# Manhood in America

## A CULTURAL HISTORY

Second Edition

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CHAPTER 1

# The Birth of the Self-Made Man

Nothing conceivable is so petty, so insipid, so crowded with paltry interests—in one word, so anti-poetic—as the life of a man in the United States.
—Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America* (1832)

On April 16, 1787, a few weeks before the opening of the Constitutional Convention, the first professionally produced play in American history opened in New York. *The Contrast*, a five-act comedy by Royall Tyler, centered around two men—one, a disingenuous womanizing fop, and the other, a courageous American army officer—and the woman for whose affections they competed.[1] Tyler parodied the dandy's pretensions at the same time that he disdained the superficial vanities of women, contrasting both with an ideal of chaste and noble love. A patriotic play, *The Contrast* offered a kind of Declaration of Independence of Manners and Morals a decade after the original Declaration had spelled out political and economic rights and responsibilities.

*The Contrast* posed the most challenging question before the newly independent nation: What kind of nation were we going to be? The sharply drawn differences between the two leading male characters, Billy Dimple and Colonel Manly, allowed the playwright to set (in names worthy of Dickens) the Old World against the New. Dimple was a feminized fop, an Anglophilic, mannered rogue who traveled to England and returned a dandy. "The ruddy youth, who washed his face at the cistern every morning, and swore . . . eternal love and constancy, was now metamorphosed into a flippant, pallid, polite beau, who devotes the morning to his toilet, reads a few pages of Chesterfield's letters [on the art of seduction], and then minces out to put the infamous principles in practice on every woman he meets."[2] His rival, the virtuous Colonel Manly, is a former military officer, modeled after George Washington, fresh from the victory over the British—a man loyal to his troops and to honor and duty. Dimple and Manly compete for the hand of Maria, daughter of Mr. Van Rough, a successful urban businessman who is looking to solidify his newly prosperous economic position with a marriage to the well-positioned Dimple. Van Rough's motto is "Money makes the mare go; keep your eye upon the main chance."[3]

While audiences were quick to see the political choices before them—pitting ill-gained wealth and dubious morality against hard work and civic virtue—Tyler was also presenting another contrast, the answer to a different set of questions: What kind of men would populate this new nation? What vision of manhood would be promoted? What would it mean to be a man in the newly independent United States? Dimple, Manly, and Van

Rough offered the audience a contrast among three types of men, three versions of manhood; each embodied different relationships to his work, to his family, to his nation. The signal work in the history of American theater is also one of the earliest meditations on American manhood.

When we first meet Maria Van Rough in the play's opening scene, she is disconsolate, extolling the manly virtues that her fiancé, Dimple, lacks:

> The manly virtue of courage, that fortitude which steels the heart against the keenest misfortunes, which interweaves the laurel of glory amidst the instruments of torture and death, displays something so noble, so exalted, that in despite of the prejudices of education I cannot but admire it, even in a savage.

Maria sees Dimple as "a depraved wretch, whose only virtue is a polished exterior; who is actuated by the unmanly ambition of conquering the defenseless; whose heart, insensible to the emotions of patriotism, dilates at the plaudits of every unthinking girl; whose laurels are the sighs and tears of the miserable victims of his specious behavior."[4]

Enter Colonel Manly. When he and Maria meet by accident in the second act, they are smitten, but Manly's virtue precludes any action on his part. As the play builds to the inevitable confrontation between Dimple and Manly, Tyler provides brief exchanges between the two men (and their manservants) to maintain the audience's interest. In one exchange they parry over the question of whether aristocratic wealth saps virility. Manly warns that no one "shall convince me that a nation, to become great, must first become dissipated. Luxury is surely the bane of a nation: Luxury! which enervates both soul and body, . . . which renders a people weak at home and accessible to bribery, corruption and force from abroad."

Dimple responds by describing the pleasures of seduction. "There is not much pleasure when a man of the world and a finished coquette meet, who perfectly know each other; but how delicious it is to excite the emotions of joy, hope, expectation, and delight in the bosom of a lovely girl who believes every tittle of what you say to be serious!" (We learn later that Dimple's disquisition was more than theoretical, as he has seduced all three of the play's leading women.) Manly's retort is angry and virtuous. "The man who, under pretensions of marriage, can plant thorns in the bosom of an innocent, unsuspecting girl is more detestable than a common robber, in the same proportion as private violence is more despicable than open force."[5]

Finally, Dimple is exposed as a phony and denounced by all. Even in defeat, though, he asks that those assembled consider "the contrast between a gentleman who has read Chesterfield and received the polish of Europe and an unpolished, untravelled American." Manly gets Maria's hand and also has the last word, closing the play with what he has learned, that "probity, virtue, honour, though they should not have received the polish of Europe, will secure to an honest American the good graces of his fair countrywomen."[6]

Maria's father, Mr. Van Rough, presents still another masculine archetype; indeed, each of the three—Dimple, Manly, and Van Rough—embodies one of the three dominant ideals of American manhood available at the turn of the nineteenth century.[7] Despite the play's focus on the other two, it is Van Rough who would come to dominate the new country in a new century. Dimple represents what I will call the Genteel Patriarch. Though Tyler's critical characterization sets Dimple out as a flamboyant fop, the Genteel Patriarch



was a powerful ideal through the early part of the nineteenth century. It was, of course, an ideal inherited from Europe. At his best, the Genteel Patriarch represents a dignified aristocratic manhood, committed to the British upper-class code of honor and to well-rounded character, with exquisite tastes and manners and refined sensibilities. To the Genteel Patriarch, manhood meant property ownership and a benevolent patriarchal authority at home, including the moral instruction of his sons. A Christian gentleman, the Genteel Patriarch embodied love, kindness, duty, and compassion, exhibited through philanthropic work, church activities, and deep involvement with his family. For an illustration of the Genteel Patriarch, think of Thomas Jefferson at Monticello, George Washington, John Adams, or James Madison.

Colonel Manly embodies a second type of manhood—the Heroic Artisan. This archetype was also inherited from Europe, despite Royall Tyler's attempt to Americanize him. Independent, virtuous, and honest, the Heroic Artisan is stiffly formal in his manners with women, stalwart and loyal to his male comrades. On the family farm or in his urban crafts shop, he was an honest toiler, unafraid of hard work, proud of his craftsmanship and self-reliance. With a leather apron covering his open shirt and his sleeves rolled up, Boston silversmith Paul Revere, standing proudly at his forge, well illustrates this type.

