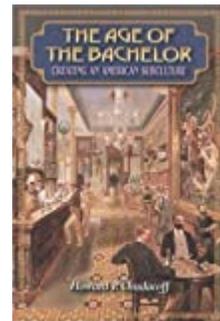




Howard Chudacoff. *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999. x + 341 pp. \$30.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-691-07055-1; \$60.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-691-02796-8.



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A Bachelor's World

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The appearance of Howard Chudacoff's important book, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture*, signals a coming of age for gender history and men's history in the United States. Until the mid-1980s, most historians considered men as non-gendered historical beings whose behavior and actions were explained by their character or identity, as shaped by their intellect, emotions, talents, or skills, not by how they understood themselves as men. With a push from women's historians who deconstructed patriarchy and masculinity, social historians began, in time, to study men as gendered subjects.

Early historians of men, however, responded to feminist critiques by viewing manhood not as a social historical construction, but rather as an "essence" that all male-bodied humans in all cultures throughout history possessed and understood by asking the universal question: "What does it mean to be a man?" Ranging across the extent of American social history, initial inquiries into the nature of manhood in past societies lacked a strong data base and tended to gloss over specific social histor-

ical contexts that may have affected how men at different times and places may have understood themselves as gendered beings.[1] Manhood, manliness, or masculinity were used as roughly interchangeable terms that seemed to apply in an ahistorical manner to most American men no matter who they were or when or where they lived.

In time, however, historians such as Elliott J. Gorn, Mark C. Carnes, and Clyde Griffen began to explore how "manhood" or "masculinity" was "constructed" by men in various social and cultural contexts.[2] E. Anthony Rotundo, in *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, took this perspective further by hypothesizing that over the course of American history, men have gradually changed their view of themselves from "communal," to "self made," to "passionate" men.[3] By examining the history of American men through both the stages of their lives and over the course of American social history, Rotundo's framework made it clear that the ways men understood and expressed their maleness were shaped by their upbringing as boys, the manner in which they were socialized and acculturated as they matured into men, and the eco-

conomic, social, and cultural contexts in which they lived as adults.

Rotundo's insights encouraged other gender historians to broaden the study of the male experience by examining the experiences and activities of different groups of men at more particular times and places in the American past. Historians examined males by their work (workers, sailors, soldiers, and students at Harvard), their stage of life, marital status, and sexuality (boys, single men, "sporting men," married men, gay men, even older men), their associations (boy scouts, fraternity men), as well as by where they lived (urban, suburban, rural, and western men).[4] Increasingly men were studied as male-bodied human beings who constructed identities through a continual interaction and negotiation between the size and physiology of their male bodies, their intellect and cognition, and the economic, social, political, and cultural contexts in which they lived.

Particularly path breaking, in this regard, was Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*.^[5] Bederman, viewing manhood as an "ideological process" through which male-bodied individuals "positioned" and defined themselves, examined the ways American men in the late nineteenth century reconfigured or "repositioned" themselves as men in the face of dramatic social and economic changes that were causing them deep anxiety and insecurity. One way American white men responded to the softening of the Victorian ideal of manliness was to reconfigure a stronger male identity under the rubric of masculinity. They did so not only by getting in touch with the savage boy in themselves, but also by intensifying their view of themselves as members of a superior white race. Increasingly, therefore, social historians have been recognizing that to understand the history of men, they need to understand the dynamic process through which different groups of men, given their precise time and place, economic, social, political, and cultural contexts, sought to understand and position themselves in society.

Howard Chudacoff, in *The Age of the Bachelor, Creating an American Subculture*, chose to examine a stage of life experienced by every man – singleness or bachelorhood – over the course of American history. He chose to do so in a relatively general format. To some readers, this may seem a step back towards a more generalized approach to history of men. Yet Chudacoff grounds his analysis so skillfully in a nuanced understanding of the dynamic process through which single men defined, un-

derstood, and positioned themselves as "bachelors" near the metropolitan vortex where a wide range of biological, demographic, economic, social, and cultural forces and frameworks intersected that his study literally bursts with insights about how the emergence of a gender subculture transformed the lives of American men and the mainstream gender system of American society.

