RE-ESTABLISHING MASCULINITIES IN EARLY TO MID-20TH CENTURY AMERICAN FICTION

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ABSTRACT

How has the concept of masculinity been revised and adapted by different writers over the course of the early to mid-20th century? How and why did the authors respond to the question of masculinity differently? To answer these questions, this dissertation navigates the contested nature of masculinity in works spanning the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. I juxtapose two to three writers and their selected works in each chapter divided by the authors’ race and ethnicity: William Dean Howells’ The Rise of Silas Lapham and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s The Great Gatsby; Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Richard Wright by focusing on Up from Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk, and Native Son respectively; Mike Gold’s Jews without Money and Nathanael West’s A Cool Million: The Dismantling of Lemuel; Younghill Kang’s East Goes West: and Carlos Bulosan’s America is in the Heart. The writers I examine present masculinities that deviate from hegemonic masculinity, challenge and/or reinforce the definition and parameters of hegemonic masculinity, and develop models of masculinity that meet the needs of their specific historical moments. I argue that juxtaposing different modalities of masculinity construction and exploring the multifaceted treatment of American masculinity afford a more comprehensive perspective about the avenues through which masculinity is made manifest. My examination of multiple masculinities reveals the processes of establishing, maintaining, and contesting hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, tracking historical changes in masculinities uncovers how a set of essentialized traits, though changing, have transformed into and manifested as a privileged form of masculinity.
To my parents, Hohwan Yang and Hyekyung Kim,
and to my family, Gunsik Yang and Younghee Kim,
for their unconditional love and support.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The recent surge of interest in the field of masculinity studies, primarily in the social sciences and humanities, stems from an impressive and continually growing body of feminist scholarship and gender studies published in the past three decades. As Athena Devlin observes, masculinity studies were driven by an urgency to redress the absent history of men’s gender and sexuality, a gap fostered by the notion that “gender operat[ed] transparently for men” (1). Stefan Horlacher also contends that in comparison to women’s studies, which have been “institutionalized” to a certain degree, masculinity as a subject of interrogation has been under-researched and under-theorized. Horlacher argues that masculinity “only much later began to receive the attention of the academy” precisely because it had been regarded as “invisible” (1-2).

Moreover, to the extent that academics did focus on masculinity, its configuration and theorization primarily centered on white masculinity. Whereas many masculinity scholars acknowledge that the existence of “others” was quintessential in consolidating the ubiquity and dominance of white masculinity, the study of marginalized others’ masculinities is neglected or only briefly mentioned. Sociologist Michael Kimmel’s work is a notable example of this oversight. In defining the scope of his study Manhood in America, a foundational text in American masculinity studies, Kimmel acknowledges that he excluded the history of “other” masculinities upon which white manhood is configured. Regarding this absence, Kimmel writes:
A history of manhood must, therefore, recount two histories: the history of the changing ‘ideal’ version of masculinity and the parallel and competing versions that coexist with it. … I do not tell the story of [the] ‘others’ from their point of view nor in their own voices; rather, I trace the ways that they were set up as everything that ‘straight white men’ were not, so as to provide public testimony and private reassurance that those ‘complete’ men were secure in their gender identity. (6)

As Bryce Traister accurately observes, Kimmel’s methodology reflects the history of American manhood, “a masculine will-to-power premised on the exclusion of his necessary ‘others’” (283). In other words, Kimmel’s comprehensive chronicle of the construction of hegemonic masculinity rests on the erasure of these ‘others.’

A rich body of studies and monographs has sought to fill the void Kimmel left, while also building on the historiography of his “complete” American manhood. Many studies of “other” masculinities focus on the way in which race constitutes one’s gendered subjectivity. This, of course, allows for an in-depth analysis of the way in which masculinity and race reflect and refract each other. While race is integral in informing masculinity, I build on and diverge from these studies by presuming there is a hierarchy of masculinities that governs the shaping of other masculinities. In so doing, I examine the specificities of masculinity constructions for a more holistic view about the operation of masculinity. Despite the publication of monographs examining the particulars of these “other” masculinities, there still is a deep lacuna with regard to the interdependency and intersectionality of these multiple masculinities.
While the field of literature has witnessed a surge in examinations of masculinity in the past thirty years, there is no chronological, comparative study focusing on masculinity across different ethnicities in America. This is a significant gap as examination of masculinities reveals the normative conventions of constructing and maintaining hegemonic masculinity as well as its shifting definitions. My dissertation explores how American writers navigate the contested nature of masculinity in works spanning the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries.

I focus on this period because colossal changes in the economic landscape and the influx of immigrants and middle-class women into the public sphere between the late 1800s and mid 1900s dramatically influenced the shape and definition of American men’s masculinity. In so doing, I also examine how the self-made man, a paradigmatic American figure with far-reaching socio-cultural resonance today, serves as the purview of hegemonic masculinity, a reference point through which other masculinities are measured. Although the primary focus of the dissertation is not the self-made man, the prototypical self-made man narratives arising from Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography*—including Horatio Alger’s tales—persist into the twentieth century, ordaining a normative masculinity that cannot be overlooked. The writers I examine present masculinities that deviate from hegemonic masculinity, challenge and/or reinforce the definition and parameters of hegemonic masculinity, and develop models of masculinity that meet the needs of their specific historical moments.

An overview of the historical transformation of masculinity during this period demonstrates the complex processes of constructing, ordaining, and maintaining a type of masculinity powerful enough to define the terms of the normative, which are neither
absolute nor secure. In so doing, I also articulate how ‘other’ masculinity(ies) were forged in the face of hegemonic masculinity by illuminating the ways in which various literary figures attend to and reveal the fissures and incongruities embedded in the myth of the self-made man. The self-made man is a defining national discourse central to the constitution of American masculinities. The multiple, competing masculinities I examine coalesce around the dominant masculinity embodied in the self-made man and its narrative.

I juxtapose two to three writers and their selected works in each chapter divided by the authors’ race and ethnicity. The authors whom I examine worked within the larger current of the conventional understanding of masculinity and questioned the centrality and presumed coherence of hegemonic masculinity. The chapters also proceed chronologically, spanning the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. In so doing, I also show the seemingly perpetual dominance of (white) masculinity and its policing of other racial minority subjects.

My study begins with two “white” literary texts that represent the experiences of a self-made man: William Dean Howells’ *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925). In Chapter 3, I trace the trajectory of the competing visions of masculinity Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Richard Wright constructed by focusing on *Up from Slavery, The Souls of Black Folk*, and *Native Son* respectively. In chapter three, I examine the different representations of ideal Jewish masculinity in Mike Gold’s *Jews without Money* (1930) and Nathanael West’s *A Cool Million: The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin* (1934), both of which are written by Jewish American writers and published in the 1930s. My fourth chapter compares the
protagonists of Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee* (1937) and Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* (1943) to illuminate the emergence and negotiation of Asian American masculinity from the late-1930s to the mid-1940s. The writers of my study were acutely aware of the urgency society faced regarding the upturned understanding of male identity at the turn of the century. Situated in this turbulent time, the writers actively engaged with one of the most pressing questions of the time: establishing and (re)defining male identity.

Ultimately, this study provides a comprehensive narrative that points to the multiplicity of American manhood. Through my analyses of these texts, I demonstrate how literary representations ask us to reconsider the way in which we examine masculinity. These writers’ cultural refashioning of masculinity show that they were not merely mirroring the concerns of the time but also were actively addressing them on their own terms. The literary efforts of these writers show that their works were both shaped by and inflected the social ideal of masculinity. In this way, literary works present different, creative ways of conceptualizing masculinity. Literary works also refracted the socio-political articulation of male identity, and it still has a lasting influence over our contemporary understanding of masculinity. As the following chapters show, the authors I examine tested and navigated the inflexibility of hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities that were not free from the policing of the dominant society.

More specifically, I explore multiple competing forms of masculinity that are also implicated by the ideals of the self-made man. How has the concept of masculinity been revised and adapted by different writers over the course of the early to mid-20th century? How and why did the authors respond to the question of manhood differently? How can
the binary of reading masculinity rooted in the larger relationship between hegemonic masculinity and other “alternative” masculinities be breached? I recognize that organizing the chapters by the authors’ ethnicity might risk reinforcing the binary of hegemonic and racial minority subjects. Framing these ‘others’ as a coherent category could subsume different, marginalized masculinities under a simplified category against which hegemonic masculinity is defined and consolidated. However, the chapter organization based on the authors’ race and ethnicity shows not only the inflexibility of the hierarchy of masculinity but also the distinct issues at stake in the discussion of masculinity to which these authors responded in a variety of ways. Moreover, the difference among the authors’ racialized sexuality and gender identity necessitates the need to articulate and refine the dominant, popular ideas about manhood within and against which these authors forged their ideas of masculinity.

Navigating gendered subjects requires a more comprehensive perspective. I argue that juxtaposing different modalities of masculinity construction and exploring the multifaceted treatment of American masculinity afford such an opportunity. This framework brings light to the historical complexities and myriad processes of establishing, maintaining, and challenging competing masculinities. The literary figures I examine constructed and/or destabilized the dominant masculinity they encountered by adopting and modifying a set of traits that was deemed masculine at the time and intervening in the contemporary understanding of masculinity. While some writers subscribed to the essentialized notions of masculinity and femininity, others escaped the binary logic albeit in a limited way.
Therefore, my critical investigation of these writers’ configuration of masculinity unearths the maneuvers of establishing and/or (re)defining masculinity, the presumed centrality and invisibility of hegemonic masculinity, and the dynamics and interdependency between hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities. In the end, my delineation of multiple representations of masculinity in American literary culture asks us to reassess and widen our understanding of masculinity by bringing into conversation the discourse of hegemonic masculinity and literary representations of masculinity that confirm, appropriate, or modify it into conversation.

My study employs the concept of hegemonic masculinity informed by Connell as a reference point through which to frame the construction of other masculinities, both of which continue to be (re)made. R.W. Connell’s reconceptualization of the term hegemonic masculinity, which she originally coined in the early 1980s, holds that the underlying notion of masculinity is “not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals” (836). Instead, Connell argues, “masculinity is defined as a configuration of practice organized in relation to the structure of gender relations” (843). In other words, masculinity is an assemblage of social actions, not essentialized traits (836). Building on this concept of masculinity, Connell further articulates that hegemonic masculinity anticipates the plurality of masculinities and undergoes complex maintenance to retain its position in the hierarchy of masculinities (846). Therefore, hegemonic masculinity is not “fixed, transhistorical” (838). Contingent on socio-historical contexts, the definition of hegemonic masculinity constantly shifts. Moreover, Connell acknowledges that the ideals hegemonic masculinity sets forth do not necessarily align with the actual reality and the lived experiences of boys and men.
As Martin Summers notes, using hegemonic masculinity as an analytical tool is only “one of many ways” to examine American masculinity. At the same time, Summer also contends that the frame is also useful because the imprint of hegemonic masculinity is still present in our understanding of gender subjectivity. Within this hegemonic-subordinate binary, African American men are treated as a “social problem,” and their construction of masculinity is only seen as “reactive, responsive, and resilient” (11). As such, their agency is rendered invisible.

Precisely because of this, I apply the oppositional politics of hegemonic masculinity and other “subordinate” masculinities. Within and against this dichotomy, my subject writers sought to challenge and alter the hierarchy of masculinities (even at the risk of constructing different sets of hierarchy they might have been unaware of). However, most of them were not free from the very constraints that Summers accurately points to as the deficiency of the model. Such a “failure” to escape the binary is evidence of the unyielding, perpetual power of the dominant masculinity that was simultaneously buttressed by and reinforced the dominant culture.

The assumption that there was an “essence,” an undisturbed, homogenous understanding of manhood all (white, native-born) men possessed, was destabilized by the turn-of-the-century emergence of the postindustrial corporate world, which left men feeling bereft of their presumed manhood. The national preoccupation with reinstating and redefining manhood has had a tremendous impact on configuring one’s subject position along the multiple axes of race, class, age, and gender. As Kimmel argued in his discussion of the discursive shift witnessed during this period, masculinity was emphasized through “the differentiation of men from women” (217). In contrast to the
term ‘manhood’, which existed in opposition to the term ‘childhood’, masculinity assumed a gendered meaning by rejecting anything associated with femininity.

Similar to Kimmel, Gail Bederman sees the turn of the century as a pivotal period that brought significant changes to how masculinity was understood. Bederman draws out the intersections of late nineteenth century definitions of masculinity, race, and civilization, and contends that the “discourse of civilization,” which regulated the idea of manliness, buttressed white supremacy. To reinstate the “essence” of manliness and its attendant power in the face of the supposed “feminizing” effects of the marketplace economy, men reframed aggressiveness, virility, and primitiveness as the principal markers of ideal masculinity. Such a reconceptualization of ideal masculinity in conjunction with the belief that white men reached the highest degree of civilization rationalized male dominance over women as well as white supremacy.

Greg Forter also points out the essential link between “the sex/gender and racial systems” spanning the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century and examines how the changing notions of gender and race have informed canonical modernism by merging studies of masculinity and psychoanalytic theories of mourning and trauma (“Mourning” 13). Forter argues that his subjects were attentive to and ambivalent about the shifting definitions of white masculinity. Rather than grieving masculine losses, modernist writers presented an alternative form of masculinity by seeking to present “a manhood neither ashamed nor disparaging of the socially ‘feminine’ in men” (5). Both Bederman and Forter acknowledge the historical transformations of this period disturbed definitions of (white) manhood (Bederman 12, Forter, “Mourning” 1-2). The rigid masculine/feminine
dichotomy and associated prescriptive gender roles were disrupted, leading to the revaluation of manhood, which suddenly required validation.

I also examine the evolving notion of the self-made man because it is useful for tracing the trajectory of masculinity(ies) across narratives woven by writers of different race and ethnicity. The prominence and ubiquity of the self-made man in American history and culture cannot be overstated. As Kimmel and James Catano note, hegemonic masculinity and the self-made man are mutually reinforcing: the dominant form of masculinity is constitutive of the self-made man. I recognize that employing the self-made man as an analytical lens might be constricting in examining the plurality of masculinity, as the figure itself is contradictory. However, this gap between myth and reality also reflects the rift between hegemonic masculinity and other “subordinate” masculinities. From this discordance between the ideals and realities of hegemonic masculinity arise the complex dynamics of competing masculinities.