The newcomer to this scene is Mr. Van Rough, the wealthy entrepreneur, whose newly acquired financial fortune leads to his social aspirations of marrying his daughter to the well-placed aristocratic Dimple. Van Rough represents the Self-Made Man, a model of manhood that derives identity entirely from a man's activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility. At the time, this economic fortune would have to be translated into permanent social standing—Van Rough must try to become Mr. Smooth. Since a man's fortune is as easily unmade as it is made, the Self-Made Man is uncomfortably linked to the volatile marketplace, and he depends upon continued mobility. Of course, Self-Made Men were not unique to America; as the natural outcome of capitalist economic life, they were known as *nouveaux riches* in revolutionary France (and also known as *noblesse de robe*, as well as other, less pleasant, terms, in the preceding century), and they had their counterparts in every European country. But in America, the land of immigrants and democratic ideals, the land without hereditary titles, they were present from the start, and they came to dominate much sooner than in Europe.

In the growing commercial and, soon, industrial society of the newly independent America, the Self-Made Man seemed to be born at the same time as his country. A man on the go, he was, as one lawyer put it in 1838, "made for action, and the bustling scenes of moving life, and not the poetry or romance of existence."[8] Mobile, competitive, aggressive in business, the Self-Made Man was also temperamentally restless, chronically insecure, and desperate to achieve a solid grounding for a masculine identity.

Royall Tyler hoped that the republican virtue of the Heroic Artisan would triumph over the foppish Genteel Patriarch, just as democratic America defeated the aristocratic British. But it was not to be: It was the relatively minor character, Van Rough, who would emerge triumphant in the nineteenth century, and the mobility and insecurity of the Self-Made Man came to dominate the American definition of manhood.

This book is the story of American manhood—how it has changed over time and yet how certain principles have remained the same. I believe some of its most important characteristics owe their existence to the timing of the Revolution—the emergence of the

Self-Made Men at that time and their great success in the new American democracy have a lot to do with what it is that defines a "real" man even today.

Let's look at the Self-Made Man's first appearance on the historical stage, which will help us limn the shifts in the definitions of manhood in the first half of the nineteenth century. An old standard rooted in the life of the community and the qualities of a man's character gave way to a new standard based on individual achievement, a shift in emphasis "from service to community and cultivation of the spirit to improvement of the individual and concern with his body."[9] From a doctrine of "usefulness" and "service" to the preoccupation with the "self," American manhood got off to a somewhat disturbing start.

Part of this start, the American Revolution, brought a revolt of the sons against the father—in this case, the Sons of Liberty against Father England.[10] And this introduced a new source of tension in the act of resolving an old one. The relatively casual coexistence of the Genteel Patriarch and the Heroic Artisan had been made possible by the colonies' relationship with England. Many Genteel Patriarchs looked to England not just for political and economic props but also for cultural prescriptions for behavior. Patriarchs had the right to lead their country by virtue of their title. The American colonies had few noblemen, like Sir William Randolph, but they had plenty of substitutes, from upper-class political elites to Dutch landed gentry in New York and the large plantation owners in Virginia and around Chesapeake Bay. There was little tension between them and the laborers who worked for or near them. The real problem was that as long as the colonies remained in British hands, it seemed to all that manly autonomy and self-control were impossible. Being a man meant being in charge of one's own life, liberty, and property.

Being a man meant also not being a boy. A man was independent, self-controlled, responsible; a boy was dependent, irresponsible, and lacked control. And language reflected these ideas. The term *manhood* was synonymous with "adulthood." Just as black slaves were "boys," the white colonists felt enslaved by the English father, infantilized, and thus emasculated.

The American Revolution resolved this tension because in the terms of the reigning metaphor of the day, it freed the sons from the tyranny of a despotic father. The Declaration of Independence was a declaration of manly adulthood, a manhood that was counterposed to the British version against which American men were revolting. Jefferson and his coauthors accused the king of dissolving their representative assemblies because they had opposed "with manly firmness, his invasions on the rights of the people." (Of course, the rebellion of the sons did not eliminate the need for patriarchal authority. George Washington was immediately hailed as the Father of our Country, and many wished he would become king.)

By contrast, British manhood and, by extension, aristocratic conceptions of manhood (which would soon come to include the Genteel Patriarch) were denounced as feminized, lacking manly resolve and virtue, and therefore ruling arbitrarily. Critiques of monarchy and arisocracy were tainted with a critique of aristocratic luxury as effeminate. John Adams posed the question about how to prevent the creation of a new aristocracy in a letter to Thomas Jefferson in December 1819. "Will you tell me how to prevent riches becoming the effects of temperance and industry? Will you tell me how to prevent riches from producing luxury? Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice and folly?"[11]



Works of fiction and essays exploited the Lockean theme of America as the state of nature in which individual morality could emerge, a contrast between virtue born of nature and vice born of luxury and refinement. In the preface to *Edgar Huntley*, the first work of fiction written by an American specifically about the American experience, novelist Charles Brockden Brown claimed that he had replaced the "puerile superstitions and exploded manner, Gothic castles and chimeras" of the European novel with "the incidents of Indian hostility and the perils of the Western wilderness." And Washington Irving echoed these themes a few decades later, writing that "[w]e send our youth abroad to grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe; it appears to me, that a previous tour on the Prairies would be more likely to produce that manliness, simplicity and self-dependence, most in unison with our political institutions." In politics and in culture, in both fiction and fact, American men faced a choice between effeminacy and manliness, between aristocracy and republicanism.[12]

To retrieve their manhood from its British guardians, the Sons of Liberty carried out a symbolic patricide. "Having left the British parent as a child, America miraculously becomes capable of its own nurturing; independence transforms the son into his own parent, a child into an adult."[13] The American man was now free to invent himself. The birth of the nation was also the birth of a New Man, who, as Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur put it in his marvelous *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), "leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. The American is a new man who acts upon new principles. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men."[14]

At first, the American new man at the turn of the nineteenth century cautiously tried to fit in, either as a Genteel Patriarch, Heroic Artisan, or even Van Roughian Self-Made Man. In the early American magazines, for example, heroism was defined by a man's usefulness and service, his recognition of responsibilities. Between 1810 and 1820, the term *breadwinner* was coined to denote this responsible family man. The breadwinner ideal would remain one of the central characteristics of American manhood until the present day. At its moment of origin, it meant that a man's "great aim" was "to fill his station with dignity, and to be useful to his fellow beings"; in another magazine, a man's death was lamentable because of "his desire of usefulness—his wish to be one of those by whom society is enlightened and made better."[15]

This is well illustrated in *The Farmer's Friend*, an advice book written by the Reverend Enos Hitchcock in 1793. In recounting the story of the well-named Charles Worthy, Hitchcock describes the Heroic Artisan as young farmer and recounts his gradual rise as he diligently pursues his calling. Worthy, Hitchcock writes, "never felt so happy as when conscious of industriously following his occupation. . . . In order to merit the esteem of others, we must become acquainted with the duties of our particular professions, occupations, or stations in life, and discharge the duties of them in the most useful and agreeable manner." Virtue inheres in the work virtuously performed, the calling followed, not in the financial rewards that accrue to the virtuous worker. Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the first American prototype of the Self-Made Man, underscored this theme. "In order to secure my credit and character as a tradesman," he wrote in his *Autobiography*, first published in 1791, "I took care not only to be in *reality* industrious and frugal, but to avoid all appearances to the contrary." To Franklin, as to

many other early Self-Made Men, image may not have been everything, but it was of importance.[16]