Chudacoff presents two provocative theses. He argues that the emergence of the modern metropolis triggered the development of a distinctive bachelor subculture. Then he argues that the behaviors, practices, attitudes, and values cultivated within this bachelor subculture eventually redefined the ideal of manhood for all men, both unmarried and married, in twentieth-century American culture. To demonstrate the first argument, Professor Chudacoff draws from his skills as a quantitative historian to show that between 1880 and 1910 the population of single men in the large cities of America reached a number dense enough to support the development of a true subculture. The author demonstrates that between 1880 and 1930 there were more single men as a percentage of total population living in American cities and men were marrying at a later age, than at any time before or after, until the 1990s.

Cities were overwhelmed by unmarried men, a significant number of whom were native-born white men. This phenomenon was not, as many have suggested, Chudacoff argues, due to imbalanced sex ratios. A closer reading of those ratios actually indicates there were plenty of women of marrying age in most cities, but even where there were not, such as in frontier towns, Chudacoff rightly notes that migration and marriage are so intertwined that most men in most places actually marry someone from outside that place, thus bringing into question any correlation between marriage rates and sex ratios.

So too, Chudacoff argues against the economic viewpoint that urban life, being more expensive, compelled men to delay marriage in the 1890s and 1900s, by indicating the weak correlation between wealth and marriage rates throughout history and the wide range of factors that affect a couple's decision to marry. By dispensing with these widely held explanations, Chudacoff is able to correlate the increase of single men with the emergence of the metropolis. The number of unmarried men increased not because men could not find wives, or afford marriage, but for the social and cultural reason that fewer men wanted to or felt they had to get married. In what he calls the "sociocultural explanation," Chudacoff argues

that the reason for this was that the emerging metropolis did not affect the life of American men by making life materially harder and more socially isolated, but rather, that, by throwing so many single men together, it provided a population threshold of individuals who in the course of social interactions constructed a new subculture in urban society. A surfeit of social “a-contextual” individuals, relatively free of communal social control, interacted with each other in new ways that created a vibrant singles culture in which men could acquire fulfillment and pleasure, sexual or otherwise, without the requirement and limitations of marriage.

This same dynamic also provided men with a matrix of interlocking social groups, networks, and institutions. These enabled men to achieve identity and self-fulfillment, with the support of companionship and comradeship, once provided only by marriage. As being single became more socially and culturally acceptable and viable, a distinctive bachelor subculture – defined as a specific subset of the culture at large – emerged. In time, the very existence of this subculture encouraged more single men to delay getting married and stay single. It was the modern city, therefore, that enabled young men and women to fulfill most of their social, psychological, sexual, and cultural needs without marriage and domestic life.

For Chudacoff’s thesis to stand, he must demonstrate that the increase in the number of single men in the modern metropolis generated new kinds of behaviors and social support as well as new venues, businesses, and institutions catering to bachelors. Many readers might wonder, justifiably, if some of the behaviors, practices, attitudes, associations, and institutions he argues were new did not have pre-metropolitan origins. To allay reader’s concerns, Chudacoff surveys the development of the bachelor subculture and confirms that many of the male behaviors, attitudes, practices, and institutions he includes within the later subculture were present in cities and towns earlier in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Chudacoff argues, however, that these were, for the most part, the temporary experiences of a small population of bachelors who would soon marry. What was new in the Gilded Age metropolis was the coalescing of these behaviors, attitudes, practices, and institutions, supported by the rising population of single men, into a mature subculture that valued single life.

The social world of single men in American cities between the 1880s and the 1920s was a particular urban realm half-way between the household world of pre-

industrial cities and small towns in which each individual was attached to a household or family unit and “singles” living alone in apartment complexes experiencing both the excitement and anomie of living in a large metropolis today. Though many men may have wanted to live alone, most, as Chudacoff again shows through demographic analysis, actually lived in their parents’ or siblings’ homes or rented rooms in the household of a host family, the head of which was often in the same profession, from the 1880s through the 1930s. It would hardly seem that these men were living the bachelor lifestyle one tends to associate with single men in apartments, residential hotels, or boarding houses run by a landlord or proprietor. But the fact that John L. Sullivan, one of the most famous, if not representative, bachelors of his day, lived at home with his parents into his mid-twenties, indicates that residence at home and bachelor lifestyle could coexist.

