MAN

Michael Kimmel, in his study of manhood in America,¹ began his two hundred-year look at the culture of men with an examination of the last decade of the

eighteenth century. During the era of the signing of the United States Constitution, Kimmel suggested there were three dominant ideals of manhood—the Genteel Patriarch, the Heroic Artisan, and the Self-Made Man.² Together, these ideals stratified the world of men, and defined manhood in America.

The Genteel Patriarch comprised the classical European definition of man. He was the dignified aristocrat, a man with an upper-class code of honor and a character of exquisite tastes and refined sensibilities. To the Genteel Patriarch, manhood meant property ownership and a benevolent patriarchal authority at home, providing for the moral instruction of his sons. His was a world encompassing love, compassion, duty; largely exhibited through public philanthropy and usefulness. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and James Madison were perhaps the best-known models for the Genteel Patriarch.

The Heroic Artisan was the second archetype inherited from Europe. Tracing his lineage to the crafts guilds of the Middle Ages, the Heroic Artisan was independent, virtuous, and honest—stiffly formal in his relationship with women and extraordinarily loyal to his male comrades. On the family farm or his urban shop, he was the honest toiler, strong in work ethic, proud of his craftsmanship, and secure in his self-reliance. Paul Revere, the silversmith, was the ideal for the Heroic Artisan.

The third in this trio of male archetypes at the turn of the nineteenth century was the Self-Made Man, a model that derives its identity from activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographical and social mobility. In a land of immigrants and democratic ideals, the Self-Made Man seemed to be born with America. Constantly on the go, competitive, restless, aggressive, chronically insecure, he was a man desperate to achieve some form of stability in masculine identity, but rarely stuck around long enough to put down cultural roots. Perhaps the best ideals for the Self-Made Man were Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. Indeed, during the first half of the nineteenth century, all kinds of men moved West: farmers and trappers, adventurers and misfits, ministers and school teachers, soldiers and miners. But the man who became the national hero, the cultural icon that would imbed itself in the masculine mind, was the frontiersman.

In fact, it was not the republican ideals of the Genteel Patriarch or the democratic model of the Heroic Artisan who would emerge triumphant in the nineteenth century. It was the Self-Made Man who would come to dominate America's definition of manhood. And this definition of the archetypal man would reign stubbornly for the better part of the next two hundred years.

From an organizational standpoint, the Self-Made Man was not the model from which Freemasonry was sired. The founding fathers of both the operative and the speculative eras were clearly European men. The Heroic Artisan, represented by the craftsman in his apron and rolled up sleeves, was the archetype commonly identified with the Master Hiram and his band of Apprentices and Fellows in the legends of craft Masonry. The Heroic Artisan was the builder, the worker in the merchant guilds, the mentor to his son and the progenitor of the next generation of craftsmen. In Speculative Masonry, the Heroic Artisan represented the Body of the Craft. The Genteel Patriarch, on the other hand, was the maker and enforcer of rules, with powdered wig and patterned clothes, the ruler of his estates, bound to his fatherland and loyal to his king. In Masonry, the Patriarch was the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge.

Although from different social and economic backgrounds, both the Heroic Artisan and the Patriarch got along during the colonial period because both were still tied to the mother country. The Patriarch looked to England for economic security and felt he was still in control by virtue of his old aristocratic title. The Heroic Artisan was in great demand in the colonies, giving him a sense of being in charge of his own life, liberty, and property.

However, to the young America, and especially those born in America, the Self-Made Man represented a form of the new manhood. The ideal of public usefulness through community service gave way to individual achievement. The American Revolution brought a revolt of the sons against the father—in this case, the Sons of Liberty against the Father England. The Declaration of Independence became a declaration of manly adulthood.³ The king, as patriarch, was replaced by George Washington, as the father of the new country. With a “kingly” leader in power, the American man was now free to invent himself.

The result was that the newly created government and its rules, the establishment of a new education system, and the acquisition of property and goods also created economic markets that were largely independent of England or the Old World. The beginnings of industrialization in the new country both freed individual men and destabilized them. The old guild systems and the craft traditions were no longer needed. Men were capable of defining their own success by their success in the markets, individual achievement, mobility, and wealth. The Self-Made Man became the manhood of the middle classes.

The Masonic response to this new form of manhood was to embrace it while striving to reinvent the Heroic Artisan in ways that would uphold its traditions in the American scene. In the old working-class structure of England, men were

able to combine work and leisure. In their workshops, apprentices, journeymen and master masons integrated work and leisure. Customers would contract for services and then socialize until the work was done. During leisure hours, the Heroic Artisan participated in evenings of drink, merriment, and ceremony. A sense of community was claimed by the mix of men who held to the old traditions. This would also become the norm in American lodges up until the public's reaction to the Morgan Affair (a story which was precipitated by the anti-Masonic political party) caused a public outcry that entirely too much drinking and merrymaking were occurring in lodge. By 1840, liquor on the lodge premises and at meetings was banned by most Grand Lodges. With alcohol banned in the lodge, Masonic meetings lost much of their festive atmosphere. Money was invested in regalia and paraphernalia, making the ritual work longer and crowding out the social elements of lodge.⁴

In spite of the devastating loss in membership in lodges from 1826 to 1840 resulting from the Morgan Affair, the men within the Masonic lodges (and other fraternal associations) saw the lodge culture as a way to cling to the old traditions and promote stability. Efforts were made to mimic the traditional ritual/leisure mix within the function of lodge. Lodges increasingly saw their function as being a haven of trust and familiarity for the traveling man, a fraternal of respite from the anxieties of an increasingly mobile society. Ritual instructors laboriously endeavored to standardize lodge rituals as a method of reinforcing close fraternal association and enhancing a sense of common identity through membership.