But patricide has significant costs, including the loneliness of the fatherless son and the burden of adult responsibilities placed upon his shoulders. American men's chief fear at the time was that the overthrown effeminate aristocracy would return to haunt them. Samuel Adams articulated this fear in an article in the *Massachusetts Sentinel* in January 1785. "Did we consult the history of Athens and Rome, we should find that so long as they continued their frugality and simplicity of manners, they shone with superlative glory; but no sooner were effeminate refinements introduced amongst them, than they visibly fell from whatever was elevated and magnanimous, and became feeble and timid, dependent, slavish and false." In other words, aristocratic luxury and effeminacy threatened the Revolution's moral edge. The post-Revolutionary American man had to be constantly vigilant against such temptation, eternally distancing himself from feminized indulgence.[17]

A few years later, Benjamin Rush saw the threat to the newly emerging republican manhood as coming from both sides—from effeminate aristocrats as well as from lazy laborers. In his "Address to the Ministers of the Gospel of Every Denomination in the United States upon Subjects Interesting to Morals" (1788), Rush advocated that American men turn themselves into "republican machines." He called for the elimination of fairs, racehorses, cockfighting, and clubs of all kinds, argued that all forms of play be banned on Sundays, and that all intoxicating spirits, including liquor and wine, the "parents of idleness and extravagance," be prohibited.

But Adams and Rush, like Royall Tyler, were wrong. Neither effeminate aristocrats nor lazy laborers were the real threats. Billy Dimple's time was slowly passing, and Colonel Manly could never be as dominant as Cincinnatus. Instead, the economic boom of the new country's first decades produced the triumph of the Self-Made Men, the Van Roughs, men who were neither aristocratic fops nor virtuous drones—far from it. These Self-Made Men built America.

Between 1800 and 1840 the United States experienced a market revolution. Freed from colonial dependence, mercantile capitalism remade the nation. America undertook the construction of a national transportation system and developed extensive overseas and domestic commerce. Between 1793 and 1807 American exports tripled, while between 1800 and 1840 the total amount of free labour outside the farm sector rose from 17 to 37 percent.[18] The fiscal and banking system expanded rapidly, from eighty-nine banks in 1811 to 246 five years later, and 788 by 1837. The economic boom meant westward expansion as well as dramatic urban growth.

Such dramatic economic changes were accompanied by political, social, and ideological shifts. Historian Nancy Cott notes that the period 1780–1830 witnessed a demographic transition to modern patterns of childbirth and childcare, development of uniform legal codes and procedures, expansion of primary education, the beginning of the democratization of the political process, and the "invention of a new language of political and social thought." Democracy was expanding, and with it, by the end of the first half of the century, America was "converted to acquisitiveness," a conversion that would have dramatic consequences for the meanings of manhood in industrializing America. In the third decade of the century, between 1825 and 1835, a bourgeoisie worthy of the name came into being in the Northeast, a self-consciously self-made middle class.[19]



The emerging capitalist market in the early nineteenth century both freed individual men and destabilized them. No longer were men bound to the land, to their estates, to Mother England, or to the tyrannical father, King George. No longer did their manhood rest on their craft traditions, guild memberships, or participation in the virtuous republic of the New England small town. America was entering a new age, and men were free to create their own destinies, to find their own ways, to rise as high as they could, to write their own biographies. God had made man a "moral free agent," according to revivalist minister Charles Finney in a celebrated sermon in 1830. The American Adam could fashion himself in his own image. This new individual freedom was as socially and psychologically unsettling as it was exciting and promising. To derive one's identity, and especially one's identity as a man, from marketplace successes was a risky proposition.

Yet that is precisely what defined the Self-Made Man: success in the market, individual achievement, mobility, wealth. America expressed political autonomy; the Self-Made Man embodied economic autonomy. This was the manhood of the rising middle class. The flip side of this economic autonomy is anxiety, restlessness, loneliness. Manhood is no longer fixed in land or small-scale property ownership or dutiful service. Success must be earned, manhood must be proved—and proved constantly.

Contemporary observers of early nineteenth-century American life noticed the shift immediately. One of the most popular tracts of the 1830s was Thomas Hunt's *The Book of Wealth* (1836), which went through several printings while proving to its readers that the Bible mandates that men strive for wealth. "No man can be obedient to God's will as revealed in the Bible without, as the general result, becoming wealthy," Hunt wrote. The drive for wealth penetrated everything. "Nearly all Americans trade and speculate," observed Thomas Nichols in 1837. "They are ready to swap horses, swap watches, swap farms; and to buy and sell anything. . . . Money is the habitual measure of all things." One English traveler in 1844 remarked that Americans used the phrase "I calculate" as a synonym for "I believe" or "I think." "Things are in the saddle, and ride mankind," quipped Ralph Waldo Emerson in an 1847 ode, which commented on the reversal of priorities encouraged by the emerging capitalist market.[20]

In the early republic, as today, equal opportunity meant equal opportunity to either succeed or to fail. "True republicanism requires that every man shall have an equal chance—that every man shall be free to become as unequal as he can," was the way one advice manual, *How to Behave*, expressed it. "Some are sinking, others rising, others balancing, some gradually ascending toward the top, others flamingly leading down," wrote a young Daniel Webster. In his 1837 book *The Americans*, Francis Grund commented on the "endless striving," the "great scramble in which all are troubled and none are satisfied." "A man, in America, is not despised for being poor in the outset . . . but every year which passes, without adding to his prosperity, is a reproach to his understanding of industry" and, he might have added, a stain on his sense of manliness.[21]

The contrast with European manhood was a constant theme, and one that European observers noted with special relish. The Frenchman Michel Chevalier wrote, after a visit to Jacksonian America, of its "universal instability." "Here is all circulation, motion, and boiling agitation. . . . Men change their houses, their climate, their trade, their laws, their officers, their constitutions."[22] Even after ten years as a resident of Boston, the Viennese immigrant Francis Grund still couldn't figure it out:

> There is probably no people on earth with whom business constitutes pleasure, and industry amusement, in an equal degree with the inhabitants of the United States of America. Active participation is not only the principal source of their happiness, and the foundation of their national greatness, but they are absolutely wretched without it. . . . Business is the very soul of an American: he pursues it, not as a means of procuring for himself and his family the necessary comforts of life, but as the fountain of all human felicity.[23]

The acclaimed British novelist Charles Dickens expected to be delighted when he visited the United States in 1842 but found himself increasingly disappointed with the American people both for their self-congratulatory myopia and defensiveness and for their energy and restlessness. As he chronicled in his rambling work *American Notes for General Circulation* (1842), Dickens was awestruck in this "great emporium of commerce" as much by the "national love of trade" as by the "universal distrust" that accompanied it, which Americans "carry into every transaction of public life." Dickens told the American people,