However, it is not my purpose to gauge whether or not the protagonists fit into the mold of the self-made man. First of all, as previously mentioned, the self-made man is not the central topic of my work. My objective is to show the inevitable default to hegemonic masculinity the self-made man represents when discussing masculinities in general and subordinate masculinities in particular. Secondly, the figure of the self-made man and its narrative underwent significant definitional changes in concert with profound historical transformations that took place at the turn of the century. Given that the very notion of the self-made man is characterized by a certain instability, it is impossible to use it as a tool to measure other shifting masculine subjectivities against it.
At the same time, the durability of the myth cannot be overlooked. American hegemonic masculinity is grounded in the fantasy of self-making, and such a belief is observed across the texts that I am examining, prescribing the definitions and parameters of an ideal masculinity. In so doing, I also reveal the limits of prioritizing hegemonic masculinity when studying masculinity. It is certainly one of the various avenues that allows discussing masculinity from different angles. However, it also risks polarizing and reinforcing the dichotomy of hegemonic masculinity versus non-hegemonic, subordinate masculinities. Therefore, while I call attention to the ways in which the authors of my subject reaffirmed or disrupted the popular, contemporary understanding of gender difference and how these authors were shaped by the cultural milieus of the time, my examination of their texts also gestures toward a non-gender binary reading of masculinity. Tracking historical changes in competing forms of masculinity uncovers how a set of essentialized traits, though shifting, transformed into and manifested as a privileged form of masculinity.

Grounded in the historical circumstances in which the works I examine were produced, I explore the ways in which writers tread the current of the dominant gender discourse. The gender binary that these writers were working within and against is yet to be dismantled. In the end, my dissertation reveals the need to search for a different language to articulate and reassess not only masculinity but also femininity in order to escape the shackles of thinking in terms of gender binary. Situating these works in their socio-historical contexts and examining the unwavering influence of the gender binary offer us a fresh framework to work against this dichotomy.
CHAPTER 2

THE REVISION OF HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY
IN THE SELF-MADE MAN MYTHS OF
THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM AND THE GREAT GATSBY

Introduction

Both *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *The Great Gatsby* present their protagonists as the epitome of the self-made man situated in a drastically changing period of America. The protagonists built their own fortune, and as representative new money, their existence threatens the authority and status old money has long enjoyed. The juxtaposing of Lapham and Gatsby sheds light on the turbulent period between the late-nineteenth and the early-twentieth centuries: the transition effects changes in the myth of the self-made man as well as the ensuing definitions of masculinity.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the values traditionally associated with the self-made man shifted. One notable change in the self-made man myth at this transitional period from the agrarian society to the market-driven society is the emphasis on material gain. Both Donald E. Pease and Michael Kimmel point out the significance of the marketplace in changing the perception of the self-made man. Kimmel explains that in the mid-nineteenth century, the capitalist marketplace was the very barometer that defined manhood. The self-made man was equivalent to the “Marketplace Man” and thus, the accumulation of “wealth, power, and capital” anchored one’s identity (“Consuming” 38). With the colossal change in the economic landscape, the values traditionally expected of the self-made man shifted as well. Pease also argues that since the post-Civil War era, “competitive personality,” which drives one’s desire for possession, replaced the Emersonian perception of character as America became a predominantly industrialized
nation (16). In this process, moral authority, which defined one’s character, and thus used to be an essential quality of the self-made man, gradually lost its significance.

However, both Howells and Fitzgerald recuperate the significance of moral authority in the self-made man through their protagonists albeit in a different manner. Despite their failure to assimilate into elite society, Lapham “rises,” and Gatsby is made “great,” as the titles of both the narratives suggest. For both Howells and Fitzgerald, then, it appears that moral authority is an essential element in demonstrating the protagonists’ worth, and ultimately their manhood. Yet, the feminine connotation ascribed onto moral authority, which is associated with the upper class, complicates the protagonists’ construction of masculinity. The juxtaposition of Lapham and Gatsby along the line of moral authority demonstrates the shifting values associated with masculinity and femininity in the period between late 19th century and early 20th century. As such, in both texts, certain traits marked in gendered terms disturb reading the protagonists’ masculinity as coherent.

The second chapter demonstrates how the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity within the works of one of the most “canonical” white male authors has always been challenged by exploring the trajectory of the definition of the self-made man and its associated meaning of masculinity the protagonists embody. The juxtaposition of Lapham and Gatsby, who are emblematic self-made man figures, reveals that the constitution of hegemonic masculinity the self-made man represents always shifts. It also shows the upper class’s endeavor to guard and police who has access to and privilege of the dominant masculinity. Consequently, white men had to utilize a variety of maneuvers
to keep the privilege of defining the boundary of hegemonic masculinity under their
control because the constitution of a dominant form of masculinity continuously changed.

There are a few studies that examine Lapham’s masculinity. For example, Graham Thompson, in his study of the homosocial bond between Lapham and Tom, reads Lapham traversing the province of old money as a sign of gender transgression (32). According to Thompson, Lapham’s desire to become part of the established money risks losing his muscular masculinity. However, such “loss” of masculinity is later compensated because the protagonist earns respect from other Bostonians through his moral rise, which is seen as “pragmatic, masculine, righteous,” according to Thompson (45).

In “Clean Hands and an Iron Face: Frontier Masculinity and Boston Manliness in *The Rise of Silas Lapham,*” Matthew J. Lavin argues that Lapham forges a new, coherent male identity by reconciling “competing paradigms of masculinity,” most notably the physical toughness of the working class and the moral sensibilities of the upper class (363). According to Lavin, Howells integrated these competing masculine tropes in anticipation of establishing a new type of manhood (378). Both Thompson and Lavin conclude that the protagonist solidifies his masculine position through the moral act he performs in the end. Lapham’s desire for upward mobility disrupts his seemingly stable masculine identity.

However, the focus on Lapham’s action fails to take account of the rigid class hierarchy Boston society imposes on Lapham. Despite the upper-class Bostonians’ diminishing authority, they still had the power to regulate one’s entrance into the dominant society, and such patrolling affected Lapham’s construction of masculinity as
well. Therefore, I examine the tension between Lapham’s desire for joining the dominant society and the measures to prevent him from doing so: this conflict reflects the changing notions of an ideal masculinity in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Few critics of *The Great Gatsby* have examined the protagonist’s gender identity. There are a number of studies discussing Nick’s potential homosexuality or Fitzgerald’s gender insecurity as author. However, critical research about the masculinity of Gatsby remains underdeveloped.¹ Moreover, when Gatsby’s masculinity is in concern, critics mostly focus on the protagonist’s sartorial choices. For example, Chaterine Mintler argues that the dandy’s preoccupation with fashion contests “the limits and stresses of socially acceptable, normative forms of masculinity prescribed for upper- and middle-class, heterosexual, white men in American society” (107). I agree with Mintler’s observation that Gatsby’s clothing unsettles the conventional display of masculine identity. However, as Mintler also admits, clothing constitutes only a part of Gatsby’s masculinity (107). Moreover, his costume underscores his failure in assimilating into the dominant society and therefore solidifies the privileged masculinity of the upper class as normative, without providing Gatsby with an alternative form to express masculinity. Therefore, while I recognize Gatsby’s self-invention through sartorial extravagance, I

¹ Over the last thirty years, besides Frances Kerr, who argues that Nick is concealing his homoerotic attraction to Gatsby, a number of critics began stressing Nick’s homosexuality, reading Nick to be emotionally and romantically attracted to Gatsby. For instance, Keath Fraser points out the lack of research regarding Nick’s sexual ambiguity (331). Edward Wasiolek seeks to affirm Nick’s homosexuality, claiming that the narrator’s “homosexual leanings” become obvert when he meets Chester McKee, an effeminate artist (18). Maggie Froehlick also highlights that Nick is “invested in sexual passing” primarily because Fitzgerald himself was afraid of being associated with homosexuality (85). She argues that such a fear was projected on the narrator. Scott S. Derrick also contends that *The Great Gatsby* has “a homoerotically charged plot” (198).
extend the discussion of masculinity into the protagonist’s mysterious past and moral authority via the lens of the self-made man.

Howells wrote *The Rise of Silas Lapham* at the height of his career. Howells (1837-1920) was the foremost champion of the American realist movement. Not only a well-known, reputable novelist, Howells was also the most influential literary critic as the editor of *The Atlantic* between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a prolific writer, Howells published novels, essays, poems, dramas, and criticisms. Howells published his first novel, *Their Wedding Journey*, in 1875. Since then, Howells published a number of novels, including *A Modern Instance* (1882) and *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890). Howells’ fame and influence dissipated at the end of his career, as realism, of which he was a strong advocate, began to be dismissed as old-fashioned.

*The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) is probably the best-known work among Howells’ novels. It recounts the trajectory of self-made businessman Silas Lapham’s success and failure in the paint business, and eventually his “rise” through his moral decision despite the consequence of losing all his fortune. With the success of his business, Lapham moves from Vermont to Boston, and wishes to join the upper-class Brahmins. Juxtaposed to the titular character is Bromfield Corey, the genteel Brahmins of Boston. Bromfield’s son Tom, who refuses to follow his father’s footstep, learns business under the guidance of Lapham. The son later gets married to Lapham’s first daughter, Penelope, not Irene, the second daughter who first expressed romantic interest in Tom. Lapham, who believes he can buy the social status the Brahmins inhabits, eventually realizes the futility of doing so. He lacks the appropriate taste and etiquette Boston society requires. Although Lapham’s business is dwindling, he makes a moral decision
not to sell his worthless property to an English syndicate. He could have used the resulting money to salvage the business but decides not to do so. Although he socially falls, he morally rises.

F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940) is the quintessential chronicler of the 1920s. His first novel, *The Side of Paradise* (1920) and the following publication of *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922), made him an instant celebrity and secured his position as a spokesman of prospering America. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) did not receive as much critical acclaim as Fitzgerald expected. He wanted to align himself with what he considered serious literary writers. His attempt to achieve this goal is well-demonstrated in his craft and technical experimentation with point of view in *The Great Gatsby*. After publishing his fourth and final novel *Tender is the Night* in 1934, *The Last Tycoon* was posthumously published in 1941. Fitzgerald’s fame was tainted as he struggled to finance his opulent lifestyle. He eventually moved to Hollywood to work as a screenwriter.

*The Great Gatsby* (1925) is a story about a mysterious, nouveau-riche Jay Gatsby. The narrator is Nick Carraway who was once Gatsby’s neighbor in West Egg. Through Gatsby, the narrator shows the futility of recuperating the past as well as the difficulty of achieving the American Dream. As time progresses, Nick gets invited to one of Gatsby’s extravagant parties and befriends the protagonist. The narrator also learns that Gatsby was deeply in love with his cousin Daisy Buchanan, who lives in East Egg with her husband, Tom. With Nick’s help, Gatsby and Daisy reunite, and their love rekindles. However, Tom gets suspicious of his wife’s relationship with Gatsby. After a heated confrontation between Tom and Gatsby in New York, Daisy kills Tom’s mistress, Myrtle, in a car accident. However, Tom reports that Gatsby was the driver of the car,
and Myrtle’s husband George shoots Gatsby to death. The novella ends with Gatsby’s funeral to which nobody comes.

In writing Lapham and Gatsby, both Howells and Fitzgerald were creating protagonists whose characteristics as self-made men embodied the conflicts of the period—between the rising new money and the older established order, between the vulgarity of the former and the elite taste of the latter, between the ambiguous racial characteristics of the insurgent classes and the assumed “whiteness” of the upper classes, between the ruthless and amoral pursuit of wealth on the part of the new money and the supposed refined moral sensibilities of the upper class, and between the masculinity of the self-made man and the putative femininity of the softer old-money classes. All of these conflicts were played out in Lapham and Gatsby, but what is most interesting is the changes witnessed from the earlier novel to the later, as a reflection of changes in American society, in the creation of wealth, and in the mores of the moneyed classes.

Howells sums up some of these conflicts in an essay he wrote in 1893 titled “The Man of Letters as a Man of Business.” Here, Howells puts himself into the conflicted position of artist and businessman and explores the contradictions that he would write into the character of Silas Lapham. In this essay, Howells asks, “Is the man of letters ever a businessman?” (30) According to Howells, in an ideal situation, writers do not have to make a living through writing, as “Business is the opprobrium of Literature” (32). However, keenly aware of the implications of literary production as business, Howells also admits that business is “the only human solidarity” (32). Howells is well-aware of the fact that writers cannot produce art in leisure time but have to make writing their profession. In this sense, the writer is akin to the new businessman.
However, according to Howells, maintaining artistic integrity as a writer and gaining wealth as a businessman simultaneously are impossible. Therefore, in order to make money, Howells suggests, writers need to become shrewd in anticipating what type of book will sell. In order to do so, knowing what women enjoy reading is imperative, because they are the main consumers of books. However, satisfying female readers’ taste and demonstrating craftmanship are incommensurable in Howells’ view. According to him, the following elements constitute “the best” works: “He has a strong, robust manly style; his stories are well knit, and his characters are of the flesh and blood complexion which we know in our daily experience” (36). However, these works do not sell because they do not “please women”. Therefore, writers should “hope somehow that [their] best will also be [their] prettiest” (36).

According to Howells, to make profit out of the profession, writers have to give up the “robust manly style” and resort to a “pretty” style that suits women’s tastes. As a result, writers’ masculinity is in jeopardy. Moreover, measured against the idealized profession of businessman, the writer was considered abnormal and feminine, even “a little off, a little funny, a little soft!” (36). Not only the profession itself but also the elements that render the works profitable are branded feminine. Howells’ perceived incommensurability between artistic integrity and profitable work delineates his own anxiety about being a writer while defending his masculinity.