Still, by mid-century, the Self-Made Man had taken over the cultural landscape. He began the long struggle to redefine America around his own image of manhood—he endeavored to build himself into a powerful machine, capable of victory in any competition. And conquest was the key to his image. He took the initiative, he was aggressive, he did not settle down. He would flee to the West, away from the feminine influences of the Victorian Era, to start all over and make his fortune. Or he would choose to define himself in the urban environment of his own place, and be off to work not only to get away from the domestic life of women, but to prove himself to other men.⁵ The new model of manhood was self-control, exclusion, and escape—and this would become the dominant theme of American masculinity for the next 150 years.

The economic rivals of urban competition, the increased distance men felt from each other, the masculine aversion of not providing intimate help, would offer lodges an opportunity to bridge the gulf which industrialization and

mobility had created. Men were in need of islands of mutual trust and support. They desperately yearned for male-male interaction. They longed for masculine unity, a place where they could reestablish their manhood through male camaraderie, a place where they could live out their manhood in fantasy, if not in reality. Perhaps Walt Whitman, an ante-bellum writer who resisted the supposed triumph of the Self-Made Man and who celebrated the Heroic Artisan, said it best in poem:

*I will plant companionship thick as trees along the rivers of America,
and along the shores of the Great Lakes, and all over the prairies.
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
By love of comrades, By the manly love of comrades.*

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass, Canto 39, v. 2, 1900*

MASCULINITY AS THE ANTITHESIS OF FEMININITY

From 1870 to 1931, growth in membership in all fraternal societies skyrocketed. By 1920, it was estimated there were eight hundred secret orders with thirty million members.⁶ Freemasonry enjoyed a larger increase in members than at any other period in America. By 1912, it had become the largest fraternal society in the United States. In the first three decades of the twentieth century, membership in American Masonry grew from less than 850,000 to 3.3 million men. During this period, the annual rate of growth doubled from 2.3% per year before 1905 to 5% by 1928.⁷

With the closing of the frontier, the entry of large numbers of women into the public sphere (an increasingly aggressive activity centered around women's rights), and an increasing flow of immigrants to America, Freemasonry, the bastion of traditional manhood, remained a haven for the meaning of manhood. Men needed to be taken into consideration as men. They sought out their own subcultures along occupational stratas or socio-economic groups, with their own meeting places, language, folklore, and moral codes. Freemasonry offered both the Caucasian and the African-American (now free to reinvent himself) private space to revel in the mores' of manhood and to affirm his attachment to the ideals of masculinity adopted by his group. The lodge offered a place of respite in a world of increasing diversity separated by gender and ethnic differences. Masonic authors prolifically extolled the virtues and philosophy of Masonry as being at the heart of Man's quest for meaning and significance. At the same time, women were out reinventing themselves.

The ratification of Women's Suffrage in 1920 brought on new fears for men. Sexuality emerged as a central element of American masculinity. For example, the office job, once a male-only culture, was invaded by newly-educated women. New insecurities arose. Men felt a certain loss in manhood in the gender-neutral office. Men believed they could retrieve it only by discouraging women to enter the labor force. And, in those work environments which accepted women, men sought to create a gender hierarchy by separating themselves from women.⁸ Aspiring white-collar men increasingly entered the field of sales. America became a nation of salesmen. The Self-Made Man of the new century became an independent salesman, energetically peddling his personality and ambition.

And, if feminine aggressiveness (and presence) in public spheres and workplaces were not enough, homosexuality in the theaters and public stages during the "Roaring Twenties" further fueled men's anxieties. Gay men were almost entirely defined as feminine in nature. Many heterosexual men feared that homosexuality was the result of too much influence from women, especially during a fellow's boyhood. After all, the three principle institutions of childhood socialization—family, religion, and education—were almost completely staffed and run by women.⁹ Men felt they needed to reinforce the ideals of their own gender. Men in Middle Class America increasingly saw manhood as simply proving one's heterosexuality. Men needed a more masculine definition of manhood. They saw masculinity as being anything opposite from that which was soft and feminine.

Thus, baseball became a national pastime. Sports dominated the male landscape, as did physical training. Gyms and athletic fields together redefined the man. National virility was tied to the physique and the proving of one's self in the arena. Weightlifting, boxing, golf, football, automobile racing, basketball—all were seen as essential to the development of masculine character. Sports offered moral as well as physical virtue. Who could not see self-reliance, resourcefulness, and teamwork in accomplishing the common goal of victory as anything but virtue in itself?

With the male physique and athletic prowess at the center of man's new definition of himself, the Heroic Artisan could make yet another return to prominence as the male archetype. To excel in sports required toughness, individual discipline, ferocity. Once again, even in play, men could be about the business of training, of making good work of their opponents through the violence on the sports field or ring. The manly art of being physical required craftsmanship and skill. The Heroic Artisan was back at work in the public arena.