> It has rendered you so fickle, and so given to change, that your inconstancy has passed into a proverb; for you no sooner set up an ideal firmly, than you are sure to pull it down and dash it into fragments: and this, because directly you reward a benefactor, or a public servant, you distrust him, merely because he *is* rewarded; and immediately apply yourselves to find out, either that you have been too bountiful in your acknowledgements, or he remiss in his deserts.[24]

Dickens found Americans "dull and gloomy," without either joy or humor, and found himself "oppressed by the prevailing seriousness and melancholy air of business" among these strange people, "restless and locomotive, with an irresistible desire for change."[25]

The era's most perceptive visitor—perhaps the most observant visitor in our history—was a young French nobleman, Alexis de Tocqueville. When Tocqueville arrived in America in 1830, he was instantly struck by the dramatically different temperament of the American, a difference he attributed to the difference between aristocracies and democracies. Unlike his European counterpart, Tocqueville observed, the American man was a radical democrat—equal and alone, masterless and separate, autonomous and defenseless against the tyranny of the majority. Each citizen was equal, and "equally impotent, poor and isolated." In Europe caste distinctions between nobles and commoners froze social positions but also connected them; "aristocracy links everybody, from peasant to king, in one long chain." Democracy meant freedom but disconnection; it "breaks the chain and frees every link." American democracy also meant a great sliding toward the center; all Americans tended to "contract the ways of thinking of the manufacturing and trading classes."[26]

Tocqueville's dissection of the double-edged quality of the democratic personality remains as incisive today as it was in the early nineteenth century. The middle-class man was an anxious achiever, constantly striving, casting his eyes nervously about as he tried, as Mr. Van Rough put it in *The Contrast*, to "mind the main chance." The American man was "restless in the midst of abundance." In a passage that eloquently defines this restlessness of the Self-Made Man, Tocqueville writes:



> An American will build a house in which to pass his old age and sell it before the roof is on; he will plant a garden and rent it just as the trees are coming into bearing; he will clear a field and leave others to reap the harvest; he will take up a profession and leave it, settle in one place and soon go off elsewhere with his changing desires. . . . [H]e will travel five hundred miles in a few days as a distraction from his happiness.[27]

Like Dickens, Tocqueville also found the American marked by a "strange melancholy"; every American "is eaten up with a longing to rise, but hardly any of them seem to entertain very great hopes or to aim very high." The American man was a man in a hurry but with not very far to go.[28]

Even the term *self-made man* was an American neologism, first coined by Henry Clay in a speech in the U.S. Senate in 1832. Defending a protective tariff that he believed would widen opportunities for humble men to rise in business, he declared that in Kentucky "almost very manufactory known to me is in the hands of enterprising, self-made men, who have whatever wealth they possess by patient and diligent labor."[29]

The term immediately caught on. Rev. Calvin Colton noted in 1844 that America "is a country where men start from a humble origin, and from small beginnings gradually rise in the world, as the reward of merit and industry. . . . One has as good a chance as another, according to his talents, prudence, and personal exertions. . . . [T]his is a country of *self-made men* [in which] work is held in the highest respect [while] the idle, lazy, poor man gets little pity in his poverty."[30] By the 1840s and 1850s a veritable cult of the Self-Made Man had appeared, as young men devoured popular biographies and inspirational homilies to help future Self-Made Men create themselves. John Frost's *Self Made Men in America* (1848), Charles Seymore's *Self-Made Men* (1858), and Freeman Hunt's *Worth and Wealth* (1856) and *Lives of American Merchants* (1858) provided self-making homilies, packaged between brief biographies of poor boys who had made it rich.

The central characteristic of being self-made was that the proving ground was the public sphere, specifically the workplace. And the workplace was a man's world (and a native-born white man's world at that). If manhood could be proved, it had to be proved in the eyes of other men. From the early nineteenth century until the present day, most of men's relentless efforts to prove their manhood contain this core element of homosociality. From fathers and boyhood friends to our teachers, coworkers, and bosses, it is the evaluative eyes of other men that are always upon us, watching, judging. It was in this regime of scrutiny that such men were tested. "Every man you meet has a rating or an estimate of himself which he never loses or forgets," wrote Kenneth Wayne in his popular turn-of-the-century advice book, *Building the Young Man* (1912). "A man has his own rating, and instantly he lays it alongside of the other man." Almost a century later, another man remarked to psychologist Sam Osherson that "[b]y the time you're an adult, it's easy to think you're always in competition with men, for the attention of women, in sports, at work."[31]

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Self-Made Man competed with the two other archetypes from Tyler's play. The Genteel Patriarch had to be displaced, and the Heroic Artisan had to be uprooted and brought into the new industrial marketplace. In the rush of the new century, Self-Made Men did indeed triumph, but neither the patriarch nor the laborer disappeared overnight.

First, the Genteel Patriarch. While the richest tenth of all Americans held slightly less (49.6 percent) than half the wealth in 1774, they held 73 percent in 1860, and the richest 1 percent more than doubled their share of the wealth, from 12.6 to 29 percent, and then to about 50 percent by mid-century. The period 1820–1860 was "probably the most unequal period in American history."[32] But these new wealthy were no longer the landed aristocracy but the new merchants and industrialists. Economically, Van Rough simply blew away Billy Dimple.

American culture followed suit. Gone were the powder, wigs, and richly ornamented and colorfully patterned clothing that had marked the old gentry; the new man of commerce wore plain and simple clothing "to impart trust and confidence in business affairs."[33] Countless pundits recast the Genteel Patriarch as a foppish dandy as they railed against Europe, against traditional feudal society, against historical obligation.[34] Even older, venerated Genteel Patriarchs were not immune to the feminization of the landed gentry. Jefferson himself was castigated as dandified, the product of aristocratic and chivalric Virginia, "America's Athens." He was accused of "timidity, whimsicalness," "a wavering of disposition," and a weakness for flattery, a man who "took counsel in his feelings and imagination," and the Jeffersonians were condemned for their "womanish resentment" against England and their "womanish attachment to France."[35]

Leading the charge against the Genteel Patriarch was Ralph Waldo Emerson, who signaled the shifting taste in his seminal essay "The American Scholar" (1837). Emerson "enshrined psychic self-sovereignty as the essential manly virtue," according to literary critic T. Walter Herbert, and the theme of his essays "of self-reliant struggle from humble origins to high position became the ruling narrative of manly worth, supplanting that of the well-born lad demonstrating his superior breeding in the exercise of responsibilities, that were his birthright."[36] Nathaniel Hawthorne even suggested that a young man could be crippled by inheriting "a great fortune." Here was a "race of non-producers," warned S. C. Allen in 1830, a "new sort of aristocracy, of a more uncompromising character than the feudal, or any landed aristocracy can ever be."[37]

Such efforts were not altogether successful, but certainly indicated a trend. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, cultural observers venerated a "romantic consumptiveness" as the preferred male body type—composed of a thin physique, pale complexion, and languid air. (Muscular bodies were snubbed as artisanal, a sign of a laborer.) "An American exquisite must not measure more than 24 inches round the chest; his face must be pale, thin and long; and he must be spindle-shanked," wrote the venerable observer Francis Grund in 1839. "There is nothing our women dislike so much as corpulency; weak and refined are synonymous." (Even then there was a difference between a manhood constructed for women's approval and the masculinity of a man's man.) It was in the Old South where the Genteel Patriarch made his last stand, at least until the Civil War. While southern manhood was increasingly caricatured as effeminate and dandified in the northern press, even in the South the old cavalier's time was passing.