Just as Howells draws distinctions between masculinity and femininity by contrasting a writer to a businessman, Fitzgerald was anxious about being seen as feminine because of his profession as an author. Fitzgerald was keenly aware that writers were considered effeminate, and as a result, he wanted to show his “masculine”
craftsmanship through *The Great Gatsby* by dislodging any emotional excess, which was deemed feminine, from the narrative. As Todd Onderdonk writes, it cannot be ignored that “a harsh rhetoric of aesthetic masculinization nevertheless pervaded” at the time Fitzgerald was writing (191). Situated within this strict binary between femininity and masculinity in writing, Fitzgerald wanted to prove himself being a masculine writer so that he could be considered a “serious” modernist writer.

As such, both Howells and Fitzgerald demonstrate the anxiety of gender identity imposed on their profession, which was stereotyped as feminine. They seek to address this issue through their works, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *The Great Gatsby*. The complexities of establishing their status as writers within the strict gender binary is projected on their works. The narratives reveal the ways in which the authors both subscribe to and defy the gender binary of the time within the broader frame of the myth of the self-made man. In parallel to the myth, the authors’ conflicted attitudes towards the intersection between authority and masculinity are also demonstrated through the desire of the protagonists of each text to assimilate into the upper echelons.

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2 Moreover, as Kerr and Onderdonk point out, Fitzgerald expressed his gender insecurity as a writer in several letters he wrote to H.L. Mencken and Laura Guthrie, and he was also subject to gendered evaluations from his contemporaries, such as Edmund Wilson (Kerr 408, Onderdonk 191).
The Self-Made Man Myth and the Making of Masculinity

The first chapter of *The Rise of Silas Lapham* focusing on Bartley Hubbard’s report on Silas Lapham succinctly captures the regulatory role the self-made man myth plays in constructing one’s identity. In the “Solid Men of Boston” series of *The Events*, Hubbard portrays Lapham as an ideal self-made businessman in alignment with the popular myth (3). However, the myth the reporter faithfully follows reveals its fissures, as Hubbard personally does not see Lapham as an exemplary self-made man because of his lack of education and manner, which are both signs of class. Hubbard’s public act of writing an article within the frame of the myth of the self-made man and his private derision towards Lapham delineate the ways in which class infracts the issue of gaining membership to Boston society. Lapham building his own fortune makes him a prototypical self-made man, but he further needs others’ approval in order to join mainstream society. In this process, Lapham’s masculinity becomes a site of contestation. Lapham’s masculinity as a successful self-made man is incommensurable with the masculinity of Hubbard as well as the Brahmins because of the protagonist’s lack of social background.

The “Solid Men of Boston” series Hubbard is working on clearly shows one of the chief values that readers of the newspaper hold—the self-made man who deservedly is rewarded with economic gain. In this regard, Lapham is a perfect candidate for the series. Not only the reporter but also the protagonist is fully aware of what he stands for—material success. To Hubbard, Lapham remarks, “I guess you wouldn’t want my life without the money” (3). Although Hubbard claims that he is not “after” his interviewee’s money, he soon admits, “you’re just one million times more interesting to the public than
if you hadn’t a dollar” (4). The reporter’s sole interest lies in Lapham’s business maneuver and financial success. As Lapham begins talking about his childhood, Hubbard wonders if he could say “he was not there for the purpose of interviewing his ancestry” (6). Lapham’s upbringing is necessary for the reporter’s interview only when it pertains to Lapham’s accumulation of wealth.

In addition to Lapham’s wealth, his physical appearance also contributes to Hubbard’s characterization of the protagonist as a “solid” man. Hubbard details Lapham’s physique as such: his “square, bold chin,” “short, reddish-gray beard,” “short and straight” nose, “solid bulk,” and “a pair of massive shoulders” (4). After listing these features, Hubbard defines Lapham as “a fine type of the successful American” (4). Lapham, a person who is equipped with both financial success and impressive physique, is undeniably a solid, successful American man in Hubbard’s report. As such, readers can see the type of masculinity a successful self-made businessman stands for.

While the journalist frames the protagonist within the myth of the self-made man, he also tries to draw a distinction between himself and Lapham. The reporter who faithfully chronicles his subject’s trajectory of material success cannot conceal his contempt towards Lapham. Unlike the valorization of Lapham as a successful American in the article, the journalist personally does not see the subject worthy of praise. The narrator notes that Hubbard finishes the article “with a good deal of inward derision,” mainly because Lapham uses an unusual accent and ungrammatical diction, and also lacks manner (21). The protagonist is marked with “burly simplicity” and is nothing more than an “old fool,” and therefore, is inferior to Hubbard (21, 22).
As Clair Virginia Eby points out, “the journalist’s sense of superiority rests on a perception of social differences as manifested in upbringing, education, and ability to manipulate language” (42). The masculine features marked by wealth and robustness are sufficient to render Lapham as an ideal self-made man. Refined manner and education, which gained feminine connotations, are not required elements for a self-made man. In fact, these qualities are even resisted. Yet, these elements demarcate one’s class position within society, as they are usually considered a privilege the upper class possess. Despite Lapham possessing the ideals set forth by the self-made man myth, Lapham fails to become a respectable constituent of American society.

Ironically, the journalist has to resort to the myth of the self-made man in order to gratify readers of The Events. In spite of Hubbard’s sense of superiority over Lapham, the reporter is still required to seamlessly fit Lapham into the self-made man myth. Eby claims, “Hubbard must re-make the businessman in his own image, aligning him with his newspaper’s notion of the representative American” even at the risk of “suppress[ing] a many-faceted human being” (40). The myth of the self-made man, despite Hubbard’s successful concealment of his derision, is a powerful tool to attract readership, a fact he cannot ignore.

In the opening chapter, the narrator demonstrates the ways in which Lapham is morphed into an ideal self-made man through the myth as well as the incompetency of the myth in taking account of the issue of class. Beneath the veneer of the myth, neither money nor physical masculinity automatically put Lapham into a certain position that people respect. The myth of the self-made man is necessary to make Lapham visible to others, but not sufficient to make him be part of Boston society. The protagonist, who
was unaware of his class position, comes to realize this regulatory role as he tries to join mainstream society.

As such, society itself functions as the ultimate barometer in gauging whether one belongs to or can become part of it. The issue of membership arises as Lapham seeks to make an entrance into Boston society, mainly for his daughters’ marriage. In fact, he has to assimilate into the upper echelon of Boston first, so that his daughters can find suitors. However, his assets do not grant him membership into nor respect from the upper class. Besides Hubbard’s unwillingness to accept Lapham as a “fine type of the successful American” as portrayed in the opening chapter, the resistance of the upper class to accept Lapham emphasizes that money is not the only qualification that guarantees one’s entrance (4).

Tom Corey, who works under the guidance of Lapham and is from the upper class of Boston, sees the vulgarity of the assets that Lapham has acquired. He remarks, “there [is] everything in [Lapham’s] house that money could buy. But money has its limitations” (99). Tom finds a way to distinguish himself from Lapham, as Hubbard had found his superiority over Lapham through language and education. Tom remarks, “I dare say they never buy a new book. I’ve met some of these moneyed people lately, and they lavish on every conceivable luxury, and then borrow books, and get them in the cheap paper editions” (100). According to Tom, Lapham is spending money on the wrong items. In fact, for the Coreys, who “never cared for the money,” the Laphams drinking ice-water, not coffee or ice, “defines them” (346, 139). Even the type of book Lapham purchases shows that he is insufficient to be considered as a member of Boston society, as it demonstrates what Tom values in contrast to Lapham.
Regarding Lapham’s lack of taste, Mary Marchand considers Lapham is in a state of class innocence. For Marchand, this ignorance is “both appealing and irritating” as it “ensures one’s dignity and self-worth but also … allows one crudely to imagine that anything of value can be bought” (286, 288). When money is not spent on “proper” items, the purchased goods function only as indicators of Lapham’s vulgarity. Therefore, Lapham has to demonstrate he is a sophisticated, cultured man, which appears to be the final barrier that prevents him from joining the upper class. However, the harder Lapham tries to learn and thus, assimilate, the more the journey becomes mortifying since he realizes not everything—social status and the culture it represents—can be purchased.

In contrast to Lapham, Bromfield Corey, who is the archetypal upper-class gentleman, “is an effortless … magnification of the personality,” a quality that the more physically imposing Silas … fails to attain” (296). In order to maintain privilege and authority as the upper class, it is crucial for people to be presentable effortlessly through their taste, and the Laphams, who strenuously have to learn the taste that the upper class “naturally” possess, fail to achieve this. As Marchand contends, “Howells is clear that upper class behaviors cannot be acquired through imitation” (300). The epitome of the self-made man who has been capable of exercising agency and authority disappears as the narrative unfolds. As a result, only a man of imitation remains.

Both Lapham and the Coreys understand that manner and taste demarcate their class status. Therefore, Lapham has to imitate and perform the manner and taste of the Coreys to demonstrate that he is equal to the Coreys. However, such a performance also

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3 This contestation between authenticity and imitation is when discussing the tropes of passing and/or assimilation.
jeopardizes Lapham’s masculinity, which is defined primarily by his physical attributes and actions. As Jonathan Mitchell underscores in his reconceptualization of the American Adam, “American masculinity is that which must be expressed/displayed” (9). Since masculinity “cannot ever be fully articulated,” it “becomes reduced to the measure of actions” (9). The actions that constitute the definition of masculinity Boston society approves of are subject to change, as Lapham exemplifies.

Ironically, Lapham’s incapability of joining the upper class manifests his masculinity in contrast to Bromfield’s masculinity. In fact, their masculinities are not questioned but assumed until they reach the point of claiming a place and defending it in Boston society. It is only when Lapham tries to assimilate and step into the boundary of old money, that his actions assume gendered meanings. The upper class represented hegemonic masculinity of the time. Mitchell contends, “essentializing the privileged masculinity is the only means to counteract the slipperiness of the signs of masculinity, so that masculinity comes to be understood as not cultural, but natural” (8). Because privileged masculinity is rendered natural, it remains invisible and its validity is never questioned.

However, the apparent “naturalness” erodes when the power of the upper class starts to diminish. The “natural” quality fades away and other kinds of actions replace the position these masculine actions used to occupy. As Bromfield acknowledges, the Coreys stand for “a faded tradition” and the power the family once possessed is on decline (102). With the fading authority of the elite class, the taste and manner Lapham performs to gain admission loses validity as well. The diminishing significance of the elite class, thus, demonstrates the declining power of the type of masculinity Bromfield represents.
Accordingly, actions that were once seen as examples of hegemonic masculinity are now considered non-masculine, or even feminine, as the authority accompanying it is effacing. Lapham is in limbo: as a successful self-made man whose masculinity is defined by assets and physical attributes, Lapham also has to negotiate his place within a society that is still regulated by traditional ideals of “feminine” manners Bromfield represents.

Lavin argues that the text “reinvent[s] the ideal man based on gentrified notions of morality and frontier toughness” (363). According to Lavin, as the exemplary model of manhood set forth by the Victorian era began fading in the late-nineteenth century, Lapham is rendered an ideal man, due to his geographical orientation (the West), physique, and morality. In other words, both Lapham’s virility and virtue set him apart from the rest. Lavin writes, “when compared with historical models of masculinity, Lapham’s identity is a clear composite of two opposing ideologies, one that prizes physical strength, virility, hard work, and the ability to dominate, and one that attaches importance to family values, mental strength, and morality” (375). Lapham’s masculinity consists of two opposite cultural modes, and this represents the emerging ideal of masculinity.

According to Lavin, Lapham’s masculinity is further emphasized when he is put in contrast to Bromfield, whose “affluence, social standing, artistic sensibility, and lack of business sense contribute to his status as a specimen of Victorian manliness” that is also declining (368). In the end, between two competing modes of masculinity, Lavin contends that Lapham’s masculinity triumphs (369). However, it appears that Lavin does not specify the reasons the masculinity Lapham represents come to be the more dominant version over that of Bromfield. For instance, such a specific type of masculinity that
Lapham represents appeals only to readers of *The Events*, not to those like the Coreys who do not read the same newspaper. In fact, the father has never heard of the title of the paper before, and the son, who is aware of its publication, does not read it. Thus, for the Coreys and the upper class whom they represent, such a new type of masculinity is not even visible. Such a failure to acknowledge different kinds of newspapers and an emerging type of masculinity might explain the reasons the Corey’s authority over Boston society is declining. However, at the same time, their indifference or, even ignorance, affirms the rigid class hierarchy that cannot be easily breached.

The narrator affords Lapham with the potential to become a new type of American but at the same time, also shows the unyielding authority of the upper class. Marchand claims that the novel affirms “the virtual impossibility of passing” because of the rigid class hierarchy (311). The term “passing” is noteworthy as it signifies that Lapham’s performance of taste and manner to join the upper class is unsuccessful or seen as “inauthentic” because the upper-bourgeois culture is inimitable, implying that it is also innate (Marchand 284). Marchand uses “passing” as a way to show that culture is a dialectic between authenticity and imitation, and that mere emulation does not pass as appropriate. Additionally, the term points to the ways in which the upper class maintains its authority through pedigree.

The dinner scene, which is one of the most memorable scenes of the narrative, is a prime example that finally brings closure to Lapham’s dream of joining the ruling class. The narrator observes, “When the alien hears a group of Boston calling one another, and speaking of all their gentlemen friends … he must feel keenly the exile to which he was born” where the society maintained and guarded its heredity by “Middlesexes [having]
married Essexes and produced Suffolks for two hundred and fifty years” (173). The narrator further observes that these conditions, which are “so perilous to the foreigner, are a source of strength and security to those native to them” (173). As the words, “alien”, “exile”, and “foreigner” connote, Lapham is an outsider. He is excluded from the clan, which has sustained its lineage for more than two centuries through heredity.