And on the family scene, boys began dressing like boys. During the whole of the nineteenth century, boys and girls were dressed the same. Both wore white gowns with laces as infants, and loose-fitting dresses in childhood. This all changed during the early decades of the twentieth century. Boys made to be or look effeminate were simply unfit for manhood. Fathers insisted that their sons dress like men and in clothes with different colors than those worn by girls. Gender separation was now reinforced at an early age. Boys joined the Boy Scouts and participated in male-only sports leagues and clubs. Young men of college age joined the campus social fraternities. Masculinity, as defined by differences in gender appearance and gender separation, was here to stay.

THE RITES OF MANHOOD

Membership in the fraternal orders peaked just before the Great Depression. Men locked into work lives and sedentary lifestyles, longing for the camaraderie of other men, seeking generational guidance— all sought an alternative to the feminine-controlled home and church. They wanted fellowship and association in retreat settings with other men. The bulk of those who joined the fraternal societies became Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Pythians, and Red Men.

Besides granting ritual and fraternal space where men could be in close association with other men, the fraternal movement provided opportunities for men to climb the hierarchical ladder of self-improvement and social recognition. Freemasonry offered many levels of hierarchy as one progressed through its degrees. The structure of the fraternal system allowed men to excel in front of other men. In the sanctum sanctorum of the lodge, men were made to feel comfortable from whatever failures they perceived for themselves in the real world. With liturgies describing the legends of knighthood, medieval magic, mysticism, birth and rebirth, a form of mystical brotherhood surfaced which captured the male imagination. The stories exemplified in the lodges and Rites swept men along a mythical journey into the realm of the heroes of their childhood. Within the lodge, the metaphor of the Heroic Artisan seemed real again. Sealed and protected from the outside world, men could experience fellowship and intimacy without the feminizing influence of women. The lodge was a motherless, wifeless, womanless family, a band of brothers with whom each member could identify. It also offered a religious setting without feminized dogma, without the moralism of Protestant doctrine. It was a safe haven where men could feel nurtured and could freely nurture in paternal ways. In a sense, lodges gave men a society whereby they could express feminine emotions like

compassion and charity, without exposing their feelings to the outside world.¹⁰ Here was a sacred space where the qualities of nurturance could be displayed without a man feeling feminized in the process. Further, male bonding could occur in a homosocial way, without fear of becoming homosexual. In one sense, men in lodge could publicly shun femininity, yet privately embrace feminine qualities. The lodge was the only place where a man could wear aprons, elaborate robes, and costumes. By applying the symbolism of costuming to the nature of duality within a theatrical setting, men could once again psychically attach themselves to their mother-son bond.

But the centerpiece of the lodge experience itself was the journey offered through its ritual form. The initiations were almost always transformative ceremonies where the initiate goes on a journey in search of something lost. On his way, he encounters challenges. He has to overcome these challenges before he can prove his worthiness. Often he dies on the journey and is reborn in a purer and more virtuous form. He is baptized into a new family of brethren. The hero joins his fellow artisans in an exclusive arena of heroism and then spends his life symbolically striving to give birth to other men.

Thus, Freemasonry offered men an institutional solution for grounding their manhood, giving solace to themselves, nurturing their sons, and escaping to an inner world where men and women were, in fact, nonexistent. It was a world where men learned how to be heroes.

THE HERO AS ARCHETYPE

To understand the journey of Masonic ritual, we must be in touch with the Hero image as the central archetype of man's search for himself. While our fraternal association may suggest the Hero Artisan as the best ideal of manhood, the initiation rituals are clearly constructed around the quest theme. Man, in search of his own individuation and self-realization, discovers the opposites within himself and sets out to reconcile them. Across every mythology the world has ever known, this is the story of the Hero's quest. It is the search for the Holy Grail. It is the journey of the Master Mason for the Lost Word. It is the quest in the Scottish Rite for the Royal Secret.

Heroes do not represent definable human figures, although it is our nature to want to imitate the qualities of the hero through the lives of men we have known or have read about. We want to worship our heroes. But what we actually seek is the mythological ideals to be achieved through heroism. The initiation gives us a way to plunge into the depths of our own terror so that we may

scale the heights of consciousness in tandem with a single precept—*that within us there is an inner meaning of the heroic principle in life*. The more we expose ourselves to the myths of our rituals, the more intensely we will be able to identify with and penetrate its significance. Like the gods of creations whom he resembles and emulates, the hero of myth brings forth order out of chaos, light out of darkness, knowledge out of ignorance. He attains such ends only as part of a journey into his own consciousness. The hero, himself the Heroic Artisan, remains always a prophet to himself, possessed both of the faculty to see and the courage to confront the darkness he finds in himself and the world. By penetrating the darkness within, light and light-giving power are attained.

Further, the tests we symbolically undergo in our ritual experiences must lead us to a more profound experience, if they are to have meaning to us at all. We must become liberated from our deepest fears, freed from the dependencies which our own past, culture, and society have placed on us. It is easy to understand why compassion, charity, and nurturing must be part of the lodge experience. We are all struggling to aid and assist our own kind so that we ourselves can be reborn.

The task of the hero in man is to function in constantly dynamic, creative accord with the past, present, and future; to live with and preserve what is life-enhancing; and to discard and dismantle what is not.¹¹ We must transcend what we fear in both cases. And we cannot depend too long on those who will follow us to solve our problems, nor can we cling to a past that should properly be outgrown and relinquished.

With this understanding of the nature of our work and the task at hand, let us now look at the reasons for the decline in Masonry from 1930 to the present.