Nevertheless, recognizing that for most readers “single life” usually refers to life in a boarding house or apartment building, Chudacoff takes the reader on a tour through the regime of boarding house life in the boarding house districts that developed in every major city. Inevitably boarders formed friendships that provided the emotional support necessary for personal growth and development. Boarding houses, therefore, were more than just places where men slept, ate, and occasionally bathed. They were the meeting points of a set of informal and formal networks that developed in response to the physical and social needs of single men.

The saloon also served a specific purpose and need within the Gilded Age metropolis. In this increasingly impersonal urban realm, the familiar local pub or tavern, once a relatively private meeting place, became increasingly a home away from home, a public “community center” (p. 114) where one became part of a surrogate family, and a homosocial, or, for some, a homosexual, network, social group, or gang, with whom one shared companionship, good times, and intimacy. Though men have, of course, been “bonding” in one way or another for generations, even centuries, the style of late nineteenth-century male bonding, amid the intense competition of the market place, drew heavily from the culture of sarcastic joking, nicknames, posturing, teasing, verbal jousting, practical jokes that had developed in towns and cities a half a century before. Such behaviors reduced competitive tensions by allowing both strangers and friends to express emotions, ideas, and attitudes indirectly. By avoiding both overly maudlin expressions of emotions and defusing disputes and preventing violence, indirection cul-

tivated a cool controlled masculine style, while defining the borders of the group and subculture. The primary catalyst of these male-bonding behaviors, however, was collective or competitive drinking accompanied by bawdy song and revelry.[6]

While men have gathered at urban taverns or bars to drink together since ancient times, Chudacoff argues that the impersonality, density, and diversity of the Gilded Age American metropolis led to the development of an elaborate and intensive culture of drinking, with its concomitant efforts to “mark” the local saloon or tavern as a male clubhouse and safe haven within the city. Though Chudacoff leaves a more detailed exploration of this realm to other scholars, the suggestion that the Victorian saloon can be “read” as a specifically “marked” artifact that reflected the particular values, attitudes, needs, and desires of the late-nineteenth-century metropolitan bachelor subculture should seem evident to anyone who has entered a tavern or bar.[7]

Chudacoff’s general description of the Victorian saloon, represented by the “archetypal” saloon decor pictured on the dust jacket (though unidentified in the text or on the dust jacket, it portrays, in fact, the famous bar in the Hotel Hoffman in New York City in which hung William Adolphe Bouguereau’s “notorious” painting *Nymphs and Satyr*, 1873) expresses the evocative cultural power of saloon decor.[8] The emergence of the style or ambience of the middle to higher clientele Victorian saloon is, in itself, a subject worth pursuing. Though the origins of the style lie in the taverns and pubs of medieval and early modern England and Europe, Americans, having larger scale spaces, and perhaps a stronger desire to create a separate gendered space, extended the length of the bar and enhanced it with ever larger and more elaborate wooden corniced mirror-backed cabinets and shelves, on which they displayed a wide range of liquor bottles. In time, both barkeeps and regular patrons would “decorate” or “mark” the bar “landscape” with images, mementos, and paraphernalia relating to their gendered interests as well as with the tools of their respective trades, to translate it into their “male space” (p. 113).

Most of these practices remain standard practice from the oldest downtown bars to the newest suburban and mall chain taverns, bars, or pizza parlors, ribs joints, and steak houses. Amid the displayed bottles, the tools of the bar-tending trade are stored. Above or besides the mirrors and wood, various symbols of male prowess, achievement, or desire were displayed. In the nineteenth-century mostly male saloon, paintings

or images of nude women were ubiquitous. In today’s non-gender-segregated saloons and taverns, these images tend to be sequestered off to the side, or limited to calendars, collections of risqué postcards tacked on the wall, or more discrete video games on consoles that now grace many bars.