The words the narrator use to mark the gulf between Lapham and Boston society illustrate that Lapham is equivalent to a foreigner: he lives in a different territory, speaks an incomprehensible language, and most notably, is not of the same bloodline. Kermit Vanderbilt finds the irony of Lapham’s incapability of joining the upper class despite the declining authority of Boston society and because of his lineage as a reflection of Howells’ own uncertain social position in Boston. As an outsider from Ohio, Howells was fully aware that the prominence he gained in Boston “had come through hard work rather than inheritance” that “the feelings of a natural aristocrat were not identical to those of the hereditary aristocrat” (299). The author’s feeling of insecurity as a member of Boston society is delineated through Lapham, whose hard work and performance of taste and manner do not secure his position in mainstream society. Lapham is a businessman, who has a better prospect of success than that of the “man of letter” in the late nineteenth century Boston society according to Howells. However, even this profession fails to guarantee Lapham’s assimilation into the upper class.

The “strength and security” of the Brahmins foreclose any chance of membership, since no matter how much Lapham tries to learn and emulate the custom of the upper class, he cannot attain the same lineage through imitation. Lapham, who, in spite of having embodied the ideal self-made man, fails to assimilate. At the same time, as noted
above, the Coreys represent the fading tradition. Furthermore, the privilege automatically granted to the upper class through closely controlled marriage is no longer viable as the marriage between Lapham’s daughter and Corey’s son Tom exemplifies. Lapham’s performance of assimilation via taste and manner bespeaks the tension among different types of masculinities. Such a tension resists one version of masculinity gaining complete dominance over that of others.

At the dinner table a night before, Lapham sees himself equal to everyone else present at the Coreys’ estate. When Lapham first came to Boston, he was “a little worse off than nothing at all,” but after ten years, “here he was now worth a million, and meeting you gentleman like one of you” (206). Here, Lapham distinguishes himself from the upper class. He does not see himself as a gentleman. Without anyone explicitly pointing out what he has done wrong, Lapham instinctively understands the unbridgeable gap between him and the ruling class. In front of Tom, Lapham cries out, “I was the only one that wasn’t a gentleman there!” (209) Whereas the narrator points out the exclusivity of the upper class through birthright, Lapham realizes it through his public humiliation that has its roots in lack of manner. Lapham, who once thought that he was equal to the Coreys because of his wealth, sees the exclusiveness of the upper class secured through lineage and other qualities that Lapham does not have any knowledge of and cannot even imitate.

Ultimately, the decision of granting membership to Lapham is in the hands of people like the Coreys. As Lapham’s wife points out, Bromfield “has been all his life in society, and he knows just what to say and what to do,” a knowledge Lapham lacks (120). Implicit in Penelope’s evaluation is that Lapham is not part of Boston society,
therefore is a transgressor, and Bromfield is the one who dictates the rules of Boston society to maintain the status quo, granting entrance to it. To him, society needs boundaries. Bromfield asks, “Will [Lapham] be a great addition to society?” (138) Bromfield’s standard in assessing one’s suitability is not based on character. He continues, “Society is a very different sort of thing from good sense and right ideas. It is based upon them, of course, but the airy, graceful, winning superstructure which we all know demands different qualities” (138). One of the examples of the “different qualities” that are prioritized over “good sense and right ideas” is whether or not the Laphams have hosted a dinner before. Bromfield questions, “… but people who have never yet given a dinner, how is society to assimilate them?” (139) It is neither achievement nor character that allows Lapham to assimilate into Boston society but the trivial manners the Coreys value.

Such a value system becomes more evident with Lapham’s departure from Boston. Despite the commotion at the dinner the Coreys hosted, Lapham gains acceptance from the upper class through his moral action. He staunchly refuses the prospective investor’s offer on his failing business because it involves Lapham selling worthless land to them. His moral choice is not only a sign of his agency but also a signal of bridging the gap between disparate social classes: Tom, who initially saw Lapham’s behavior as an affront to his upper-class status, realizes the injustices done to Lapham. Lapham’s moral act likewise commands the admiration of Bromfield, who is “proud of him,” and finds “a delicate, aesthetic pleasure in the heroism” Lapham has shown (315). However, such an evaluation of the protagonist is ironic since the qualities Lapham demonstrate, as Bromfield remarks, are normatively associated with “femininity.”
Additionally, it should not be ignored that such an approval is given from a distance; Lapham’s moral action does not mean that he can be part of Boston society.

According to Pease, Lapham combines “traits of both the self-made man as well as the laissez-faire individualist” that his “social mobility [is] expressive of his belief in the superiority of laissez-faire individualism over the values of the self-made man” (16). The nineteenth-century self-made man was equivalent to a successful businessman, and moral authority was not a desirable quality for such a man, as this trait was seen as equivalent to effemineness. However, Lapham does not lose masculinity as a result of his moral choice. In fact, Lapham recuperates his moral authority by sacrificing his monetary gain and social status, and in so doing, he gains approval from the Coreys, his wife, and within himself. The narrator writes, “[adversity] had taken from him all hope of the social success for which people and truckle, and restored him, through failure and doubt and heartache, the manhood which prosperity had so nearly stolen from him” (359).

Regarding this restoration of manhood via the balance between economic loss and moral gain, Lavin argues, “Lapham settles into an alternative model of masculinity where physical prowess and hearty business sense matter but must be accompanied by a sense of moral nobility” (376). Lapham’s withdrawal from Boston society does not signify his defeat but opens up the possibility for the protagonist to represent a different type of masculinity that fuses both the traditional and the contemporary definitions of the self-made man.
Moral Authority and Masculinity in *The Great Gatsby*

In contrast to *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, in which moral authority solidifies the protagonist’s social position and masculinity, in *The Great Gatsby*, the significance of moral authority is greatly diminished. Michael Pekarofski notes, “Bootlegging for Gatsby is a means by which he can overcome his initial class status and get within geographical and social proximity of [the Buchanans]” (63). Since Gatsby’s only purpose of life is to get closer to Daisy, Gatsby does not register the moral dilemma associated with committing such a crime. The criminal activity is just a means to make a profit so that he could assimilate into the upper class and finally win Daisy back. Gatsby’s lack of moral authority in pursuing his objective is evident from his criminal activities, and this deliberate tarnishing of the myth of the self-made man ironically emphasizes Gatsby’s greatness in Nick’s interpretation of the titular hero.

At the turn of the century, the presumably naturalized gender roles were disturbed, primarily due to the drastic change in the economic sphere. The vastly altered economic system disrupted the balance between traditionally ascribed qualities of masculinity and femininity: while man stood for aggression and virility, women complemented these qualities with moral compassion and emotional sensitivity. As Forter argues, “A period’s dominant definition of manhood felt exceedingly tenuous and hard to achieve, for historically specifiable reasons and for a sufficiently large group of people” (“Psychobiography” 152). The vastly altered economic system disrupted the balance between traditionally ascribed qualities of masculinity and femininity.

The ways in which men responded to and grappled with the changing values ascribed to gender roles was to rewrite the once comforting female virtues as
emasculating, effete, and effeminate, thus actively reshaping the meaning of masculinity. As a result, the feminine virtues, which were once regarded as essential to balance masculine qualities, were no longer desirable, and only a version of masculinity that was marked by particular traits, such as aggressiveness, physical dominance, and hardness remained. Within this gender binary, the significance of moral authority, which was traditionally seen as a feminine virtue, gradually dissipated.

However, it should be noted that this binary that categorizes emotional control as masculine and expression of sentiment as feminine based on the division of the public sphere and the private sphere is an “oversimplification” that has become one of the “most well-entrenched truisms about masculinity” as Milette Shamir and Jennifer Travis point out (1-2). They question the resilience of this master narrative regarding the supposed mutual exclusivity between sentimentality and masculinity, and extend Howard’s reminder that “neither sentiment nor antisentiment exist independently … nor do they ‘belong’ to one gender alone” in their collection of essays that reexamines masculinity along the line of emotional expression (qtd. in Shamir and Travis 2). Therefore, it is imperative to perceptively distinguish between a historically informed understanding of the gender binary that existed at the turn of the twentieth century and the critics’ perpetuation of the division to the present.

Moreover, as Connell clarifies in her reconceptualization of the term hegemonic masculinity, idealized definitions of masculinity do not necessarily correspond “to the lives of any actual men,” but “express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires” (838). Fitzgerald straddled between ideals and reality in constructing and expressing Gatsby’s masculinity: shifting, incommensurable ideals of masculinity based on the gender binary
were prescribed onto the male characters as well as the author himself. As Onderdonk observes, “a harsh rhetoric of aesthetic masculinization nevertheless pervaded the discursive buoying Fitzgerald at this time” and the author was acutely aware of the gendered divisions (191). In *The Great Gatsby*, multiple masculinities manifest and compete for dominance, but neither a single trait constitutes one’s masculinity nor masculinity itself is static.

Gatsby’s belief in his capability of assimilation stems from his newly acquired wealth that in turn underscores his masculinity. The drastic change in the capitalist marketplace allows Gatsby to display his assimilability through conspicuous consumption. Kimmel observes, since the late nineteenth-century, “how one lived” replaced “what one did” as consumption displaces production as the signifier of one’s identity (“Consuming” 43). As such, the lifestyle Gatsby puts on display through his wealth defines his identity. Gatsby’s flaunting of wealth, in particular through his attire, functions in the multiple ways Gatsby can appropriate the traits of the upper class, displaying his capability of approximating Tom’s class status. However, it also “ironizes his efforts at originality” as Meredith Goldsmith claims, as it unearths Gatsby’s inauthenticity—his pretense to appear as one of the old money elite (447).

Gatsby’s ostentatious display of wealth cannot grant him the privilege and authority old money “naturally” possesses. Gatsby is fully cognizant of the distinction between old money and new money, and clearly wishes to disguise himself as the one who belongs to the former. To accomplish this goal, Gatsby imitates and purchases what the old money would have had possessed. For example, when Gatsby shows Daisy around his mansion for the first time, he proudly says, “It took [him] just three years to
earn the money that bought it” (*GG* 72). When Nick interrupts and points out that he “thought [Gatsby] inherited [his] money,” Gatsby “automatically” replies that he did, but lost most of it (72). For Gatsby, assuming the social status that old money provides him with is as critical as displaying his wealth to Daisy. However, not only the mansion but also Gatsby’s sartorial choice uncovers his inauthenticity. Tom, who is ever suspicious of Gatsby’s past, retorts to Jordan Baker, when she insists that Gatsby went to Oxford. He says, “An Oxford Man! … Like hell he is! He wears a pink suit” (97). For Tom, wearing a pink suit is the definitive evidence that Gatsby did not attend Oxford. A genuine “Oxford Man” would not choose pink.

The very clothing and lifestyle that enabled Gatsby to display his accumulated wealth, which he thought would suffice to claim that he is an equal of the Buchanans, reveal his inauthenticity as well as his lack of masculinity. The means Gatsby employs to stress his assimilability and masculinity paradoxically undermines the protagonist’s effort. Regarding Gatsby’s masculinity, Forter contends that Tom bears “the new style of manhood,” erasing the trace of femininity while Gatsby, conversely, embodies “the qualities of residual masculinity,” encompassing both masculine and feminine traits (“Melancholia” 146). Tom seeks ways to assert and defend his authority by adapting to the type of masculinity that is commensurable with the time. In fact, Kimmel writes, “as ways of countering the perceived feminization of culture” American men “sought to acquire manly physiques, shore up flagging energy, or develop masculine hardiness” (“Consuming” 48). One of the central means of fighting against feminization was sports. Tom used to be a college football player and now plays polo, and his playing various sports demonstrates Tom’s athleticism and wealth.
It is not only the sports Tom plays but also his body itself that emphasizes his masculinity. Kimmel observes, “Marketplace Man” demonstrated his masculinity through self-control, especially through the control of the physical body (“Consuming” 38). As a result, the body became the site on which one’s manhood was contested. He continues that the yoking of the emerging consumer culture and the preoccupation with body over soul led men to seek “a new foundation upon which to ground manhood” (“Consuming” 44). Situated in this transformative period, both Gatsby and Tom seek new ways of demonstrating their masculinities; Gatsby, with his newly accumulated wealth, puts his masculinity on display through his assets and clothing whereas Tom emphasizes his masculinity through the body. For example, Daisy introduces Tom as a “brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen” who fits into the ideal masculine man of the time (GG 12). Additionally, the first time Nick meets Tom, the narrator observes, “[Tom] was a sturdy straw-haired man of thirty with a rather hard mouth” (9). He continues, “Two shining arrogant eyes had established dominance over his face and gave him the appearances of always leaning aggressively forward” (9). Traits such as arrogant, dominance, and aggressiveness represent Tom. His masculinity bears no trace of traits traditionally associated with femininity.

Even when Tom bears a glimpse of femininity, his “new manhood” overpowers it. Nick writes, “Not even the effeminate swank of his riding clothes could hide the enormous power of that body” and he “could see a great pack of muscle” under his coat (9). Tom’s vigorous body is sufficient to overpower the “effeminate” attire, and Nick concludes that Tom’s body is “capable of enormous leverage—a cruel body” (9). Tom can assert his masculinity despite the feminine clothing because his body is the very site
of masculinity. According to Frances Kerr, fused with material wealth, Tom’s physical virility marks “the apex of a class-gender hierarchy” (420). If taste, manner, and culture were the components of upper-class manhood as exemplified through the Coreys in *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, in Gatsby’s time, Tom represents “the new American upper class, whose members value money and material possessions, not the development of character and taste” (420). Since the version of masculinity Tom embodies is deemed desirable, he has the authority to patrol interlopers like Gatsby.

The juxtaposition of the physical appearance of Gatsby and Tom demonstrates the ways in which a specific type of masculinity is rendered superior and ideal over other types of masculinity. Gatsby’s incapability of adapting to the changing ideals of masculinity that undermines his effort to appear as the elite class hinders him from assimilating into the upper echelons. For Gatsby, the body does not function in the same manner as it does for Tom. In fact, there is no description of Gatsby’s body but only his attire: Gatsby’s “flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie” when he meets Daisy for the first time after many years. Gatsby frocks himself with a suit to flaunt his wealth. However, it fails to conceal his “pale” face and “dark signs of sleeplessness” (*GG* 67). Stripped of the suit that signifies Gatsby’s economic fortune, Gatsby’s body fails in exerting muscular masculinity.