THE MALE DILEMMA IN THE DEPRESSION ERA

If America felt optimism from the growth and prosperity of the Roaring Twenties, it would be short-lived. The Great Depression and the widespread unemployment during the 1930s shook the very fabric of manhood and produced emotional tremors that have continued to reverberate in each succeeding generation to this day. Placing the ideal of the hero into a contemporary framework meant, among other things, that men were always to be the breadwinner for the family. A man's role is that of breadwinner. Thus, one proof of manhood is providing for one's family.

Soon after the stock market crashed, wages plummeted and relief rolls swelled. The unemployment level rose from just under 16 percent in 1930 to

almost 25 percent in 1933. It would remain at this level for the remainder of the decade.¹² Nearly one out of four men found himself without a job.

The results were devastating to the male psyche. The Depression was demoralizing, both at work and at home. Men felt they had lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent. A new competition arose, not only between ethnic groups vying for the same jobs, but also with women who were sharing the workforce with men. With the unemployment ranks among men numbering about ten million with the same number of women working, there was a wide-scale attitude among men that women should be fired so they could go to work themselves. After all, women were not supposed to be working anyway. The woman who could earn enough to support herself and her family did not appeal to the male psyche. In jobs where women only supplement their husbands' earnings, men do not feel threatened. But the notion that one's wife could function just as successfully in the marketplace *was* resented. Again, it deprives a man of an important dimension of heroism—the heroism of the breadwinner. His virtue is tied to his productivity. To his wife, he is a hero because he provides for her.¹³

Conversely, wives who were at home, feeling the pressure of no money, few conveniences, and little food, had little more to do than indict their husbands as if it were their fault for not being employed. It was a time of intense personal strife and family pressure. Men had lost their dual identity as worker and father/husband.

The fraternal movement did not fare much better. Although there is evidence to suggest that growth in fraternal membership peaked two years before the stock market crash, during the decade of the 1930s, all fraternal societies lost members. Freemasonry, America's largest fraternal order, declined in membership by 25% from 1930 to 1941.¹⁴ However, the decline could not be totally attributed to economic woes. While many men could not afford the annual lodge dues, relatively few were suspended for economic reasons alone.

The fraternity was already in upheaval, partly due to the accumulation of wealth during the 1920s. Many corporate chairmen, railroad executives, men of science and industry, grew weary of the seemingly deadened routine of Masonic ritual. The incessant internal movement to standardize the ceremonial forms of Masonry seemed too stifling for the imaginative and creative mind. Men increasingly perceived the fraternity to be for the man of average capability, with an outlook that was too narrow and stimulated by mediocrity. Many of the higher-ups moved out of the fraternity into more exclusive gentlemen's

clubs. Country clubs, offering golf, tennis, and dancing, with exclusive dining and drinking privileges, became a popular symbol of status for the man in the upper-income rung of the socioeconomic ladder.

Economic prosperity during the 1920s also had the effect of displacing young men from the family farm. Commercial agriculture and the attraction of cheap farmland away from the patriarchal home sent young men to other climes to seek their own wealth. The father-to-son influence of the three generation household filled with males who were also Freemasons was largely mitigated by this out-migration. The old fraternal connection had been severed.

The division of the men's movement into a class consciousness, coupled with the woes of the Great Depression, would likely have sent the Masonic fraternity into the same decline to obsolescence experienced by all other fraternal societies had it not been for a major conflict in ideology which brought the nation together in a world war, and which brought the world of American men face to face with another timeless icon of masculinity—the soldier.

THE SOLDIER AS HERO—THE PROMISE OF POST-WAR MANHOOD

The Great Depression may have forced men to abandon their faith in the workplace as a stable icon confirming their manhood, but masculinity still had to be reinvented and achieved by men so that it could be passed on reliably to their sons. In 1941, with America's announcement that it would formally engage in a world war, men suddenly had another chance to prove themselves. War, more than any other occupation, offers the ultimate test and demonstration of manhood. Indeed, it has been suggested that the sole cause of war is masculinity. George Patton was reported to have once said that, "... without war, man and nation would have lost their virility."¹⁵

War requires masculine energy and communal effort. It engages man in the age-old conflict between courage and cowardice, right and wrong, aggression and compassion. But most importantly, war requires soldiers—men who can be protectors of home and family. By journeying to some far-away place, amid foreign cultures little understood and less appreciated, the soldier becomes the defender of the homeland, the agent of security, the man willing to risk his life to protect everything he loves and knows.

And he is almost always male—not just any male, but a certain kind of male, a male of courage, duty, strength, responsibility. He follows orders, shares a common mission, inspires other men to greatness, and acts with public sanction to preserve the sovereignty of his government. In a sense, his manhood

comes from contributing to something bigger than himself. And, if all goes well, he becomes great himself— in life or through death. Soldiering offers a man many avenues to become a hero.

And for the soldier who fought during the World War II, the country conveyed upon him the gift of manhood. It was a war which redefined American masculinity. Although it led men to brutality on a very personal level, it served the hero archetype well. Gerzon observed that, as an image of masculinity, it was vital to civilization.