One notable exception is McCormick’s Fish House and Bar in Denver, Colorado in which a large and brazen Bouguereau portrait of a group of bathing female nudes hangs on the wall in the bar near the door into the hall across from the restaurant entrance. Less frequently, these images of sexual freedom or fantasy are made more concrete by the display of the underwear of women who male patrons allegedly had been with (the trophies, souvenirs, or proverbial notches in the belt, of sexual conquest) though, in fact, they were usually surrendered voluntarily by those female patrons who were willing to play along. Today this tradition manages to survive in the Coyote Ugly Saloon (featured in August 2000 in the Touchstone Film, *Coyote Ugly Saloon*) and Hogs & Heifers, both in New York City. In the latter, female customers have turned the tables on this male tradition by voluntarily leaving their bras on the “bra tree” after taking them off at or while dancing on the long bar.

These erotic paraphernalia were one kind among a wide range of male symbols, tokens, mementos, and souvenirs hung on the walls by the proprietors or clients to “mark” the saloon as a “male space.” Early on, hanging mounted animal heads, horns, or antlers became prevalent. Today this practice, which possibly originated with hunters adorning their shacks or cabins with antler “racks,” is still ubiquitous west of the Mississippi River and impressively maintained in historic places such as the Buckhorn Exchange in Denver, Colorado or the Menger Bar in the Menger Hotel in San Antonio, Texas. Stuffed animal heads, however, also adorn the impressive bar in Old Ebbitt Grill in downtown Washington D. C., one of which – a walrus head – was supposedly donated for the bar at the previous site of the establishment by a regular, Theodore Roosevelt. In addition to these, pieces of clothing, hats, weapons, job-related equipment, sporting equipment, instruments, even toys, as well as newspaper clippings, signed photographs, old posters, and in some cases, even a special made plaque to mark one patron’s spot, or table, or booth, adorn “barscapes” across the country. The toys that still hang from the ceiling, the historic photos that grace the walls, and the plaques in the booths at New York’s famed 21 Club [9]; or the yellowed and dusty political paraphernalia covering the walls in McSorley’s Bar [10], or the musical instruments

displayed on the walls of the Hard Rock Cafe (a commercialized and museum-like evocation of biker bar paraphernalia) continue these traditions. Most bars would also serve as information centers. Patrons would leave mail, their cards, or sometimes even cash tacked onto message boards or the walls, or messages carved into the wooden bar (a famous example of this kind of decor was Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon in Oakland, California in the 1890s through 1920s).[11] This tradition survives today at the Salty Dawg in Homer, Alaska, where the walls are covered by dollar bills on which patrons have written messages, and calling cards from thousands of tourists and travelers (the reviewer's included, left in March 2000).

So too, many bars acquired a cache or notoriety, simply because it was patronized by individuals who later acquired fame, whether in real life, a novel or, in our day, television. This phenomenon is continued today by the tourists who still make a pilgrimage to the bar "Cheers" on Beacon Street in Boston. Founded in 1895, Cheers was the locale of a famous American television series, Cheers (Paramount Studios, 1982-1993). And even though the interior looks little like the set in the television series, one can purchase Cheers glasses, mugs, T-shirts, and other souvenirs at a gift shop, something which those who cannot get to Boston can now do at Cheers branches in a dozen airports across the United States. In such ways, the "regulars" marked bars, taverns, and saloons as middle class or poor "man's clubs" within the impersonal city. In addition to being male cultural domains, bars and taverns served more basic needs. The traditional free lunch served by many taverns foreshadowed the free hors d'oeuvres served by many bars and taverns today during "happy hour." So too, saloons were centers for entertainment, boxing matches, news, political activity, and other social services. In each of these ways, men, Chudacoff argues, quoting from another historian, claimed "male space and male freedom" (p. 113).