Gatsby’s physical body, which is seen as effeminate in contrast to Tom’s body, is one of the reasons preventing him from joining the upper class. The drastic change in the American economy led to the creation of a new word, masculinity. It is differentiated from the term manhood that is synonymous with adulthood. Whereas the opposite of the term manhood is childhood, the opposite of the word masculinity is femininity.
Regarding this new vocabulary, Kimmel sums up the difference between manhood and masculinity as such: “Manhood was an expression of inner character; masculinity was constantly in need of validation, of demonstration, of proof” (“Consuming” 44-5). Therefore, men had to perform masculinity, as the term resists any monolithic definition. Kimmel argues that one of the means to stabilize the traits of masculinity was to exert the qualities of femininity onto people who did not belong to the group of white, native-born American men (“Consuming” 45).

The disruption in deriving one’s identity from manhood and the instability in performing masculinity resulted in the feminization of those who did not have membership to the dominant society. As June Howard points out, “The normative perspective from which the ‘Other’ is defined and authority is asserted is … essentially masculine” (140). It is unclear why such a normative point of view first came to be understood as masculine. Nevertheless, it appears that men did not even register such a concern over gender identity, until they realized their assumed authority started ebbing. As a result, the turn-of-the century anxieties of manhood led to defining masculinity against the binary opposite, femininity. Otherness and femininity became synonymous.

Gatsby is not free from the shackles of this logic. Being associated as an outsider dislodges normative masculinity from him and hinders him from assimilating into the upper class and society at large. Due to his unverifiable past, Gatsby becomes an outsider, which leads to his emasculation that prevents him from claiming membership to not only the upper class but also to society. Implicit in Tom’s repudiation of Gatsby is the idea that otherness bespeaks femininity, which threatens the status quo of class that Tom wants to protect. As a means to safeguard Tom’s elite class status, he dismisses Gatsby as
“Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” to prevent Gatsby from assimilating into the upper class (123).

Since Tom frames Gatsby as an outsider because of his dubious past and lack of background, a range of critics finds Gatsby to be non-white or even assigns him with a specific racial identity. For example, Walter Benn Michaels argues, “insofar as the desire for a different future is the desire to belong to a different class,” then “the desire for a different past that replaces it should be understood as the desire to belong to a different race” (150). Here, Michaels finds class and race to be synonymous, interchangeable. The upper class that Gatsby desperately seeks to be part of grants permission to join its class position only to a certain race—white. If a person is of “a different race”, then, he or she cannot be part of “a different class” (150). If we follow Michaels’ premise, then, Gatsby belongs to a different race, and therefore, cannot assimilate into the elite class.

The logic that an outsider position bespeaks racial difference can be seen Goldsmith’s reading of *The Great Gatsby* as a passing narrative as well. Noting the similarities between *The Great Gatsby* and African American passing narratives of the Harlem Renaissance era, Goldsmith claims that “Gatsby’s mode of self-invention may be fruitfully read against those of the protagonists of Harlem Renaissance and Americanization fiction of the late teens and twenties” (443). Such a comparative reading is possible because Tom and Nick frame Gatsby’s identity through “racial miscegenation and immigrant ethnic assimilation,” themes that are commonly shared in African American passing narratives and immigrant narratives of the time (443). According to Goldsmith, Tom seeing Gatsby as non-white seems to fit into the reading of the text as a passing narrative since passing usually connotes black-to-white racial transgression.
However, marking Gatsby as racial other in fact reifies the existence of visible markers signifying racial traits. Eugenics certainly was one of the dominant “scientific” discourses of the early twentieth century, explicitly claiming the racial superiority of Anglo-Saxon Americans. Tom utilizes this discourse to show his superiority over Gatsby, whose racial identity is unknown. However, contemporary critics’ reading of Gatsby as “a straightforward description of something called ‘America’ or ‘American’ identity” Benjamin Schreier contends, “is enabled by an assumption that practices and signs already bear racial meaning” (153). The reading of race and ethnicity in Gatsby through racially visible markers only re-inscribes the very notion of race being universal and essential that critics purportedly seek to destabilize. The ways in which Tom designates Gatsby as an outsider and the readings of critics framing Gatsby as a figure of different racial identity should be distinguished: Gatsby’s lack of acceptable pedigree does not necessarily mean that he is of a different race. Gatsby’s identity is that of indeterminacy, a binary “Other” that impairs his masculinity.

In fact, many critics have demonstrated the ways in which the narrator and the author projected their own gender anxieties on Gatsby by making him non-masculine. For example, Onderdonk argues that Nick is “the author surrogate” who eventually enabled Fitzgerald to achieve the critical esteem he desperately sought after as the literary scene of the time was under the influence of highly gendered modernist aesthetics (189). Fitzgerald enjoys his place in the American canon, Onderdonk argues, because the narrator “establishes his white, masculine, epistemological authority” through his mastery and control of the narrative, which in turn demonstrates the author’s masculinity as well (197). As an author surrogate, the privileged position as the narrator affords Nick
apparent intellectuality and self-control that are associated with masculine attributes, and via Nick, Fitzgerald is capable of constructing his masculine literary authority. Such a masculine trait becomes more conspicuous when Nick is juxtaposed to Gatsby, whose ambiguous identity and unscrupulous business practice are not considered masculine.

In tandem with Onderdonk, Kerr claims that *The Great Gatsby* resides in the intersection between Fitzgerald’s desire to express his creativity, which was deemed “feminine,” and his “struggle with the gendered standards of modernism” that valued emotional reserve and artistic control, which were regarded “masculine” (427). The text mirrors the author’s own struggle as a writer to come to terms with the “feminization” of culture. Fitzgerald straddled the desire to express “the appropriate kind and degree of emotion in art” and “manly detachment, discipline, and craftsmanship” at the same time, and this oscillation between masculinity and femininity translates into the narrative form of *The Great Gatsby* (409). According to Kerr, Nick embodies Fitzgerald’s concerns about asserting masculinity and expressing femininity simultaneously. Nick is a split person, who publicly asserts masculinity but privately shelters femininity. Kerr contends that Nick’s interpretation of Gatsby, however erroneous it might be, allows him to publicly defend his masculinity while privately indulging his attraction towards Gatsby.

This split gender identity explains the reason Nick affirms the protagonist as a self-made man embodying the dominant ideals of masculinity at the time. According to Forter, the exemplary status *The Great Gatsby* occupies in American literature has to do with Gatsby’s embodiment of “a belief in the colossal power of desire” and “the possibility of economic and imaginative self-making” that defined the protagonist’s masculinity (“Melancholia” 144). Through Nick’s narrative point of view, Gatsby is
made into such a figure despite his corrupted business practices and non-masculine attributes. Nick’s focalized narrative makes Gatsby morally superior and transcendental beyond the limits of society, and it also enables him to repudiate the type of masculinity Tom represents. As Kerr noted, Tom is “all physical and material force” that he “appears to have no emotional interior … no manners, taste, or intelligence” (420). In contrast to Tom, the titular hero is made “great” as the title suggests. The unethical business schemes Gatsby practiced have no influence on Nick’s judgment on Gatsby.

The valorization of the protagonist, which also conceals Nick’s insecurity about his gender identity, is made possible because Nick projects the ideals of a great American man onto Gatsby. In Nick’s point of view, Gatsby is metaphorically bound to America; he stands in for America and its dream. In narrating Gatsby’s past, the narrator sees what the Dutch sailors saw—“a fresh, green breast of the new world” (GG 143). Nick finds a parallel between the Dutch sailors’ quest and Gatsby’s dream of winning Daisy back. No matter how elusive a dream might be, the unflinching belief in the green light, “the orgastic future,” enables “us” to keep moving on (144). The narrator writes, regardless of outcome, “to-morrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther” (144). The pursuit of dream is rendered inviolate. As Schreier suggests, “the end of the book is nothing if not an attempted defense of [Gatsby]” (167). Gatsby’s staunch belief in pursuing his dream re-positions him within the myth of the self-made man that unfolds the possibility of self-fashioning, one of the core values of America’s national discourse. At the same time, the elegiac final pages of the book are imbued with ambivalence. The very desire that enables “us” to move on is anchored in the past, which only exists in the fictional,
inaccessible national discourse that conceals Gatsby’s ravenous and unscrupulous business practice (116).
Conclusion

Catano suggests that “the deep irony of masculine self-making lies in its claim to offer the ultimate in freely formed, self-created individualism, while it actually serves to establish a social subject, a set of behavioral patterns and expectations that are already prescribed, as it were” (3). For both Lapham and Gatsby, simply abiding by the predetermined rules do not automatically grant them the status of the self-made man: material gain does not define the protagonists in each text. Instead, the (re)insertion of moral authority, a quality does not comport with the ideals of the hegemonic masculinity the marketplace society promotes, establishes the protagonists’ ideal masculinity.

As the significance of moral authority is stressed, the protagonists’ construction of gender identity is further complicated. Each protagonist navigates different paths in coming to terms with the question of masculinity. Lapham is obliged to conform to the regulatory ideals of gender identity that are simultaneously inflected by class-specific ideals. Since manner and taste comprised upper-class masculinity, Lapham fails fitting into the upper class that exerts power over others’ assimilation into the same echelon. However, at the same time, the Coreys no longer represent the ideal masculinity of the time as the values underlying the upper class began acquiring effeminate connotations. Situated in this transitional juncture, Lapham’s gender identity is constantly reshaped.

When compared to Lapham, the imperative to perform different modalities inflected by gender and class turns out to be more onerous for Gatsby: his identity is rendered dubious because of his ambiguous social background. This incomprehensibility of identity is part of the reasons Gatsby fails joining the upper class. Additionally, the narrowing definitions of masculinity as regulated by the upper class put Gatsby’s place
on a precarious plane. If Lapham’s lack of manner and taste prevented him from assimilating into the elite class, it is Gatsby’s body that marks his femininity, which also bespeaks his otherness, blocking him from joining the upper echelon. Unlike Lapham, who Boston society had accepted in the end albeit in a distant place, no one comes to Gatsby’s funeral, indicating his social defeat. It is only in Nick’s imagination in which Gatsby is made great.

Ironically, both Lapham and Gatsby retrieve their status as the self-made man after they lose social position. Lapham gains the Coreys’ acceptance only after he loses his fortune and retreats to Vermont, away from the mainstream society of Boston. Gatsby represents the pristine American Dream untainted by material concerns only in Nick’s perception. These endings reveal the irreconcilable contradictions between the ideals the myth of the self-made man sets forth and the reality that seeks such national values. What happens to the idealized American masculinity in the myth of the self-made man, which promises the possibility of autonomy and self-invention and supports the status-quo’s interests simultaneously? The question becomes more complex, as the issue of racial identity interwoven with that of class identity dominates early-twentieth century national discourse.
CHAPTER 3
THE DEBATE ON THE VISION OF MANHOOD AMONG
W.E.B. DU BOIS, BOOKER T. WASHINGTON,
AND RICHARD WRIGHT

Introduction

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 failed to bring equality to African Americans. In fact, numerous segregation measures codified the Jim Crow laws to justify white supremacy extended nationally by the late nineteenth century. African Americans were denied “natural” rights, and such an exemption from full citizenship was justified and perpetuated through gendered ideologies. As Ross argues, the Jim Crow regime was “a sexual system of oppression” (2). The ways in which Jim Crow had formulated African American men’s masculinity was two-pronged.

On the one hand, African American men were emasculated as their access to and exercising of political and economic rights as citizens were denied. Under the Jim Crow regime, African Americans were not considered to be citizens as they were denied political and economic entitlements that were naturally endowed to white men. For instance, the implementation of the “grandfather clause” in the Southern states disenfranchised blacks and the emergence of the sharecropping system was akin to the reintroduction of slavery. Finally, the landmark Supreme Court decision in the case Plessy v. Ferguson (1886) that enacted the “separate but equal” doctrine fortified segregation. Such a denial of rights African American men faced meant that they were incapable of gaining citizenship, a status that simultaneously connoted one’s manhood.

On the other hand, whites morphed African American men into the image of the black beast, emphasizing their presumed hypermasculinity that would “violate” the purity
of white women. To demonstrate that blacks were “sub-human,” and therefore should be preempted from any claims of citizenship, whites were preoccupied with portraying blacks in gendered terms: the maneuvers whites had taken to deny African Americans’ claims to citizenship prominently relied on the collective construct of African Americans as the black beast. For whites, protecting white female sanctity became one of the most effective measures for controlling black population and advocating white supremacy. It became the responsibility of white men to defend the purity of white women against the risk of the uncontrollable black men reverting to bestiality. Shrouded in this overpowering myth of the black beast, African American men were guarded from the privileges of masculinity. As the image of the black beast crystalized in the late nineteenth century, it became “a fundamental element of America’s racial hierarchy” (Leiter 6).

Informed by two dialectically opposed conceptualizations of black manhood—effeminacy and hypermasculinity—African American intellectuals created varying literary representations of black manhood. They not only had to establish black manhood but also had to rebut the black beast stereotype. In the face of the black beast myth that dictated the understanding of black manhood, African American intellectuals’ call for (re)shaping black manhood was “an ongoing struggle to move beyond the dominant conventions of masculinity as they have been coded and enacted in the ideology of white male supremacy” (Ross 13). The myth had formative influences on the ways in which African American intellectuals represented black manhood, albeit in contradictory portrayals. However, the reformulation of black manhood uniformly demonstrates that
such a reform was predicated on the adherence to hegemonic masculinity that whites had established.

This chapter explores the ways in which black intellectuals develop models of black masculinity that serve the purposes and needs of their respective historical moments by navigating the trajectory of the competing visions of masculinity Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Richard Wright constructed. The philosophical difference between Washington and Du Bois on ideal black manhood is used as a critical lens to discuss the model of black manhood Wright establishes. By doing so, this chapter delineates the ways in which these three black intellectuals codify the conceptions of ideal black manhood in the face of two dialectically opposite gender stereotypes imposed upon them: black men were either seen as effeminate or hyper-masculine, and were denied access to the markers of the dominant gender ideology centering on whites.