Meanwhile, the Heroic Artisan was losing his independence, which he so dearly prized. He "looks the whole world in the face/ For he owes not any man," as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow put it in "The Village Blacksmith" (1844).[38] Disciplined and responsible, the Heroic Artisan believed that "independent men of relatively small means were both entitled to full citizenship and best equipped to exercise it." A firm believer in self-government, the Heroic Artisan was the embodiment of Jeffersonian liberty; the



virtuous "yeoman of the city," as he had called them. Before the Civil War nine of every ten American men owned their own farm, shop, or small crafts workshop. About half of all workmen were employed in shops of ten or fewer; four-fifths worked in shops of no more than twenty. His body was his own, his labor a form of property.[39]

The independence of the Heroic Artisan did not mean that he was isolated, reclusive, nor, on the other hand, overly competitive; both in his daily interactions in the workplace and as he strolled through the city or town, the Heroic Artisan saw himself as deeply embedded within a community of equals, a "shirtless democracy," in the words of Mike Walsh. On the occasion of the dedication of the Apprentice's Library in 1820, Thomas Mercein said that "[e]very man looks with independent equality in the face of his neighbor; those are exalted whose superior virtues entitle them to confidence; they are revered as legislators, obeyed as magistrates, but still considered as equals." One bit of verse used equality before God as another foundation for political equality:

> Of rich and poor the difference what?—
> In working or in working not
> Why then on Sunday we're as great
> As those who own some vast estate.

Sure, the Heroic Artisan wanted to get ahead in the market, and he was not immune to its rewards or temptations. Even Tocqueville remarked that the craftsman's goal was not "to manufacture as well as possible" but to "produce with great rapidity many imperfect commodities." But he was just as determined to retain his independence and protect the independence of the community of equals in the republic of virtue.[40]

The cement of this republican virtue was the coupling of economic autonomy to political community and workplace solidarity. This combination is the essence of *producerism*, an ideology that claimed that virtue came from the hard work of those who produce the world's wealth. Producerism held that there was a deep-rooted conflict in society between the producing and the nonproducing classes and that work was a source of moral instruction, economic success, and political virtue. "We ask that every man become an independent proprietor, possessing enough of the goods of this world, to be able by his own moderate industry to provide for the wants of his body," wrote Orestes Brownson in his tract "The Laboring Classes" (1840). The doctrines of producerism resurface constantly through the century as rural and urban workingmen, from the Populists to the Knights of Labor and early union organizers, cast their resistance to proletarianization in terms of preservation of economic autonomy and political community.[41]

The British historian E. P. Thompson's explorations of the emergence of the British working class revealed an easy flow between the workplace and leisure in the British villages of the pre-Industrial Revolution, even in the actual length and organization of the working day. In their workshops, apprentices, journeymen, and master craftsmen integrated work and leisure. Customers would appear, contract for specific tasks, and socialize and wait while it was being done; when no customers appeared, masters and journeymen would continue to train young apprentices while jugs of hard cider were constantly passed around. At leisure the Heroic Artisan was communitarian, participating regularly in "evenings of drink, merriment, and ceremony that were part of longstanding

premodern traditions" and that provided ample opportunities for artisans to meet in a mood of "mutual self-esteem and exaltation."[42]

Workplace solidarity and ease of movement between work and leisure also spilled over into the organization of the trades. Many trades resembled fraternal orders in which artisans developed modest welfare systems for their sick and needy brethren or for the families of deceased brethren. Each volunteer fire department, for example, was its own fraternal society with its own insignias, mottoes, "freshly minted traditions," "fiercely masculine rituals," and sacred emblems like the fire hose, company crest, and fire chief's trumpet.[43]

These independent artisans, craftsmen, and small shopkeepers were on the defensive throughout the first half of the century. Each of the periodic economic crises had struck these artisans especially hard. Older skills became obsolete and factory employment grew—from an average of eight women and men to anywhere between fifty and five hundred men.[44] Masters increased the scale, pace, and routine of production, hiring young strangers, with whom they shared only contractual relations, rather than the sons of their neighbors.[45] Real wages of skilled workers declined, and workplace autonomy seemed to be disappearing everywhere. New forms of labor control, including the putting-out system, sweated labor, and wages, all eroded the virtuous republic.

In Philadelphia in 1819, three of four workers were idle, and nearly two thousand were jailed for unpaid debts. By 1836 ten major strikes hit the skilled trades, and convulsive strikes took place on the waterfront and the building sites. In June of that year, thirty thousand men showed up for a demonstration in New York, the single largest protest gathering in American history to that point. Also in New York six thousand masons and carpenters were discharged in April 1837 alone.[46]

The sons of the Sons of Liberty were fast becoming, as they put it in a letter of protest to President John Tyler, "mere machines of labor." Ironically, the same experiences that cemented their solidarity and underscored their autonomy now left them isolated and defensive. While, politically, democracy had "hastened the destruction of onerous forms of personal subordination to masters, landlords, and creditors that American working people had historically faced," writes the labor historian David Montgomery, it also left them unprotected from unscrupulous masters and conniving employers and disconnected from others who shared a similar fate.[47]

Many workingmen tried to combat this trend by organizing the nation's first workingmen's political parties, there to redress their economic and political grievances in parties like the Mechanics Union of Trade Associations (1827), the Workingmen's Party (1828), and the Equal Rights Party (1833). These organizations' rhetoric was saturated with equations of autonomy and manhood. Loss of autonomy was equated with emasculation; economic dependence on wages paid by an employer was equivalent to social and sexual dependency. The factory system was "subversive of liberty," according to one worker in the fledgling National Trades Union in 1834, "calculated to change the character of a people from bold and free to enervated, dependent and slavish." Under such circumstances, held an editorialist in the union newspaper *The Man*, it would have been "unmanly" and undignified, "an abdication of their responsibilities as citizens" if they did *not* organize.[48]

Newspapers like *The Man* inveighed regularly against three groups: women, immigrants, and black slaves. Women had earlier been excluded (of course) from craft guilds



and apprenticeships, but the emerging working class supported women's complete exclusion from the public sphere, even though only around 2 percent of all females over the age of ten worked in any type of industry. These formerly independent small shopkeepers and craftsmen opposed women's rights to education, property ownership, and suffrage.[49] It was as if workplace manhood could only be retained if the workplace had only men in it.