To embody courage under the most gruesome circumstances, the soldier had to repress his fear. To embody strength, he had to repress his feelings of vulnerability. To embody toughness, he had to repress his sensitivity. To kill, he had to repress compassion. No alternative existed.... What war required was, by definition, manliness. The men who were the best soldiers were, in effect, the best men.¹⁶

The men who returned to American soil at the end of World War II were indeed revered as the best of men. The United States came out of the conflict with a sense of itself as a masculine nation. Boys whose depression-era fathers did not provide for them were “fathered” into manhood anyway by senior officers, who acted as surrogates. They watched over them, taught them how to fight, tempered them for the heat of battle. The disruption in family life of a decade earlier had finally been healed. The boys had been saved and molded into men. The global conflict announced the end of hard times for America. At war’s end, they were ready to return home to reunite with their wives, form their families, and take their places as adult men in a community of a nation that was the power of the world.¹⁷ The number of new men entering the fraternity peaked in 1946.¹⁸

This was the hero image that the postwar generation of American men grew up revering. Many Baby Boomers, whose own sons today are beginning their families, were the sons of those fathers who had “won” the world by winning the big one. Their fathers had brought the nation out of the depression and had reinvented the masculine by giving us the most powerful, wealthy, dominant, and destructive force ever imagined. Those were the fathers who gave us manhood after victory, a world where we could be the masters of the universe. And we thought our fathers had created a world that would last forever.

But there was one major problem. Our fathers too often did not see it the same way. What they brought back from the war were oppressive memories that would not go away. What they brought back was war trauma, enormous chal-

lenges in reintegrating with domestic life, vast emotional mood swings, and decades of nightmares. What the soldier brought back with him was the terror of war or, worse, the guilt of his personal inadequacies associated with it.

And what the soldier found when he came home was a vast network of women who had grown accustomed to jobs in the war production arena, had gotten used to being employed, and felt a new sense of freedom from their increased sense of worth outside the home. The war had changed women from nameless, homebound, duty-filled servants to meaningful contributors to the gross national product. Even more, the assembly-line nature of many jobs held by women during the war offered much time for conversation. Women began to collectively see that their pre-war world had been one largely created by men—and could just as easily be uncreated. This new insight would soon mother in a new kind of feminism that would eventually grow itself into a national movement by the middle of the 1950s. Even before the soldier returned home, the seeds of change had already been planted to undermine his understanding of the traditional roles of masculinity.

The result was devastating. Fathers returning from the war only knew their sons from pictures; they lacked warm, interpersonal relationships with their own children and were vague and uncertain with their role as fathers. They became lethargic, almost remote from intimate contact, living in suburbs with wives and children they barely knew, working at new and different jobs, living in a new world they could not understand, much less explain to their sons. The Cold War Era often left them in jobs tied to national security, serving in nameless roles devoid of individual growth and creativity; once again feeling neutered as men, framed in a box with no perceived path to individuality. The Self-Made Man and the Heroic Artisan found little space for individual achievement in post-war America. Their work became that which was “authorized” through government grants and programs serving endless community goals and common purposes.

Even though the fathers had won the world and were giving it to their sons, it was not clear what was being given. Sadly in many cases, it was difficult for a father who had been fatherless himself to know how to father his own son. The effect was to sire a generation who would also become a fatherless generation.

WHEN ALL IS CONQUERED

Among the significant accomplishments after World War II was the conversion from wartime production to peacetime technological prowess. The dropping of

the bomb on Hiroshima was perhaps the ultimate act of male aggression in the history of the world. But it was motivated by the pursuit of peace. It ended the war of all wars and ultimately saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

It also ignited the atomic age and launched a new opportunity for the expression of masculinity in America. The building of rockets capable of delivering arsenals of mass destruction to any prescribed point in the world quickly evolved into a quest for a new frontier—the uncharted blackness of outer space. Suddenly, a new rite of passage was made possible for an untested generation of young men. A new world lay before him which could be won, just as his father had won the old world. Man himself had created a government-backed program of man-making.¹⁹

There was a frontier to be claimed, a race to be won, a glory to be had, and a future to protect. But the conquest, once achieved, did not deliver on the promise. What the sons had won for themselves turned out to be a place not much worth conquering. Outer Space turned out to be a sterile environment. There was nothing to clear away, no real reason to make an investment, nobody there to learn from, no place for an initiation, nothing from which to be transformed. Even the astronaut turned out to be less than an Heroic Artisan or a Self-Made Man. Faludi described it in the most graphic way:

The astronaut was a dependent strapped to a couch in a fetal position, bundled in swaddling clothes. He made it through space only by never breaking the apron strings of mission control back on Mother Earth.... By the time Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon, Americans were already suppressing a yawn over the adventures of their new heroes.²⁰

THE DILEMMA OF VIETNAM

In the mid-1960s, the Baby Boomer generation was given yet another opportunity to be initiated into manhood after the model of their soldier fathers. And it was none too soon. Boys who had grown up amid the massive bureaucracies of employment created by the defense industry in post-war America too often saw their fathers as having a secure job provided for by Uncle Sam, but not as performing any vital role in society as leaders or as men. The masculine ideal of the invulnerable hero, the self-sacrificing martyr, wore a suit of armor that no longer fit. It was made for a used-up generation. It was inflexible. The militaristic approach to family life provoked resentment and sometimes rebellion. We chose not to wear the armor. Our fathers sent us off to another war with standards of masculinity we could not understand and were not yet ready to accept.

The war in Southeast Asia was not the typical American kind of conflict. There was no clear mission, no easily identifiable enemy, no heroic meaning to victory. It was not the masculine war like all others that preceded it. It seemed more like a war against a domestic population. It seemed like a political war. Rather than fully committing the soldiers' power to overtake an enemy, we seemed engaged in a battle where power could not be unleashed. We were fighting a limited war because we did not want to unleash an unlimited one.²¹

The boy who came home from Vietnam came to a different kind of contested village. Unlike V-J Day in August, 1945, there were no ticker tape parades, no crying lovers kissing in the streets, no elated countrymen crowded in celebration. There was only hostility. It seemed all the standards of masculinity, all the proofs of manhood, all the liberating influences of victory were gone.