These black intellectuals each shaped an ideal black masculinity that relied upon the shifting cultural understanding of manhood and the dominant representations of black men. Marlon B. Ross argues that the general discourse regarding black manhood has been reductive, as it has long been centered on viewing black manhood “either as a reactive identity overdetermined by the hegemony of white masculinity or as a parallel, if marginalized, cultural formation mimetically patterned on white masculinity” (6-7). I recognize Ross’s argument that this binary simplifies the complex maneuvering of the formation of black manhood. Extending his argument, I examine how the writers of my subject strategically worked within and outside an ongoing discussion about manhood. Their construction of an ideal manhood reveals how they simultaneously modified and
affirmed certain factors as more suitable and ideal for the constitution of their vision of manhood as well as how they utilized the conventional gender binary.

Despite the apparent opposition between Du Bois and Washington regarding what an ideal man is, one crucial characteristic overlaps in their construction of the concept: civilization. Noting increased interest in manhood between 1880 and 1910, mainly due to the influx of immigrants, working-class men, and middle-class women in the public sphere, Bederman explores the ways in which (white) middle-class men adopted a variety of ways to redefine manhood primarily through racial difference. Bederman argues that one of the most effective methods in remaking the definition of manhood was employing the discourse of civilization that “simultaneously denoted attributes of race and gender” (25). Predicated on the “scientific” belief that the evolution of civilization was contingent upon one’s race, the notion of civilization assumed a very specific racialized meaning: civilization was “an explicitly racial concept” and that only white races had reached “the civilized stage” (25). Within the discourse of civilization, white supremacy and male dominance were conflated.

In this process, non-white men were defined in contrast to white civilized men (Bederman 23). It is here where Du Bois and Washington’s visions of ideal manhood and the white notion of civilization coincide. These black leaders contended that black men, or at least some of them, “evolved to the civilized stage” despite their differences in the proposed means of achieving this end, as Bederman points out (25). In order to prove that black men have traits of civilized manliness, and therefore are equals of whites, both Du Bois and Washington rebutted the primitive, “unmanly” images projected onto blacks.
Yet, demonstrating the capacity for reaching the stage of civilization that whites required presented another dilemma to Du Bois and Washington. The discourse of civilization “maintained the power of Victorian gender ideologies” and “dealt with moral achievements which only the most civilized men could attain,” Bederman contends (26, 27). In other words, the discourse of civilization and the Victorian notion of manhood were inseparable. However, by the 1880s, “the power of Victorian manliness eroded,” Bederman observes, and “many middle-class men began to find this rough working-class masculinity powerfully attractive” (17). As a result, Victorian manliness and its constitutive traits, such as “sexual self-restraint, a powerful will, a strong character” were treated as effeminate features (18).

I have shown in the previous chapter the ways in which civility and heritage signify the Bostonian upper class and its fading authority by examining the Coreys of The Rise of Silas Lapham. Unprecedented industrial growth in the nineteenth century spurred new class distinctions and individuals’ class identity became more flexible. With the emergence of the self-made man, as Kimmel notes, the newly formulated manhood was derived “entirely from a man’s activities in the public sphere, measured by accumulated wealth and status, by geographic and social mobility” (8). As a result, the primary values that distinguished old money, such as character, manner, and taste, from new money, best represented by the self-made man figure, became antiquated. The fading authority of the upper class also resulted in the decline of the concomitant values it used to represent.

While the Coreys still practiced authority over its class status, the reader can also observe how at one time dominant perception of civility as a manly value, which once defined the upper class, declined. As such, the juxtaposition of Lapham and Gatsby
demonstrates the ways in which class and masculinity inform each other as understandings of manhood change from Victorian manliness to a more physique-oriented “masculinity.” Situated within the dominant discourse that governs cultural representations of black men, the comparison of Washington, Du Bois, and Wright delineates how the intersection of class and masculinity is further complicated by race. The capability of self-cultivation and self-making that supposedly brings about civilization risked effeminizing blacks. Still, Bederman contends that “it took several generations for the new formulations of ‘masculinity’ to overtake Victorian ‘manliness’ as the primary middle-class ideology of powerful manhood” (19). She continues, “middle-class Americans were equally likely to praise a man for his upright ‘manliness’ as for his virile ‘masculinity’”(19). Therefore, the black intellectuals had to explore and establish their model of manhood within this complex terrain marked by shifting notions of ideal manhood.

Educator, writer, and founder of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, Booker T. Washington was one of the most prominent spokesmen of blacks at the turn of the twentieth century. As an advocate of vocational training and industriousness as a means for blacks to assimilate into white society, Washington was willing to tolerate racial segregation as long as opportunity for education and economic progress were guaranteed. Southern white employers were appeased by Washington’s insistence on keeping blacks in trades, and northern philanthropists, such as Carnegie and Rockefeller, were convinced by Washington’s idea of inculcating the Protestant work ethic. Washington’s vision of vocational training and industriousness as a pathway for blacks to achieve political equality reached its culmination at the Atlanta Compromise Address
delivered in 1895. While the Address enlarged his vision, it also drew the ire of critics who found his philosophy to be excessively conciliatory towards whites.

Washington’s celebrated autobiography, *Up From Slavery* (1901), chronicles a boy’s journey from slave to leader of the Tuskegee Institute and the black community. The autobiography was first published in the popular magazine *Outlook* as a series, and it reached a wide audience, gaining strong white support. The first part of the autobiography focuses on Washington as a slave boy who seeks an opportunity for education. As he details his transition from student to teacher, and later founder of the Tuskegee Institute, Washington credits education as what enabled him to become an immensely influential civil rights activist and public speaker. In the final chapters, he includes the addresses he delivered, including the Atlanta Compromise Address. The autobiography concludes with an account of the recognitions Washington has received for his work.

W.E.B. Du Bois, scholar, author, and co-founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), enjoyed a long career as one of the leading spokesmen of the twentieth century. After graduating Fisk University, a prominent black college, Du Bois became the first African American to earn his Ph.D. at Harvard. In 1899, he published *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, a case study on blacks that was conducted for the first time in the United States. Du Bois also played a prominent role in founding the Niagara Movement, which also had a huge influence on the establishment of the NAACP in 1909. He was affiliated with the organization for the following 40 years, and also served as the editor of the NAACP magazine *Crisis*. In 1960, Du Bois emigrated to Ghana, and became a naturalized citizen of the country.
While Du Bois was a professor at Atlanta University, he published arguably his most enduring and monumental work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). A collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk*, is an admixture of social documentary, anthropological fieldwork, autobiography, and fiction. In this work, Du Bois proclaims that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line,” and propounds the indelible impact segregation had had on blacks’ consciousness through the concept of “double-consciousness,” which is the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (3, 9). The collection can be read as a response to Washington, the leading figure of black community at the time. Whereas Washington urged for gradual race equality through vocational training and economic gain, Du Bois saw this approach as acquiescent and complacent, and sought civic equality through political rights and higher education.

Novelist and essayist Richard Wright often tackled and protested the treatment of blacks in the United States in his writings. He is principally remembered for *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), which depict the moral complexity of growing up in a segregated society. His other works include *Uncle Tom’s Children* (1938), which catapulted him into the public attention, *Twelve Million Black Voices: A Folk History of the United States*, with photographs from Edwin Rosskam (1944), *The Outsider* (1953), and *Laud Today!* (published posthumously in 1963). Wright had also written haikus and travel writings. The last work he published was *The Long Dream* in 1958. However, his later writings were received less favorably. Wright joined the Communist Party in 1934, as he believed Communism was a resolution to race problems. However, he later became disillusioned and left the party in 1942.
*Native Son* captures the harrowing life of Bigger Thomas, the protagonist of the novel, who lives in the poverty-stricken South Side of Chicago in the 1930s. The twenty-year-old, uneducated, poor Bigger is hired by Mr. Dalton, who is Bigger’s landlord. On the same day Bigger works as a chauffeur, he drives Mary, Mr. Dalton’s daughter, and meets her boyfriend Jan. The couple tries to prove their progressive ideas and breaks social taboos that make Bigger uncomfortable. When Bigger helps Mary up the stairs where she was drunk, Mrs. Dalton steps into the bedroom, causing Bigger to smother Mary to death out of fear. The murder gives Bigger a sense of power, and while he is on the run, he rapes and kills his girlfriend Bessy. He is eventually captured. Jan enlists his friend Boris J. Max to defend Bigger. While imprisoned, Bigger is awakened by the meaning of his action and sees whites as individuals who are equals to him. In the end, despite Max’s effort to save Bigger from the death penalty, Bigger faces his death. *Native Son* became the first best-selling book written by an African American author, but was also excoriated by other black writers, most notably James Baldwin, for the depiction of Bigger and the life of blacks, which they found to be debasing.

The competing visions of racial uplift Washington and Du Bois set forth cannot be overemphasized. Whereas Du Bois underscored higher, liberal education, and immediate political agency for African Americans, Washington stressed the significance of vocational training, meritocracy, and gradual economic and social progress. Despite their philosophical differences, for both Washington and Du Bois, establishing the terms of leadership for racial uplift was intimately connected with and informed the question of reforming black manhood. As Anna Pochmara points out, the issue of racial uplift was rewritten into “a gender dilemma” as it was “identified with, and hence reduced to, the
problem of black manhood” (18). As such, both Washington and Du Bois’ articulation of black leadership was gender specific.

Unlike Washington and Du Bois who sought to either deny the existence of or present counterexamples of the stereotypical black beast, Wright “embraces the stereotype as reality” and presents it “as the psychological product of segregation rather than the justification for it” as Leiter accurately observes (6). Wright embraced the black beast myth and presented Bigger Thomas as a product of a racist environment that used the myth to justify white superiority and to establish segregation and black disfranchisement (Leiter 167-8). Bigger Thomas reveals the unfounded fear white society had created and the trap of hegemonic masculinity that is encoded and enacted by whites.
Booker T. Washington’s Vision of Ideal Manhood

Booker T. Washington seeks to establish himself as the epitome of ideal manhood by strategically adopting and modifying the traits of white masculinity. As white supremacy was justified on the basis of whites reaching the stage of civilization, Washington appropriates the discourse of civilization to demonstrate his pliability as a student and a leader that ultimately proves his place in white society. According to Washington’s logic promoting his version of ideal manhood, black men can join mainstream society dominated by whites, because character, which can be cultivated, is the most important trait with which a man should be equipped. To develop one’s character, Washington’s pedagogical lesson highlights discipline and personal hygiene, which in turn proves the extent of blacks’ civilization. Moreover, improving one’s character through training is evidence of civilization.

For Washington, General Armstrong, an American general during the Civil war and the founder of the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, is the paragon of manhood, a “perfect man” and even a “superhuman,” who he would like to emulate and to become a successor of primarily because of his character not the physical body (55). Washington lionizes Armstrong to the degree to which he declares that simply observing him on a daily basis would teach students more valuable lessons than reading textbooks and taking classes. Washington records that the trait that makes Armstrong such an ideal figure is his selflessness: Armstrong’s altruism and his devotion to Hampton invoke Washington to recount that Armstrong is “the rarest, strongest, and most beautiful character that it has ever been my privilege to meet” in the final chapters of *Up From Slavery* (74).
As noted in Washington’s praise of Armstrong, it is character not physical features that makes Armstrong an ideal man. In fact, Armstrong was afflicted with a disease that paralyzed much of his body: Washington notes, “[Armstrong] was paralyzed to the extent that he had lost control of his body and voice in a very large degree” (55). However, for Washington, such physical incompetence does not affect his admiration for Armstrong. Armstrong’s devotion to daily rituals of cleaning and perseverance at Hampton despite his physical incompetence underscores his character. As such, Washington ennobles Armstrong as a “perfect man” based on his character, not his physical attributes.

The virtues Washington prioritizes in the conceptualization of an ideal man can be observed in his description of President McKinley as well. Washington records, “those who have accomplished the greatest results are those who ‘keep under the body’; are those who never grow excited or lose self-control, but are always calm, self-possessed, patient, and polite” and the president best exemplifies such a figure Washington reveres (181). As seen in Washington’s descriptions of Armstrong and McKinley, it seems that the very traits Washington emphasizes and seeks to emulate are these men’s character.

Washington invoking the significance of self-making and cultivation of character among blacks is precisely what whites required blacks to practice to prove that they were equal counter-partners of whites. Regarding the centrality of character, Saidiya Hartman contends that whites promoted a range of liberal discourses emphasizing individualism, agency, will, and responsibility and so on, and these discourses erased the realities of enslavement after the Emancipation, thereby extending the state of black subjection in new forms. According to Hartman, with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment and
the Fourteenth Amendment, the term ‘man’ assumed a very specific meaning among legislators: “the masculinity of the citizen-subject” (177). Meeting the qualifications of citizenship was central to the constitution of manhood, and therefore blacks’ transition into citizenship predicated on their capacity to prove their “mature manhood, reason, and responsibility” (176). She continues, “responsibility essentially denoted the duty of self-making and the virtue of individual accountability,” and such an emphasis on the self and the capacity to fashion oneself effectively erased the discussion of any social, material obstacles that freed black men faced as a result of their enslavement (176).

Washington’s shaping of an ideal manhood is not different from the liberal discourses the dominant society facilitated. Moreover, Hartman finds that whites expected blacks “to meet and exceed the norm” by “the adequation of a normative masculinity, ultimately inseparable from the entitlements of whiteness” to pull themselves out from the state of degradation and to prove that such a state was not a result of blacks’ “innate” inferiority (179). In other words, the failure to demonstrate manhood through self-invention reaffirmed blacks’ inferiority, which in turn, reinforced white supremacy.

According to Maurice Wallace, Washington’s veneration of Armstrong and emphasis on character are a strategic choice on the side of the author to appeal to the white audience of Up From Slavery. Wallace contends that Armstrong exemplifies “the very abstract disembodiment and disciplinary individualism,” which came to represent the ideal white manhood of the time (101). By establishing both Armstrong and the President as ideal male figures, mainly because of their character, Washington gratifies the white audience. Additionally, Washington’s highlighting of “disembodiment” and
“individualism” in Armstrong effectively erases the question of body. The priority given to one’s character over physicality diminishes the significance of phenotype, and it suggests that Washington (and other blacks) can become like Armstrong or the President, notwithstanding his race.