And only native-born men at that. Immigration had increased rapidly through the first half of the century, from 140,439 in the 1820s to 599,125 in the 1830s. During the 1840s immigration more than tripled to 1,713,251, and 2,598,214 more immigrants arrived during the 1850s. Anti-immigrant demonstrations and riots followed as the native-born artisans felt increasingly threatened by these less-skilled workers, who were willing to work longer hours for lower wages.[50] In antebellum America Irish immigrants were especially stamped with a problematic masculinity. Imagined as rough and primitive, uncivilized and uncivilizable, the Irish were ridiculed as a subhuman species, born to inferiority and incapable of being true American men.[51]

Of course, not all native-born men were real men. In an arresting book the historian David Roediger argues that, from the moment of its origins, the white working class used black slaves as the economic and moral "other," whose economic dependency indicated emasculation and moral degeneracy. Whiteness, Roediger argues, served as a secondary "wage" for white workers who were resisting the view of wage labor as a form of wage slavery. By asserting their whiteness, workers could compensate for their loss of autonomy; the "status and privileges conferred by race could be used to make up for alienating and exploitative class relationships."[52]

What Roediger describes economically, social historian Eric Lott discusses symbolically in his analysis of blackface minstrel shows in antebellum America. Minstrel shows performed a double mimesis; the minstrel show was, Lott argues, both love and theft. The projection of white men's fears onto black men was simultaneously for "whites insecure about their whiteness" and for men insecure about their manhood. "Mediating white men's relations with other white men, minstrel acts certainly made currency out of the black man himself," he writes. The "pale gaze" of the white audience faced with a caricatured black identity paralleled the "male gaze" of this now conscious audience of men reasserting their manhood through the symbolic appropriation of the black man's sexual potency.[53]

In these literal and symbolic ways the American working class that emerged in the decades before the Civil War was self-consciously white, native-born, and male, rooted as much in racism, sexism, and xenophobia as in craft pride and workplace autonomy—a combination that has haunted its efforts to retrieve its lost dignity and organize successfully against industrial capitalists throughout American history. The rage of the dying class of Heroic Artisans took many forms.

In the 1830s, however, something remarkable happened. The working class saw its salvation in the presidential campaign of one of its own. Andrew Jackson was both the last gasp of Jeffersonian republican virtue and the first expression of the politics of class-based resentment.

Andrew Jackson was not the first American leader to combine virulent hypermasculinity with vengeful, punitive political maneuvers nor, certainly, was he (nor will he be) the last. But he was one of the most colorful and charismatic of such, and he embodied the

hopes and fears of many men. The emotions that seem to have animated Jacksonian America were fear and rage. When Jackson first arrived in the Senate, he was unable to speak because of "the rashness of his feelings," then–Vice President Thomas Jefferson recalled. "I have seen him attempt it repeatedly and as often choke with rage." A "choleric, impetuous" man, according to turn-of-the-century historian Frederick Jackson Turner, Jackson was a "tall, lank, uncouth-looking personage, with long locks of hair hanging over his face and a cue [ponytail] down his back tied in an eel skin; his dress singular, his manners those of a rough backwoodsman."[54]

It is difficult not to see Jackson and the men he stood for in starkly Freudian terms. Here was the fatherless son, struggling without guidance to separate from the mother and, again, for adult mastery over his environment. Terrified of infantilization, of infantile dependency, his rage propelled the furious effort to prove his manhood against those who threatened it, notably women and infantilized "others." It was as if America found an adolescent leader to preside over its own adolescence as a nation. Here was "the nursling of the wilds," a "pupil of the wilderness," according to George Bancroft, a man, as Tocqueville put it, "of violent character and middling capacities." Andrew Jackson was the consummate schoolyard bully.[55]

The hero of the War of 1812 and the Creek War of 1813–14, Jackson saw his military exploits as an effort to overcome his own "indolence" and achieve republican purification through violence. He came to power as the champion of the Heroic Artisan, whether rural yeoman farmer or urban artisan, against the effete aristocracy of the Eastern urban entrepreneur and the decadent Europeanized landed gentry. One laudatory biography of Jackson from 1820 began with alarm over the "voluptuousness and effeminacy" that was attendant upon the sudden rise of new wealth in America, characteristics that were "rapidly diminishing that exalted sense of national glory."[56]

The Heroic Artisans embraced Jackson. He campaigned in 1828, in the words of a campaign song, as one "who can fight" against John Quincy Adams, "who can write," pitting "the plowman" against "the professor."[57] As president, his hostility toward paper currency, his opposition to corporate charters, his deep suspicion of public enterprise and public debt—all elements of American producerism—appealed to small planters, farmers, mechanics, and laborers, the "bone and sinew of the country." His administration was saturated with the rhetoric of the violent, short-tempered, impulsively democratic artisanate, especially in his struggle against the savage nature of primitive manhood (Indians) and the effete, decadent institutions that signaled Europeanized overcivilization (the Bank).

In his brilliant, psychoanalytically informed biography and cultural history of Jackson and his historical era, Michael Rogin focuses on these twin peaks of the Jacksonian landscape. Jackson projected his own and the nation's fears of dependency onto the Indians, who were cast as the passive, helpless children that the Heroic Artisan was attempting to avoid becoming. A simple pattern emerged: Appropriate their land and abridge their freedom because you see them as passive and helpless. This makes them passive and helpless, which then allows you to justify the whole thing by referring to the passivity and helplessness you have just caused.

It was as if, by making these independent Indian tribes dependent upon the benevolent paternalism of a centralizing state, white artisans and farmers could avoid becoming dependent. "Like a kind father," James Gadsden said to the Seminoles in Florida, "the President says to you, there are lands enough for both his white and his red children. His white are strong, and might exterminate his red, but he will not permit them. He will preserve his red children." And Jackson told three chiefs that the bad counsel they had heeded "compelled your Father the President to send his white children to chastise and subdue you, and thereby give peace to his children both red and white." Now, Jackson continued, it was necessary for the Indians to come under the President's care, where "your Father the President may be enabled to extend to you his fatherly care and assistance." No sooner had the sons of liberty thrown off their own tyrannical monarchical father than they set themselves up as the benevolent fathers they had never had and, tragically, were utterly unable to become.[58]