Men of the Vietnam Era would forever be divided between those who did and those who didn't; between those who accepted the agendas of their fathers and those who didn't; those who rebelled and those who didn't. In the end, both wanted the same thing. They wanted acceptance from their fathers. In a word, a whole generation of men came up short. And they did not participate in the institutions of their elders.

The Vietnam-Era man dropped out of his society at the very time when his dialogue could have initiated a healing of the wounded male within. He did not need to feel shame because of his participation, nor as the result of his deferment. In terms of his country's definition of masculinity, he had either been left out, or he failed to make the passage into manhood which every man needs because this particular war did not measure up to the meaning of war. Men have a built-in need to feel their own strength, to know their worth, to acknowledge their worthiness. They want to belong to their country and their generation. What they missed in the 1960s to 1970s Era were both. And, in the end, the war would be reconciled, not by political or military positioning, but by the movies.

FROM HEROIC ARTISAN TO PASSIVE CONSUMER

In many respects, Vietnam was a movie unto itself. It was reported worldwide each day of the week for a decade by cameras and reporters from every network. It became like a movie while it was happening. Everything Americans understood about the war came from what they saw; and what they saw was always media-driven. There was no mechanism of reality that would enable American males to put closure on what many believed to be their greatest failure. At least not until Ronald Reagan became president of the United States.

President Reagan was an actor who had starred in a respectable number of movies playing male icons of an earlier America. To a large degree, Reagan lived out his manhood through the lens of a movie camera. But, in so doing, he found a way that the Vietnam syndrome might be put behind his country. By endorsing movies depicting Heroic Artisans and Self-Made Men engaged in battles in Southeast Asia, by encouraging Hollywood to create diversions that the actual war denied them, it was possible for America to redeem its manhood through fantasy. During the 1980s, the most popular movies were about tough, muscled-up loners with names like *Rambo*, who not only brought back the pain of the vet, but also gave him a sense of justice with his elders. Television often depicted the fighting man as the victim of a greater political loss, thus moving blame from the individual to a harder-to-define national entity. Documentaries revealed the feelings of soldiers and provided a public venue where the moral pain of Vietnam could be shared with a new population who did not live so close to the conflict. It took a new conflict, which lasted just a couple of weeks nearly a quarter-century later, to finally enable Americans to put closure on the Vietnam Era. Desert Storm brought back the old masculine icon of power and control. American manhood was once again in charge of the world's destiny.

By the turn of the century, Vietnam would also play prominently in numerous conspiracy theories where thousands of men dubbed themselves as militants, patriots, and survivalists, donned fatigues and waged a sort of guerrilla warfare against almost every male-dominated bureau or icon in existence. The new myth of conspiracy was centered around the perceived threat that some New World Order was being secretly conceived by the old American power structure, in tandem with other world powers, with a sinister aim to control the distribution of wealth, exact oppressive taxation, and brainwash the American family. A new enemy from within needed to be crushed. Sadly, Freemasons were one of the groups "chosen" in this wave of paranoia as the type of male metaphor which should not be trusted. It didn't matter that the conspiracy groups also didn't trust each other. What was important was the restaging of the Vietnam War, where the new patriots could be the knights waging battle against the same forces from within that were perceived to have neutered manhood in the war era. To the new militant, masculinity was defined by the Self-Made Man in an American movement to break down the establishment and recapture America from a new set of fantasy enemies.

Of course, this new breed of warrior turned out to be the antithesis of the warrior as archetype because he was not capable of compassionate human rela-

tionship. He became the commander of his household, often doling out as much cruelty and destructiveness as he believed he was assigned in battle. The tragedy of the new conspirator is that he served only to create a more divisive and cloudy understanding of manhood. Fortunately, most American men did not buy into his level of fanaticism.

What American men did buy into was that an image of manhood could be depicted on the screen easier than in real life. Faludi remarked that most late-twentieth-century men had no way of participating in manhood except from their sofas, where important things were not made but filmed, where control was exerted from afar.

It could feel that way whether you were a laid-off craftsman with a busted-up union or a part-time employee working two jobs to get by, a football fan watching your relocated team in a sports bar or a family spiritual "leader" watching celebrity preachers hold forth on the big screen of a football stadium, a young man selling space-shoe-style Nikes amid towering Michael Jordan cardboard cutouts at a sporting-goods outlet or a night clerk surrounded by action-hero posters at a video store. Even men within the triumphal media were not spared; male correspondents watched their profession reconfigure itself around entertainment journalism and doubted their own utility."²²

Something had once again stripped men of their usefulness and left them stranded. That something was consumerism. Through a Hollywood-driven entertainment culture, by racks full of gender-focused magazines and self-help manuals, through technology that enables kids to know more than their elders, there seems no longer a pressing need for a father. The image of the elder had been lost to the image of the camera. With no real knowledge to impart, the decorated ornaments of television ads with computer enhanced landscapes had become the world in which man traversed. Receiving no structure or meaning from their culture, men increasingly looked for societal purpose. And they sought it out in small circles of men.