In fact, such an emphasis on personal hygiene to discipline the body Armstrong vigorously instills through militaristic, regimental pedagogy is the most important lesson that Washington learns from his teacher and what Washington wants his students to adopt as well. By shaping his ideal version of manhood based on character, Washington tries to demonstrate that his students can universally adopt the practice of cultivating character primarily through hygiene and discipline. Washington writes that the early-education he received from Armstrong was a revelation to him: Washington notes, “The matter of having meals at regular hours, of eating on a tablecloth, using a napkin, the use of the bath-tub and of the tooth-brush, as well as the use of sheets upon the bed” were all new to him (58). He learns that such a regiment improves not only bodily health but also “self-respect” and “virtue” (58). For Washington, then, personal hygiene is essential in cultivating character. Whereas Armstrong was free from the judgment put on his physical incompetence, Washington and his students were not because of their skin color. They constantly had to polish their bodies as it was believed that the practice of doing so had an impact on their character as well, which in turn demonstrated their degree of civilization.

Unlike Wallace who notes that Armstrong’s pedagogy is militaristic and disciplinary, traits that are closely associated with masculinity, Donald Gibson finds Armstrong’s pedagogy underscoring hygiene and discipline to be domesticating and
feminine. Stressing the significance of the first chapter of *Up From Slavery* in configuring Washington’s infamous Atlanta Exposition Address, Gibson argues that Washington in no way imagined himself as a “man” that aligns with the transformed definition of the time period: the definition of men comprises the rights to practice social and political equality. Instead, Gibson argues, Washington seeks to demonstrate to his white readers that “black males neither are nor desire to be ‘men’” (96). Ross also contends that whites accepted Washington as a leader because he concentrated on “softer concerns” such as “bringing order, industriousness, cleanliness, moral virtue and discipline to an African American population” while regaining his position as “a clean nonpartisan, nonpolitical leader of the black people” (56). By eschewing any public role, which equated with the meaning of man, Washington legitimated his role as a leader within the “domestic” realm.

Gibson further argues that Washington’s recount of his past as a slave and his positive description of slavery as an institution underscore the tone of the narrative, which is “reasonable, tempered, and without rancor or bitterness,” and thus, feminizing (101). According to Gibson, Washington’s repetitive insistence on arguing that slavery does not and shall not cause resentment between blacks and whites is imperative for the author to appeal to his white audience. By doing so, the author ultimately proves that he is not a threat to whites. Gibson contends that Washington strategically adopts such a conciliatory tone and argument, which are in turn stereotyped as feminine.

While I agree with Gibson’s argument that Washington diminishes the harsh reality of slavery in order to appease his white readers, and seeks to present himself as a complacent person, the argument that Washington willingly feminizes black men,
including himself, raises a question. According to Hartman’s observation, the dominant society required blacks to refashion themselves in the guise of white-centered masculinity in order to prove their “worthiness.” As such, Washington shapes an ideal manhood emblematic of the dominant gender ideology of the time. He strategically maneuvers the terrain of hegemonic masculinity centered on the notion of civilization to establish his manhood. The waning authority of the civilized upper class and its assumed hegemonic masculinity should be taken into account when discussing Washington’s construction of ideal manhood.

Regarding Washington’s strategic choice to depict himself as a non-aggressive man, Pochmara also argues that the values Washington celebrates in *Up From Slavery* draw on Victorian civilized manliness that reached its culmination in the late nineteenth-century (25). This particular notion of manliness consisted of several notable traits, such as “self-mastery and restraint,” and “bourgeois respectability,” Pochmara writes (21). The emphasis on control and restraint as a sign of civilization was contrasted with uncivilized men, who are primarily blacks. Therefore, whites had a responsibility to “civilize” blacks. Cognizant of this notion, Washington demonstrates his achievement of civilization, which was made possible at Hampton through white educators, and further seeks to propagate the lesson on hygiene that enables him to achieve self-control, and eventually, civilization.

In particular, Washington equates hygiene and order with civilization. Such a value system is best exemplified through Washington’s stressing the importance of the toothbrush. Upon recounting his daily schedule, Washington notes, “In all my teaching I have watched carefully the influence of the tooth-brush, and I am convinced that there are
few single agencies of civilization that are more far-reaching” (75). As seen here, Washington believes that cleanliness represents civilization, which garners respectability, and thus, safeguards black men’s position among whites. However, associating civilization with femininity is also a socially contingent discourse. As seen in Wallace and Gibson’s contrasting perspectives regarding Washington’s masculinity, the concept of masculinity shifts. Civility, which was once seen as a manly attribute, can also be interpreted as feminine, showing that masculinity is always in a process of construction.

According to Phillip J. Kowalski, Washington’s emphasis on order and hygiene does not effeminate the author. Kowalski argues that the obsession with the system of order and hygiene Washington demonstrates makes him analogous to some of the white female reformers of the nineteenth century such as Harriet Beecher Stowe. In fact, such a value system that prioritizes domesticity, Kowalski contends, enables Washington to politicize it, thus enabling black men to achieve “political and personal control in a subversive approach” (117). According to Kowalski, African Americans’ dedication to self-improvement through cleanliness, work ethic, and civic service are akin to the values the white female reformers prioritize in order to gain social, political voice in the public sphere (117). While Kowalski agrees that Washington posing himself as non-threatening to the white audience can be seen as feminizing, he argues that the matter is much more complex than it appears to be: Washington can be associated with northern female reformers “who demand northern standards of cleanliness that offer implicit social, economic, and personal power” (118). As such, out of many competing paradigms of masculinity, Washington chose civilization to show that he too belongs to mainstream society.
Additionally, Washington urges that blacks have the competency to attain this particular type of civilization. Washington makes this point clear by contrasting his black students to Native American students. According to Washington, the black students are more “civilized” in contrast to the Native American students who appear to be incorrigible. Such superiority of blacks can be seen in one of the anecdotes Washington discusses. It is the black students who decide to accept Native Americans as students of Hampton, because the black pupils believed that they would be able to “teach them to speak English and to acquire civilized habits” (99). The black students are amenable enough to acquire (white) civilization through education, and now it is their turn to educate the Native American students. The role Washington and his black students play is analogous to the position his mentor General Armstrong occupied. The role of disciplining and civilizing the Native Students demonstrate the degree of Washington’s civilization and his manhood.

As such, Washington establishes a new vision of manhood cognizant of the dominant perception centering on black men: he had to configure a new type of masculinity while not succumbing to the stereotypes that black men were either effeminate or hyper masculine. The version of manhood Washington conceptualizes is created within the tradition of civilization, challenging the black rapist myth that was prevalent at the time. Washington is aware that the concept of civilization that has currency in America is white-centered: he notes, “no white American ever thinks that any other race is wholly civilized until he wears the white man’s clothes, eats the white man’s food, speaks the white man’s language, and professes the white man’s religion” (98). Washington has no desire to challenge this particular notion of civilization. Rather than
subverting this definition of civilization, he actively adopts it. In so doing, he proves blacks’ manhood and their assimilability to white society.
A number of critics have suggested that Du Bois excluded black female subjects from his vision of racial uplift. Carby’s insightful analysis of Du Bois points out the ways in which he constructed an ideal masculine figure and presented himself as an embodiment of such a figure without taking account of, or even at the expense of, black female subjects that he completely failed to “imagine black women as intellectuals and race leaders” (10). Du Bois further establishes, Carby continues, the terms that “only those men who enact narrowly and rigidly determined codes of masculinity” are eligible to assume the leadership role (10). Assuming a leadership role for African Americans meant abiding by a set of markers that constituted the ideal masculinity of the time, and Du Bois plays a critical role in this process. Within the consolidation of ideal black masculinity Du Bois sets for himself and black men in general lies his resistance to feminization.

While I acknowledge that Du Bois excludes black female subjects (at least in the writings that I primarily focus on) from his discussion of the Talented Tenth, my interest lies in the ways in which he constructs the ideal black manhood that both answers and reacts to the hegemonic masculinity of the time, and how Du Bois’ vision of black masculinity overlaps with that of Washington’s despite the seemingly wide discrepancy many critics have historically noted. Although Du Bois and Washington drastically differs in what they envision as ideal man, their values are grounded in their strategic embrace of white ideal masculinity that centers on the concept of civilization.

Civility began gaining the connotation of femininity at the turn of the century, and such a perception was in no way seen as desirable. While the idea of civility as a
desirable trait was no longer fashionable, Du Bois’s vision of manhood nonetheless centers on civility that is akin to femininity. Such a fact complicates the vision of ideal black manhood Du Bois forges, as it is constructed in opposition to the emerging (white) ideal manhood based on virility. However, espousing the notion of civilization is a strategic choice Du Bois employs to discredit the common stereotype of bestiality cast on black men. Just as Washington emphasizes the importance of African American men’s competency in achieving a stage of civilization that whites seemingly occupy and take for granted, Du Bois also invokes the need to prove the capability of the Talented Tenth to lead the masses by adhering to whites’ standard of civilization. Du Bois rebuts stereotypes of black men as innately brutal by demonstrating himself as the model for racial uplift in “Of Alexander Crummell,” one of the fourteen essays of The Souls of Black Folk. However, in “Of the Coming of John,” which is the last and the only fictional story from the same collection, Du Bois also acknowledges the limitations of the same model, which is based on markers of hegemonic masculinity that is reserved only for white men.

In “Of Alexander Crummell,” the reader encounters the embodiment of Du Bois’ vision of ideal masculinity. Noticeable from the account of Crummell is his path towards the intellectual maturation that enables him to recognize and see beyond the Veil. It is education at the Oneida school, which abolitionist Beriah Green founded, that eventually pulls Crummell out of the “Temptations of Hate, Despair, and Doubt,” Du Bois notes (153). At school, Crummell finds “a revelation of thought” and “a vision of life” (155). With the opportunity to learn that is afforded by Green, Crummell is enlightened at last, and decides to become a priest. However, Crummell discovers not only the unflinching
racism present in the Catholic community but also the “fatal weaknesses [and] the dearth of strong moral character” presiding in the black community (157). In fact, Crummell finds the latter to be more problematic in bringing about racial uplift: in his eyes, the black community is a “dumb driven cattle” without any desire to overcome the stultifying environment (158).

However, Du Bois notes, Crummell turns out to be triumphant at last, because his “soul” was untainted, one of the qualities Du Bois prizes in ideal black manhood (160). Du Bois sees Crummell as an exceptional leader, who leads the rest of the black community. Therefore, Crummell equating blacks to ignorant “cattle” does not register as problematic for Du Bois. Such a distance between the masses and the Talented Tenth demonstrates that Du Bois affiliates himself with the latter, and finds this exclusive group represented by figures such as Crummell to be responsible for the uplifting of the masses.

The praising of Crummell clearly shows what Du Bois values in the construction of an ideal black masculinity. Firstly, formal education is necessary, and in order to have such an opportunity, accepting white patronage is unproblematic. In fact, it might be the only measure for Crummell and other black men to have the opportunity for education. Secondly, additional to education, Crummell’s moral authority enables him to become cognizant of the Veil that had shrouded his entire life. With this newly gained perspective, he strides with determination to uplift his race, exemplifying Du Bois’s conceptualization of the Talented Tenth. According to Du Bois, the only regrettable fact about Crummell is the latter’s relatively lesser-known reputation. Thus, it is Du Bois’ duty to continue with Crummell’s vocation to guide the black community, only with more prominence as a leader.
Regarding Du Bois’s claim to continue the lineage of black leaders, Hazel Carby contends that presenting himself as an intellectual and a leader was “the only sure route to becoming a certain type of man” that does not come “in direct confrontation with the nation state” because it is “socially acceptable” (45). Such a strategy that avoids gendered and racialized submission is not different from Washington’s construction of an ideal manhood, since assuming the roles as an intellectual and a leader is predicated on the notion of civilization that Crummell exemplifies.

In fact, Du Bois stresses the ways in which Crummell serves the very embodiment of civilization. However, figuring Crummell in such a mold defined by the notion of civilization also risks feminizing him, which contradicts Du Bois’ vision of reforming ideal black manhood based on virile masculinity. In the opening of the chapter, Du Bois recounts the first time he met Crummell: “I began to feel the fineness of his character—his calm courtesy, the sweetness of his strength, and his fair blending of the hope and truth of life” (emphasis mine, 154). Here, the picture the reader can draw of Crummell based on Du Bois’s description is that of a civilized, rather feminine male figure. The descriptors—fineness, calmness, sweetness, and fairness—are associated with traditionally “feminine” qualities, not manliness. The strong association of civility with femininity gained validity in the late-nineteenth century, and as a result, civility was no longer seen as an ideal trait for men.

To prove that he is the legitimate leader of the masses and a representative masculine subject, Du Bois has to dislodge Washington from his status as a prominent leader of blacks. In order to do so, Du Bois launches gender-inflected criticism on Washington in “Of Booker T. Washington and Others” in The Souls of Black Folk. Here,
Du Bois makes clear that Washington’s approach to racial uplift emasculates black men. For example, the principles that make Washington an influential spokesman are devoid of “certain elements of true manhood” (37).

According to Du Bois, the ideals Washington formulated were denigrated as submissive and therefore, not manly. Moreover, Du Bois’ disapproval of Washington’s vision of racial uplift extends to the spokesman himself. His political rival Washington was thus emasculated in the process of establishing Du Bois’s version of ideal manhood. Ronda Anthony argues that for Du Bois to achieve his ends of racial uplift—legally recognizable citizenship with equal political and social rights—the scholar and activist had to set the terms of black manhood that resist feminization (55-6). In order to consolidate his position as the leader who would successfully bring racial uplift, Du Bois feminizes not only Washington’s principles but also Washington: Anthony contends, “Booker T. Washington not only is set up as the counter example of ideal black manhood, but is sanctioned for his emasculating example of black male leadership” who is inadequate to (re)generate black manhood (57).