If the Indian symbolized the savage brute transformed into a helpless dependent child, the Bank symbolized the devouring mother from whose grasp the adolescent nation was trying to escape. The "Mother Bank," was a "monster Hydra," a "hydra of corruption," as Jackson himself put it, and it became a symbol of corporate power—paper money, monopoly privilege, complex credit—that turned men from "the sober pursuits of honest industry." The Bank represented centralized economic and political power, which threatened to overwhelm the virtue of the republic. If the Bank was able to consolidate credit, control a single paper currency, and control all business transactions, the independence of the Heroic Artisan would be compromised, and he would be returned to helpless childhood dependency. As Vice President Martin Van Buren warned, the Bank would "produce throughout society a chain of dependence . . . in preference to the manly virtues that give dignity to human nature, a craving desire for luxurious enjoyment and sudden wealth [and] substitute for republican simplicity and economical habits a sickly appetite for effeminate indulgence." The freeborn sons of liberty would be turned into the dependent daughters of the Mother Bank.[59]

Jackson's flight from feminizing influences illustrates a psychodynamic element in the historical construction of American manhood. Having killed the tyrannical father, American men feared being swallowed whole by an infantilizing and insatiable mother—voluptuous, voracious, and terrifyingly alluring. Jackson projected those emotions onto "others" so that by annihilating or controlling them, his own temptations to suckle helplessly at the breast of indolence and luxury could be purged. Jackson's gendered rage at weakness, feminizing luxury, and sensuous pleasure resonated for a generation of symbolically fatherless sons, the first generation of American men born after the Revolution.

Historically, such flight from feminization produced its opposite as the Heroic Artisan became wedded to exclusionary policies that left him increasingly defenseless against unscrupulous capitalist entrepreneurs, just as Jackson's effort to reconcile simple yeoman values with the free pursuit of economic interest ultimately cleared the path for the expansion of laissez-faire capitalist development. The heroic resistance of the artisan against the feminizing Bank was ironically the mechanism by which he was eventually pushed aside and transformed into a proletarian.

That process was begun in the 1830s but by no means quickly completed. In the presidential campaign of 1836, Jackson had picked his vice president, Martin Van Buren, as his successor to continue the struggle against the forces of feminization and proletarianization. The son of an innkeeper, Van Buren was praised by Jackson as "frank, open, candid, and manly . . . *able and prudent*." But after one term in office, Van Buren was outmasculinized in the campaign of 1840 by his Whig opposition as they seized upon the

very sentiments that Jackson and Van Buren had aroused. The rhetoric of that campaign, which pitted William Henry Harrison, the hero of Tippecanoe, against Van Buren, was a political masterpiece of gendered speech. Harrison's manly virtues and log cabin birth were contrasted with Van Buren's ruffled shirts and his cabinet composed of "eastern officeholder pimps.". In a sense, the presidential campaign of 1840 was the first—but certainly not the last—national presidential campaign characterized by dirty tricks, race-baiting, and the promotion of form over substance, and it continued the great American tradition of using manhood as political currency.[60]

Rather than articulate Harrison's position on specific issues, the Whigs chose to denigrate his opponent and promote their man by attaching to him two symbols of the Heroic Artisan: the log cabin, symbolizing the humble birth of a self-made man of the people—Harrison was labeled the "Cincinnatus of the West"—and the hard cider jug, symbolizing his alliance with the traditional artisanal work world and his opposition to the new discipline of the market. Images of log cabins were everywhere—"hung on watches, earrings, in parlor pictures and shop windows, mounted on wheels, decorated with coon-skins, and hauled in magnificent parades."[61]

The chief task for the Whigs was to dissociate Van Buren from his predecessor. Congressman Charles Ogle's speech, "The Regal Splendor of the Presidential Palace," delivered in April 1840, signaled the beginning of perhaps the most gendered rhetorical barrage in the history of American politics. Ogle freely mixed gender and class in his effort to discredit Van Buren. In vain imitation of European aristocratic tastes, Ogle observed, the president's table was not "provided with those old and unfashionable dishes *hog and hominy, fried meat and gravy, schnitz, kneop and sourcrout* with a mug of *hard cider*." Instead, Van Buren's "French cooks" furnished the president's table in "massive gold plate and French sterling silver services." Van Buren was, moreover, the first president who insisted upon "the pleasures of the warm or tepid bath." Perhaps most shocking was Ogle's contention that a recent appropriation of $3,665 for alterations and repairs to the president's home "may be expended in the erection of a *throne* within the 'Blue Elliptical Saloon' [the Oval Office] and for the purchase of a *crown, diadem, sceptre* and *royal jewels*" so that this president, "although deprived of the *title* of royalty, will be invested, not only with its *prerogatives* but with its *trappings* also."[62]

The tone for the campaign was set, and pundits quickly fell into step. The *Louisville Journal* reported that when Van Buren read this outrageous attack, "he actually *burst his corset*." Davy Crockett penned an incendiary faux biography of Van Buren, damning the president as traveling in "an English coach" with liveried "English servants." "He is laced up in corsets, such as women in town wear, and, if possible, tighter than the best of them," wrote Crockett, so that "[i]t would be difficult to say from his personal appearance, whether he was man or woman, but for his large *red* and *gray* whiskers."[63]

As the log cabin dwellers and drinkers of hard cider campaigned against "Vanocracy," they sang newly penned campaign songs. (This campaign marked the political songbook's first appearance.) Like the journalists, songwriters went after his physical appearance and his manner and style, chastising "little Van" as a "used up man," a man "who wore corsets, put cologne on his whiskers, slept on French beds, rode in a British coach, and ate from golden spoons from silver plates when he sat down to dine in the White House." According to the song lyrics, Van Buren "had no taste for fighting" but adored "scheming" and "intrigue."[64] Of Harrison, by contrast, they sang:



No ruffled shirt, no silken hose
No airs does TIP display
But like the "pith of worth" he goes
In homespun "hoddin-grey."

Upon his board there ne'er appeared
The costly "sparkling wine"
But plain "hard cider" such as sheered
In days of old lang syne.

The strategy paid off handsomely, sending an incumbent to defeat for only the third time in American history. Over 80 percent of the eligible white male voters turned out for the election—a turnout rarely, if ever, equaled before or since. And it set a dubious precedent: Since 1840 the president's manhood has always been a question, his manly resolve, firmness, courage, and power equated with the capacity for violence, military virtues, and a plain-living style that avoided cultivated refinement and civility.

The campaign of 1840 had a sad, if well-known, coda. Harrison apparently believed his own hype. Taking the oath of office on one of the most bitterly cold days on record in Washington, Harrison refused to wear a topcoat lest he appear weak and unmanly. He caught pneumonia as a result, was immediately bedridden, and died one month later—the shortest term in office of any president in our history.