During the last decades of the twentieth century, men increasingly looked to social consciousness through movements. These loosely organized systems tended to divide themselves into groups that were "feminist" or "anti-feminist." The feminist groups tended to support women's causes, such as sexual discrimination in the workplace, and sought to achieve a sort of equality between men and women in all things. For the man who had quietly fought in behalf of the women's movement in isolation, the equal rights group offered a form of liber-

ation to him. The anti-feminist groups, in turn, sought a new kind of masculinity founded in men's rights, whose principle mission seemed to be to offset or balance the progress women had made through the courts in divorce litigations, child custody, father's rights, etc. Men increasingly sought a new equilibrium in legislation which affected both men and women.²³

Another kind of men's movement also gained national attention in the mid-1990s. Calling themselves the Promise Keepers, a large group of Christian men saw manhood as being directly tied to spirituality. The idea was to exact promises from each other aimed at making them better fathers and husbands at home. Isolated by the distress of non-identity in their lives, the Promise Keepers captured the male arena of the football stadium to bring thousands of men together to sing praise, tell their stories, weep at their inadequacies, and reaffirm their dominance as men over their own households. Back home, they organized themselves into small groups to pray together and admit their fears and shortcomings in a circle of safety and mutual sharing. What men in the Promise Keepers were looking for was meaningful relationships with other men. It might have worked but for the fact the head of the movement, in publicly bearing his own life, turned out not to be the hero men wanted to mimic and look up to. Instead of being the icon for a new masculinity, he was just another guy.

The Christian Right took over the movement from within, and the agenda became dogmatic, too structured for the free expression men looked for and needed. In the end, Promise Keepers became a mass marketer, selling products and logos and encouraging men to feed their shopping appetites at stadium events, ultimately placing themselves on display in the nation's capital, more to be seen than to be heard.²⁴ Consumerism and the television camera had once again won out over social responsibility and meaningful male expression.

As we launch into the first decade of the new Millennium, man is revered as a larger-than-life, stand-alone version of himself. He is not guiding, nurturing, or directing a real world adventure, but is being directed in a virtual world as a reflection of himself. He is a man on display in the marketplace, where he can passively count away his years being father to himself.

It turns out that this thing called manhood, or masculinity, is indeed an elusive critter. Even after more than two hundred years of the American male experience, man is still in search of a reliable definition for himself. And his sons are still searching how best to become a man in a fatherless landscape. And both are being constantly monitored by a roving electronic eye, moving them along the journey to the next generation.

FREEMASONRY'S TIMELESS ROLE:
Recapturing the Lost Word in Manhood

American Freemasonry's greatest failure in the last two hundred years has been its failure to recognize that its purpose is not just to teach a set of cultural moralisms, but to establish a pathway for men that will harmonize their individual need for fulfillment with a collective well-being. This pathway is nothing less than the road to mature masculinity. And our corporate Masonic task is not only to construct this road; we are also to make sure that we are on it ourselves, and that those who will come after us will themselves be on it.

The inherent role of any morally based male-only organization is to take on the virtues of manliness, to enhance and extend the male tradition, to embrace that tradition irrespective of how formidable the demands any present society may place upon it. It is important that the organization provide a founding, or sense of history that will yield a lasting legacy of worthiness. It must offer a sense of stability, an authority that can be respected and passed along to succeeding generations. And it must be cross-cultural, i.e., accessible to men of all religious, ethnic, national, and economic backgrounds.

Freemasonry's strength lies in the fact that it offers the right model by which men can grow and achieve balance in their human and spiritual lives. Further, it offers another widely unpublished and still largely hidden role to men—the role of patriarchy. By our teachings and our individual role modeling, we can guide our younger members from a sort of boyish impetuosity to mature and manly judgment; we can lead them back to the timeless ethical and spiritual traditions which can facilitate their own transformation and rebirth into manhood. By educating ourselves and living the traditional virtues of character, by teaching our moral and ethical lessons over and over, we raise the consciousness of each generation. Our younger members learn how to be friends, how to be honored and esteemed, how to cultivate honor and integrity and compassion in their lives in ways that make them worthy of love in the eyes of their own beloved, and in their communities. The object of teaching virtue is to want to be worthy of being loved. What we all learn in fraternity, we are charged to take out into the world.

What we know about manhood and masculinity now gives us extraordinary opportunity to become relevant in our own time.

We know the old models of manhood have each provided a too-limiting definition for the complex sense of manliness within us. The Genteel Patriarch

has no history in America with which the common man can identify. The Self-Made Man has clearly gone on a circular journey which has led him only back to his relentless testing of an unprovable ambition. The Self-Made Man is not our nature. We know that, while Freemasonry was born in the age of the Heroic Artisan, that era has long been lost to industrial technology and marketplace capitalism. The connections of commerce and society are far too numerous and complex for the Heroic Artisan to survive as the single icon of manhood.

We also know that obsessive control, defensive exclusion, and frightened escape are no longer revered and accepted norms for manhood in America. We know that gender exclusion as an aim of masculinity, or a hatred for feminist ideals, only divides our society. It is not our history. We know that the male paradigm of confrontation only breeds antagonism and, in the end, conquers only the antagonist and proves itself worthless to men as a reliable model of masculinity. We know that men's movements, while offering a stepping-off point where the association with other men might lead to an honest sharing of mutual fears and concerns, are not end in themselves. The movements have served to make men more aware that they are not alone in their sense of drifting. But in every menu provided by the men's movement, the agenda has been too narrowly focused. It has not freed the man in his quest for meaning.