While the saloon was the central venue of this world, it was at the center of an increasingly dense matrix of support "institutions" that together, enlarged the "male space" in which single men lived. Chudacoff takes the reader on a fascinating tour of the various other "institutions" that developed in most cities, at each step of the way, interpreting the institution as one among several that supported and sustained a subculture with occasional countercultural tendencies. Pool and billiard halls ranged from elegant high stakes halls to a table in the back of the neighborhood saloon. Barber shops were places for men to clean up and indulge in male

talk and comradeship – evoked to some extent by today's upscale men's hair cutting salons complete with complementary liquor, men's magazines, neck massages, facials, and manicures. Likewise, in candy stores, as well as cigar stores (evoked by the mid-1990s revival of cigar stores, bars, or saloons), single men gathered, competed, bonded, and indulged in male discourse, providing ideological support for the notion that it was fine to be a bachelor. So too, cafes, restaurants, and lunchrooms, as well as concert saloons, taxi-dance halls, theaters, public baths, and even tailor shops all provided single men with the space in which they could pursue their physical and psychological needs for companionship, meaning, and identity.

It was in these venues, Chudacoff argues, that single men in the city, in contrast to the image of them as lonely detached a-contextual solitaries, established meaningful relationships and connections. But of course, evidence from city directories that a saloon, billiard hall, or barber shop was in business for a number of years does not necessarily provide evidence about what the patrons achieved socially and culturally when they were there drinking, playing, or relaxing. The evidence, as Chudacoff suggests, is buried in turn of the twentieth century diaries, daily pocket calendars, memo books, or the letters of single men in urban America, that record the daily interactions of men as they created fictive kin and friend networks, and joined gangs or clubs or associations.

Rather than pursuing this elusive evidence, however, Chudacoff argues his thesis by drawing from theories of social and personal development from both contemporary and more recent sociological studies of urban life. These theories argue that most young urban men acquired their first sense of identity among other males in a youth gang. There a young man learned both to work with others and stand up for oneself without the aid of parents or older siblings. Men later formalized these fluid associations into clubs and fraternal orders – ranging from simply working-class groups to elaborate elite men's clubs. Each served an analogous role in shaping male identity by providing companionship, sociability, connectedness, validation, and a confirmation of maleness. Among one's band of brothers, one discovered self and learned what it meant to be and how to become a man.

Based on this theory, Chudacoff argues that the world of the bar, tavern, billiard hall, barber shop, and even tailor shop was not the isolated, lonely, morally dissipated social realm that reformers feared was corrupting young

men and making them unfit for the adult responsibilities of work and married life. Instead, men in the bachelor subculture found meaningful relationships and social connections that enabled them to understand themselves and live satisfying lives. Chudacoff convincingly argues his thesis. But to demonstrate it, he and other historians need to find more empirical evidence that these new social connections, a new ideology, and a new view of manhood actually emerged within this subculture.

Moreover, the men in this subculture gradually developed a distinctive single “ideology” or ethos that, above all, exalted aggressive independent manhood, a value rooted in boy culture. For these men, most of whom would eventually get married, marriage was to be delayed or avoided and married men were to be pitied and scorned. Women, of course, had their attractions, but other than for casual dating and sex, they were to be avoided as much as possible. This single male creed gradually coalesced into a bachelor ideology, the development of which Chudacoff traces in newspapers like *The National Police Gazette*, as well as in the development of more ribald forms of male entertainment and pornography. In sum, Chudacoff convincingly presents institutional, spatial, sociological, and cultural evidence that a distinctive bachelor subculture emerged and flourished around the turn of the century in American cities.

On a general level, Chudacoff impressively demonstrates his thesis. Yet the fact that in order to convince the reader, Chudacoff relies on fitting his argument within the logic of the urban theory of turn-of-the-twentieth-century sociologists, indicates how much more work urban, social, and cultural historians have to do before we empirically understand the actual impact of the metropolis on individuals and modern society.