But gender had become political currency, and subsequent campaigns continued to trade in manly rhetoric. Of Zachary Taylor, Old Rough and Ready, for example, it was said that his education on the frontier had developed his manly character, while Taylor's supporters castigated his opponent, Lewis Cass, for his service as Jackson's ambassador to France. Cass was a "common man" if ever there was one—the son of a New Hampshire blacksmith who had fought in the Revolution, he rose to fame as a soldier and frontiers-man, fought the British at Detroit, and made peace with the Indians. Yet even he could be smeared by the association with France. In the following election, General Winfield Scott attempted to "clothe military aristocracy in frontier buckskin."[65] By 1860 one newspaper chastised James Buchanan for his "shrill, almost female voice, and wholly beardless cheeks," while the bearded and deep-voiced Abraham Lincoln parlayed his plain-spoken humble origins into a national myth of probity, economy, and virtue that come from a log cabin president.[66] Our president could never be some Europeanized dandy who dreamed of aristocracy or monarchy; he would, for many years, claim the mantle of the artisanate, a descendent of the agrarian yeoman farmer.

In the last decade before the outbreak of the Civil War, it was still unclear which model of manhood would emerge as triumphant. Already the Heroic Artisans were in retreat though they still exerted significant influence in local urban politics. And though Genteel Patriarchs had been discredited politically, at least as a political symbol, they still controlled a significant proportion of the nation's property. Their decline and the Self-Made Man's ascendancy were still in question, as was made abundantly clear in a shocking series of events that took place in May 1849. As with Royall Tyler's *The Contrast*, the stage was set, literally, in the New York City theater. Or rather in the Opera House at Astor Place and the surrounding square and city streets.

In May the celebrated British actor William Macready was preparing to perform *Macbeth* at the tony Astor Place Opera House. At the same time, Edwin Forrest, perhaps the most acclaimed American actor of his era, was taking up theatrical residence at the Broadway Theater for a run of his own. What might have begun as a personal squabble between the two premier actors of their respective countries turned into a clash between the patriotic, xenophobic nationalism of the New York working classes and the contemptuous elitism of the powerful. To the emerging urban elite, the working classes were nothing but gutter rabble, "sanguinary ruffians," filthy and uncouth; those same workingmen branded the bankers and merchants as "the dandies of Uppertendom."[67]

The actors themselves had squared off before. Macready was pompous, elegant, and extraordinarily gifted; an "actor autocrat," according to one critic. Forrest was a man of the people, "born in humble life," who "worked his way up from poverty and obscurity." In short, the man hailed as "the American Tragedian" was a self-made man and as the *Boston Mail* put it in 1848:

> he is justly entitled to that honor—he has acquired it by his own labors; from a poor boy in a circus he has arisen to be a man of fame and wealth, all of which he has lastingly gained by enterprise and talent, and secured both by economy and temperance.[68]

Stylistically and sartorially, the two men were as different as a leather-aproned artisan and a liveried aristocrat. When Macready played Hamlet, one critic observed, he "wore a dress, the waist of which nearly reached his arms; a hat with a sable plume big enough to cover a hearse; a pair of black silk gloves, much too large for him; a ballet shirt of straw coloured satin," which, combined with his angular facial features, made him appear "positively hideous." Forrest's rugged appearance and muscular acting style stood in sharp contrast; Forrest had, in the words of one London reviewer, "shot up like the wild mountain pine and prairie sycamore, amid the free life and spontaneous growths of the west, not rolled in the garden-bed of cities to a dead level, nor clipped of all proportion by too careful husbandry." The two actors captured the contrast of national cultures and of versions of manhood, pitting, as one critic put it, "the unsophisticated energy of the daring child of nature" against the "more glossy polish of the artificial European civilian."[69]

The two played their parts superbly. Neither especially liked the other, either as an actor or as a man. Macready was struck by the "vehemence and rude force" of Forrest's performances, which favorable critics attributed to Forrest's manly vigor and oracular power. Macready was criticized as a "high-hatted" player, "craven-hearted, egotistical, cold, selfish, inflated," and obsessed with his "aristocratic importance."[70] Forrest had earlier hissed at Macready's performance of *Hamlet* ostensibly because the Englishman, castigated as a "superannuated driveller," had tinkered with the play somewhat, introducing into one scene a "fancy dance" that was excoriated by Forrest as a "pas de mouchoir —dancing and throwing up his handkerchief across the stage."

When Macready and Forrest were each booked to perform in New York in May 1849, both stages were set for an explosive confrontation. The opening night performance of Macready's *Macbeth* was punctuated by noisy demonstrations and efforts by the rowdy throngs in the balconies to disrupt the performance. Tossing rotten eggs, "pennies, and other missiles" and eventually throwing a few chairs, they succeeded in driving Macready from the stage of that "aristocratic, kid-glove Opera House."[71] Disgusted, the stalwart



English actor determined to cancel his performances and sail the next night for England. The plebeian crowds were jubilant in their assumed victory. The next day, though, Macready changed his mind after being entreated by several New York notables, including bankers, merchants, and writers like Washington Irving and Herman Melville.

The next night, May 10, thousands of workingmen and young working-class teenagers, known colloquially as B'hoys and renowned for their "virtuous contempt" for all things aristocratic, gathered in front of the Opera House.[72] Ned Buntline, the organizer of the infamous nativist organizations the United Sons of America and the Patriotic Order of Sons of America, whipped the "mobbish nativism" of the crowds to a fever pitch; the group now intended to prevent the performance or at least to disrupt its conclusion. Meanwhile the New York City police, joined by the local battalions of the state militia, were determined to keep the enormous crowd in check. By the end of the performance, as the crowds were whisked away via side exits, tempers were flaring. There was the expected shouting back and forth and even a few projectiles launched in the direction of the police and soldiers. Suddenly and unexpectedly the soldiers opened fire on the crowd. Twenty-two were killed, thirty more wounded, and over sixty more arrested.[73]

The Astor Place riot marked the first time in American history that American troops had ever opened fire on American citizens. To some it signaled the beginning of the great class struggle. A year after Marx and Engels had published *The Communist Manifesto* in Germany, one eyewitness saw the Astor Place riots in these terms:

> [I]t was the rich against the poor—the aristocracy against the people; and this hatred of wealth and privilege is increasing all over the world, and ready to burst out whenever there is the slightest occasion. The rich and well bred are too apt to despise the poor and ignorant; and they must not think it strange if they are hated in return.[74]

Those killed and arrested were all local artisans or small shopkeepers, including printers, clerks, grocers, ship joiners, butchers, plumbers, sailmakers, carpenters, and gunsmiths.[75] And their opponents were the newly moneyed urban entrepreneurs, flexing their political muscles, able to harness military and police power for their side and able to fend off efforts to taint them as aristocratic dandies.

It had taken scarcely twenty years for the Self-Made Man to establish a foothold in the consciousness of American men and to stake a claim for dominance in American politics and culture. He had gone from being the new kid on the block to owning the street. Avoiding the taint of aristocracy and subduing the working classes, the Self-Made Man was now, at mid-century, the dominant American conception of manhood. And in the decades following the Civil War, he would transform the nation.