The fact is that men are still isolated. They are isolated individually and in groups, in occupations and in feelings. They still seek a common identity as men. And they yearn to share their lives with other men.

Herein lies an historic opportunity for the Freemasonry of our time. We know the secret men have actively sought after for the last two hundred years. And the secret is this: *There is, in fact, no test for manhood! There is only the journey for self-development and improvement.* And men want to be engaged in that journey. A man wants friends, he wants a tribe. He wants the influence of elders. He wants to be nurtured. He wants a gathering of men. He needs father figures. He needs brothers. He seeks meaning in his life. He seeks truth. He wants to know why he is here and what will give him fulfillment.

Freemasonry offers the broadest menu for manhood and masculinity in the world. And it always has. If this were not true, we would not have been the longest-surviving fraternal society in the world. Our challenge today is not that we should change what we are, or rather, what we have been. We are not to become a social club, or a public charity, or a civic organization. These are things we do, not what we are. Our challenge is to rediscover our purpose, to get back to the business of men teaching and mentoring men. We must offer our

menu once again to those who seek the feast of self-improvement and self-worth. And such goals exist in every strata of manhood.

Unfortunately, this menu—this choice of heroes, this journey in search of ourselves, this discovery of the male archetype which ultimately becomes us—has been lost in the structure and politics of American Freemasonry.

It didn't happen suddenly. Nor did it happen for a single reason. Membership in the fraternal movement has been on a long and slippery road of decline. This fall has encompassed three generations of men. We fell asleep while we lost the men most capable of providing us leadership. We did not use all of our resources and capabilities to engage active participation from the broad population of Masons. We remained unaware, or perhaps fearful, when America's worldview changed from a largely, rural, agrarian culture centered around small towns to the complex urban infrastructure of today, digitally connected to every thought center on the globe. We stayed away from the culture of men who were involved in their communities and their world. Their dialogue has not been shared in lodge. Like the men's movements of the past quarter century, we have become too narrowly focused ourselves. We have moved from mentoring, teaching, and nurturing to degree mills, memorizing, and isolation. And we are still too often separated by race. Men are men without biological differences. They have the same longing to be worthy and accepted.

To survive, we need only to wake up. Men coming into Masonry today are better informed, more knowledgeable, and have higher expectations than ever before. They want authenticity. They expect our actions to be consistent with what we believe and say. They want to learn and express themselves. They want a direct personal experience in addition to intellectual ways of knowing things. They want to follow through on their values with personal action. They want to express idealism and altruism in their lives. They want to feel important. They want to be nurtured. They want to make a contribution to society, meaning they want to be involved in creating a better society.²⁵ And they want to see the big picture. They need to know from whence we come as an organization for men and what has made us stay the course through four hundred years of fraternal development. They are interested in how men are connected, how relationships can have meaning across generations, and where we can journey together on the path of our gender.

It is time for us to give an accounting of who we are, what we know, and what we have to give to the world of men. It is imperative that we explain how Masonry addresses different ideologies and how these can be successfully syn-

thesized in a world comprised of both traditionalists and modernists. It is now important that we express the value of individual freedom and how it is connected to societal fulfillment. There is a moral compass within Masonic teachings that tomorrow's men will just as readily adopt and use as the guide to their own lives. It is time to introduce our lodge as a place where the male psyche is consoled by other men struggling in the midst of their own ineffable mystery.

It is time that we woke up to our true mission as Masons, to our own connections to what is around us. It is time that we express who we are on a more intimate level with other men, and that we become invested in the support of our fraternal brothers. We need to recognize that we are participants in the raising of the next generation of elders, that our examples can produce men who will lead with honor and integrity, and that we are the bridge to their future. It is time that we truly practiced Masonry as both a reflective and active art.

We can change. We can alter the *do-nothing, mean-nothing* mindset that has crept into our fraternity over the past three generations of men. We can change because the root system within Freemasonry runs deep within the male psyche. The fraternal experience can still meet the needs of men. Men are still looking for it to make a difference in their lives. There is latent power in fraternity.

All we have to do is turn loose of it a little bit, let our fraternity adapt to how men think and act today. Men cannot change Freemasonry, but it can change men. Men, however, can hurt the Craft by containing it too much; holding it too closely, controlling it too tightly, practicing it too narrowly.

Manhood and masculinity in America are expressions of different ideas and sentiments. Hopefully this review has shown that there is no single definition of man. I hope I have also been able to show that there is clearly a practicing model for manhood that still exists within our present culture that is a match with the model of American Freemasonry that was erected for us many patriarchs ago.

It is important we adapt to the culture and rhythm of our time. It is equally important we clearly understand that, when he joins, a man from our culture will expect to find the traditional model of Freemasonry—the model that teaches the meanings of our liturgy as well as our words, that teaches meanings are in men and how they live and relate to the world and each other through their own life experiences. We must become relevant and have a purpose which our society can embrace, a societal need that can be met in the name of our fraternity. Our principal purposes are to be role models to ourselves and to cultivate our brothers as men. Our appeal to an entire generation of men may largely relate to how we invest ourselves as father figures, as men of mature masculin-

ity, delivering positive and meaningful influences to their children. This revived old model of Freemasonry does not hold to meaningless rules. It is essential we deliver the traditional model where the lodge is responsive to its members, offers them a culture for education, encourages free expression and insight, offers close association, and promotes self-improvement as men.

This is Freemasonry's timeless model for men. It is truly the Lost Word in Manhood.

NOTES

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