Chudacoff’s theoretical framework is securely rooted in the work of Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, Harvey Zorbaugh (Professor Chudacoff wrote an introduction for the 1976 reprint edition of Zorbaugh’s 1929 classic, *The Gold Coast and the Slum*), and Louis Wirth, all members of the Chicago School.[12] To Chudacoff and most urban historians, the metropolis is a massive money-making machine that generated intense competition, specialization, and diversity within a densely occupied space. In doing so, it shattered the organic structure of traditional society and left people alone, and isolated, both compelled and free to seek out new kinds of social and institutional interactions that would transform society. While members of the Chicago School of sociology saw both the disorganizing impact and creative possibilities of so

many people being thrown together in big cities, they tended to emphasize the negative impact – impersonality, atomization, a-contextualization, and disorder. They explored less fully the countless enterprising, resilient, and creative responses of people to the metropolis that contributed to the creation of modern metropolitan society and culture. Chudacoff’s contribution is to show us how single men, rather than a manifestation of disorder, were actually among the urbanites who responded positively and innovatively to city life. They created new social bonds, associations, services, and institutions out of which developed a viable subculture that provided the social support many felt only the family or close-knit community could once have provided.

Yet how this happened precisely eludes social historians. One is left wondering exactly how individuals in the real world – outside of an academic model – experienced urbanization and how their experiences affected social attitudes, behavior, and order. Though Chudacoff rightly notes that trying to quantify if people had fewer or more social contacts, acquaintances, friends, or if they drank, gambled, and frittered away their income on entertainment more or less, or if they committed more crimes, or indulged more in casual sex or prostitution – are all extremely difficult to demonstrate, it seems a door of inquiry that many social and cultural historians would benefit from going through. We simply do not know very much empirically about whether or how cities, in fact, loosened social ties and affected behavior. Nor do we really understand how population density, by creating a threshold of people who behaved in certain ways within the same place, increased the visibility, if not the actual numerical frequency, of certain behaviors associated with urban life.[13]

In addition, we have only begun to analyze how people experienced metropolitan production, management, and marketing bureaucracies, and how, in responding to city life, people began to construct a freer, more tolerant, and diverse modern society. In short, urban historians need to study a wider range of individual and group behavior and responses to the metropolis as a process not just a context, without relying on Louis Wirth’s “brilliantly conceived and compellingly developed” classic model to do our explaining for us.[14]

Chudacoff’s fine discussion of the development and impact of the YMCA, for example, touches on the real complexity of the cause and effect dynamics between individuals, institutions, and city life. The “Ys” were founded to counteract the social isolation that was mak-

ing single men unfit for a moral and responsible adult life. Yet, in providing all the services single men needed, the YMCA ironically supported the single lifestyle. Nor is it really clear if such institutions were a response to a specific sociological demand, or if they simply had enough customers in most cities to thrive. Chudacoff notes the further irony that early on, the YMCA became associated with a homosexual subculture. YMCAs became known as centers of gay life and seem, by inference, to have been used more by gay than straight men. It seems that the YMCA provided services that most straight men found more than adequately provided by the web of institutions Chudacoff described. That single men chose not to use the “Y” very much, seems to indicate that single life was not the isolating, atomizing, a-contextual experience that the YMCA administrators assumed it was.

Not so for gay men. Though gay men had cultivated their own subculture within the taverns, bars, theaters, and dance halls that served as venues for the bachelor or “sporting male” subculture, the space of straight single life was still alienating. As a culture pervaded by the heterosexual ribaldry, fantasy, entertainment, and behavior that created bonds among straight men, men bonded and reconfirmed their heterosexuality by directing their attention, gaze, discourse, and actions toward women – gay men were still required to dissimulate, making it problematic for gay men to meet and relax. Though most straight men were just tolerant enough to look the other way, many remained less than receptive, and liable, at any time, to indulge in gay bashing. In the YMCA, gay men found the institutional support that they could not find as easily within the bachelor subculture. In short, the YMCA’s goals turned out to be more relevant to gay rather than straight men. And once a threshold of gay men gathered at the YMCAs, the interactions and connections they made fostered the emergence of a gay subculture. As an analogy for the impact of the city on bachelors, the YMCA did not create gay subculture, rather it created a space where a greater number of people sharing subcultural values and behavior could achieve a threshold of numbers that enabled that subculture to flourish institutionally, socially, and culturally, though still much more underground than in more recent times.

The “bachelor subculture,” as a creative response to the metropolis, served as a model for other men who felt they needed to respond to the over-civilized and feminized culture in which they lived. As mainstream men responded by seeking to reassert their manhood in new ways “to meet the challenges society” presented them, they drew deeply from the well of the bachelor subculture

and “boy culture.” Lacking the outlet of war until 1917, mainstream men vented their frustrations and satisfied their need for self-assertion and competition in strenuous activities such as exercise and sports. “New men” engaged in competitive sports, enhanced their personal appearance through exercise, grooming, and dress, initiated more aggressive dating behavior, drank with other men, chewed tobacco, smoked cigars, swore, and gambled. “Manly action” was increasingly seen as rooted in boyish self-expression. This impression was reinforced around 1900 by the penchant among contemporary political cartoonists to portray men with their adult heads on boyish bodies – a favorite way to portray Theodore Roosevelt. In an increasingly feminized and over-civilized society, to be a man meant acting like a boy, cultivating a “boys will be boys” attitude and yet a bold, ambitious, self-assertive, activist, and individualist image of masculinity. Chudacoff argues that this image of masculinity profoundly affected the broader cultural construction of manhood in American society in the twentieth century.

Though Chudacoff only has room to sketch his argument in broad strokes, the lay of those strokes across the canvass of twentieth-century America will ring true so often with most reader’s knowledge or past or contemporary experiences, that it seems certainly plausible. Twentieth- and twenty-first century American men do assert themselves and compete at the office, at home, and in play. Competitive sports are a significant aspect of many men’s lives and define how they understand themselves and others. American men have admired, glorified, and lived fantasy lives through sports figures from John L. Sullivan (bare knuckle and linear heavyweight boxing champion, 1882-92), to Babe Ruth, Muhammed Ali, Michael Jordan, and, in the year 2000, Tiger Woods. And they did elevate popular or public figures from Theodore Roosevelt, to Frank Sinatra, to John F. Kennedy to the status of public gender heroes more so than men in other cultures.

As American men and women after World War II set in motion a marriage and baby boom, at the core of which was a sexual revolution, married men did respond to and follow a resurgence of the bachelor subculture in the 1950s. Chudacoff focuses on the role played by Hugh Hefner’s articulating and living a “playboy philosophy.” However, Hefner was just a part of a larger cultural resurgence of the bachelor lifestyle as cultivated by the “Rat Pack” and nightclub culture that developed in New York, Atlantic City, Miami, and Las Vegas. Though, at one time or another, Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, and Sammy Davis Jr. were family men, by presenting

themselves as swinging bachelors and “boys at play,” they brought the bachelor ethos into mainstream culture and even into the White House in the early 1960s. Chudacoff, of course, does not have the time to explore the nuances of the convergence of Rat Pack culture with Rock n’ Roll and youth countercultural rebellion of the 1960s, but both, running on parallel tracks, with Frank Sinatra always trying to navigate back and forth, cultivated the swinging singles life style that surged through American culture and society as both a response to and cause of the marriage and baby bust of the 1970s. Though it seems far fetched to suggest that Frank Sinatra, Elvis Presley, and the Beach Boys in music, and Humphrey Bogart, Paul Newman, Robert Redford, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mel Gibson, and Bruce Willis in film all drank from the same cultural trough of the bachelor subculture early in the century that portrayed most modern public men as single men, the prevalent “singleness” of each of their public personas gives plausibility to Chudacoff’s thesis.

Today there are more single men and single women in the United States than at any time in its history. Straight men today, responding in various ways to social liberalism, feminism, and gay rights, seem confused or searching yet again for what it means to “be a man.” The extent to which their responses rely on the values, attitudes, and behaviors of the bachelor subculture of a century ago convinces the reader that even if Professor Chudacoff cannot explain the status of manhood in contemporary America (a task best left to cultural critics, journalists, sociologists, and future historians), he has succeeded in placing today’s efforts to do so within an historical context that helps us understand the roots of contemporary behavior and discourse. *The Age of the Bachelor, Creating an American Subculture* is imaginative social history that convincingly explains the past in a way that gives deeper meaning to the present.

Notes

[1]. See Peter N. Stearns. *Be A Man!: Males in Modern Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979; second ed. 1990).

[2]. Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings For Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[3]. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993)

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