According to Du Bois, Washington is a compromiser who represents “the old attitude of adjustment and submission” because he accepts “the alleged inferiority” of African Americans to gain a foothold in white society (41). Du Bois finds that Washington’s willingness to tolerate political inequality for the opportunity of economic gain and education is “bound to sap the manhood” from black men (42). For Du Bois, what characterizes Washington’s philosophy and even the speaker himself is submissiveness. However, without political rights, there is no chance of cultivating “exceptional men,” which is the principal objective of Du Bois’ project of racial uplift.
(42). Du Bois continues that the “industrial slavery and civic death” Washington advocates are inadmissible, and blacks should “oppose such a course by all civilized methods” if they were “really men” (44). Du Bois reinforces his masculinity and status by “rhetorically emasculating” Washington and his visions for blacks (Pochmara 38).

At the same time, it appears that Du Bois was aware of the fact that simply mimicking hegemonic white masculinity that centers on civilization had its limits. Du Bois navigated both the possibility and the limitations of racial uplift through “Of the Coming of John,” which is Du Bois’s only fictional work in the collection. The story demonstrates the ways in which the writer’s vision of leadership is intertwined with the issue of masculinity. Here, the reader can again witness the writer’s conceptualization of an ideal black masculinity embodied through the protagonist, John. In the story, the reader follows the trajectory of John’s movement from the South to North, along with his opportunity to receive education, his awakening, and his return to the South where he meets his demise.

In the opening of the story, Du Bois provides the reader with a blueprint of what awaits John. In the South, John is “a good boy” according to “the white folk of Altamaha” because he has “fine plough-hand, good in the rice fields, handy everywhere, and always good-natured and respectful” (163). He is “good” because he does not seek to disrupt the order of the community and is beneficial to whites. However, when John sets out to the North to attend school, whites who spoke of him highly, warn that attending school will “spoil him, -- ruin him” (163). Whites “[shake] their heads” in doubt while blacks are excited in anticipation for the future “when John comes” (164).
However, at school, John is no longer “a good boy” (163). The narrator remarks, “the clay seemed unfit for any sort of moulding” (164). What is noticeable from this observation of the narrator is the use of collective “we” voice when making judgment on the protagonist. The narrator writes, “we were long puzzled at the case of John Jones” and therefore “we solemnly voted” to suspend Jones (164-5). The narrative voice “we” suggests that the narrator is part of the faculty, and shows the reasons John had to be suspended from school: from the narrator’s point of view, John is “loud and boisterous, always laughing and signing, and never able to work consecutively,” thus not civilized (164). Moreover, John’s personality is marked with “tardiness, carelessness, and appalling good-humor,” and these personal traits are identical to the stereotypes long attached to black men (164). It appears that the narrator finds some of these stereotypes to be not only true but also undesirable for an ideal black man to have, and therefore should be corrected and removed.

What enables John to get rid of these stereotypes is his self-awareness and self-recognition. Similar to Crummell, John succeeds in widening his perspective by discovering the once-invisible Veil. The narrator emphasizes that John came to this realization with “his own building [which] he builded slow and hard” (165). For both Crummell and John, education was necessary, but it was eventually individual will that enabled them to face the reality of racism. It appears that one of the elements in attaining the ultimate state of manhood Du Bois encourages is to recognize and come to an understanding of the chasm between blacks and whites.

However, when John returns to the South, he is no longer the same person his community used to know. Regarding John’s newly attained social position, Andrea N.
Williams notes that John was educated “out of class affinity with his hometown” and therefore lacked “a way to sustain the social position to which he aspires” (179). As a result, the villagers began to notice that not only was John “silent, cold,” but he also spoke “an unknown tongue” (169, 171). In a vague language, he asserts that “new ideas” and “new century” are needed, and therefore, a “new Industrial School” should be established (170). For John, “charitable and philanthropic work” as well as “money” are essential for the “the striving of the new century” (170). The ideas John tries to inspire the black community with are similar to that of Washington, who also advocated vocational training and the profits made out of it. Through John’s realization of his surroundings and transformed status, the narrator points out the shortcomings of John’s ideas as well as the black community.

With his newly gained knowledge, John realizes how his life used to be “glad and gay” and “smooth and easy” (172). To his sister’s question, whether education makes one “unhappy,” John answers that it does (171). John sees him as the leader of the community, but is made “unhappy” because he does not see the future he dreams of ever coming true in Altamaha. For example, “the parents were careless, [and] the children [were] irregular and dirty,” and such a description is analogous to the one that used to describe John before he was suspended from school (173). As the “Temptation of Doubt” that inflicted Crummell, John is subject to the same uncertainty. Such an observation of the masses, in contrast to his newly acquired position as an educated black man, is similar to Crummell’s experience. With education, both John and Crummell acquire a sense of class difference, and this recognition is what the narrator finds to be inevitable, if not favorable. Furthermore, the white community is only ready to accept a black “leader”
who is “going to accept the situation and teach the darkies to be faithful servants and laborers as [blacks’] fathers were” (173). The white community does not want the status quo to be disrupted by John’s “fool ideas of rising and equality” (173). The ideal leader for racial uplift is accepted neither by blacks nor by whites, which also jeopardizes his masculine authority.

In a limbo in which John acknowledges the discrepancy between him and the villagers as well as his inability to join white society, John is left paralyzed. However, when John sees his sister being harassed by another white man named John, who used to be childhood mates, the protagonist says “not a word, but, seizing a fallen limb, struck him with all the pent-up hatred of his great black arm” (175). On the one hand, one can argue that John is physically challenging the status quo the white community so adamantly wanted to defend. His action can be seen as manly because he demonstrates his physical virility to protect his sister. Carby contends that Du Bois “consciously confronts and contradicts claims that white male aggression is met only by black male passivity” by killing his childhood companion, which earns him “self-respect in his own black manhood” that even becomes “a model for future generations” (25). Pochmara also argues that John in is “a stark contrast to Washington’s black men, who hold no bitterness” (46). Instead, John is “full of hatred” and pays the price for “the dignity of black manhood” (46). John is not the stereotypical black beast but a noble man who takes action to protect the purity of his sister.

On the other hand, one can argue that even with newly gained knowledge, John encounters an impasse in uplifting his community, and the only means left to protect his sister is to kill the proprietor, which solidifies the black beast stereotype. It appears that
the narrator is also fully cognizant of the fact that racial uplift led by a few exceptional, ideal men with their newly attained education and social position might not be realized in a foreseeable future. The final story that gives closure to the collection of essays ironically reveals the fissures that lie in the ideal black manhood Du Bois articulated.
Richard Wright’s Vision of Ideal Manhood

In Manning the Race, Ross notes the rise of the self-made man as a new model of (white) manhood at the turn of the century, and blacks’ embrace of this dominant mode of manhood. Eventually, Ross claims, “Black manhood [was] a collectively contested identity that [was] repeatedly espoused through exceptionally individualized and prominently self-making men” (8). Whereas Washington and Du Bois stress the significance of individual achievement in attaining racial uplift as Ross observes, Wright urges collective unity among black writers “with the consciousness that one-sixth of the earth surface belongs to the working class” (106). As such, Du Bois and Washington closely follow the then-dominant mode of manhood as Ross observes, thus, fitting into the ideal male figure of the time. However, Wright turns to the black working class, and frames them as ideal men. According to him, the voice that represents the black race comes from the working class, not the bourgeoisie whose only concern is to conceal the working class’s “lowly, shameful depths of life” and to pretend that the working class’s are irrelevant to the bourgeoisie’s ways of life (450).

The difference in projecting oneself as either an individual or a collective entity demonstrates the contested nature of defining and establishing black manhood. Furthermore, the self-made man model of ideal (white) manhood, which was constructed with the exclusion of the black male subjects and their particular social conditions, as Hartman also notes, is limited in discussing the manhood Wright forges. Washington and Du Bois actively strove to defy the mold of being seen as a black rapist by demonstrating the extent of their civilization. Wright, however, utilizes the black rapist myth to reveal the painful reality of the aftermath of slavery that left an indelible impression about black
subjectivity on American consciousness. While Washington and Du Bois see themselves as exceptional individuals, and even self-designated themselves as leaders who would uplift the rest of the black race, Wright asks black writers to be part of the larger community consisting of both black writers and workers.

Wright constructs a new vision of ideal manhood that modifies and contrasts that of Washington and Du Bois. By looking into Wright’s critique of Washington for willfully ignoring the indelible impact slavery had on African Americans, we can logically assume the values of manhood Wright tries to establish. One of the principal markers that constitutes the ideal black manhood Wright forges is the ability to recognize his self-consciousness, as Bigger Thomas exemplifies in *Native Son*. The protagonist’s inability to articulate the indispensable marks of slavery and racism prevents him from growing up to be a “man.” However, the acts of murder propel him to expound on the meaning of life, and this eventually leads to a psychological development he was denied before. Wright’s insistence on Bigger’s maturation to self-consciousness demonstrates the author’s refusal to place Bigger within the stereotypical depictions of African American men as either an emasculated black slave or a hypermasculine black rapist.

In “How Bigger was Born,” Wright argues that Bigger is “resentful toward whites, sullen, angry” unlike what Washington argues about the state of African Americans in general after the Emancipation. Washington argues that blacks do not harbor bitterness toward whites. In fact, Washington contends, blacks believe that they had learned valuable lessons from the experience of slavery, which is evidenced by their loyalty to their former white masters. However, Wright condemns that Bigger is inevitably “resentful … sullen, angry” primarily because of the institution of slavery:
Wright argues that this disarray of emotions Bigger harbors stems from “his own lack of inner organization which American oppression has fostered in him” (440). He was deprived of the opportunity to fully comprehend his “inner organization” that would also provide him with the principles to expound on his particular circumstances.

According to Wright, the resentment and anger Bigger has against whites is an honest depiction of him, which contrasts to Washington’s portrayal of him and other blacks as “civilized” subjects who are not discontent with slavery. Truthfully articulating such a state aligns with Wright’s argument that there is “a right more immediately deeper than that of politics or race” which is “a human right, the right of a man to think and feel honestly” (449). This state is what Bigger achieves at the end of the novel. He neither had the capacity to comprehend the situation he was trapped within nor had the language to articulate his rage and resentment. However, he ultimately realizes that the act of murder came from both the inevitability of the racist social structure and from his own motivation as well.

The state of gaining self-consciousness comes only after Bigger commits two acts of murder. Kenneth Kinnamon sees the murder of Ms. Dalton and Bigger’s understanding of his own action as “an ultimate level of rebellion” as it opens up “a feeling of elation, freedom, and self-mastery … he has never known before” (69). In this way, “the act of murder becomes a regenerative force” (69). Regarding the same action, Valerie Smith further argues that it “empowers [Bigger] to achieve levels of action and articulation that he had formerly been unable to attain” and that “it initiates the process by which he ultimately comes to understand the meaning of his life” (145). Smith also focuses on the aftermath of murder when Bigger contemplates his action while awaiting his sentence.
Smith argues that Bigger’s retelling of the murder, primarily to his attorney Max, “gives [Bigger] a measure of control over his life and releases him from his feelings of isolation” (143). She continues, “The ostensible ordeal of telling his story actually propels Bigger on to a higher level of self-knowledge” (149). Both Kinammon and Smith see the act of murder as an opportunity that lends Bigger a new perspective through which he gains a sense of liberty and vision of life.

As Bigger exemplifies, acknowledgement of one’s consciousness and process of reaching this state comprise one’s manhood. If he were a pawn whose fate is overdetermined by an uncontrollable force, Bigger finally gains self-knowledge and awareness about the world in which he is entrapped after the act of murder. He is no longer a pawn but an agent in his life. Bigger lacked the ability to articulate his turmoil, but he “emotionally, intuitively” knew that his life was “dammed up, buried, implied,” Wright explains (451). The act of murder opens the gate for Bigger to access this buried knowledge. As Wright argues in “How Bigger was Born,” that “Every man and woman … have the opportunity to realize himself, to seek his own individual fate and goal, his own peculiar and untranslatable destiny,” Bigger ultimately seizes this opportunity as he redefines the action (451).

The emphasis on self-consciousness can also be seen in *Blueprint for Negro Writing*, Wright’s literary manifesto published in 1937, in which Wright repudiates black writers’ elitism and urges them to hold greater responsibility for the masses. More than education, Wright claims, “a deep, informed, and complex consciousness is necessary; a consciousness which draws for its strength upon the fluid lore of a great people, and molds this lore with the concepts that move and direct the forces of history today” (218).
As Wright’s insistence on consciousness indicates, being cognizant of the black working class and utilizing this knowledge are essential for black writers.

Wright seeks to forge a communal identity for blacks, which mainly comprises the black working class, and establishes this particular class as constitutive of representative, ideal manhood. Wright revises Washington and Du Bois’s concept of black masculinity by juxtaposing black intellectuals and the black working class. In his construction of the vision of ideal manhood, Wright privileges masculine working-class identity, which is made prominent when it is juxtaposed with his description of black leaders and writers. In so doing, Wright emasculates the black elite class and introduces virile, militant black working-class masculinity. In *Blueprint for Negro Writing*, Wright denigrates black writers in gender-inflected tropes:

Negro writing in the past has been confined to humble novels, poems, and plays, decorous ambassadors who go a-begging to white America. They entered the Court of American Public Opinion dressed in the knee-pants of servility … They were received as poodle dogs who have learned clever tricks. (213)

The black writers of Wright’s time did not improve. According to Wright, they are “technically brilliant,” but such a writing style these writers demonstrate is merely “a sort of conspicuous ornamentation” (214). If the writers of the past are criticized in sartorial terms for their submissiveness, contemporary writers are only capable of producing literary works that are donned with decorations. Wright associates sartorial terms with submissiveness, and in so doing, he emasculates the black writers. For such a reason, Wright argues, black leaders and writers in general do not conform to the vision of ideal manhood he sets forth. In such a way, Wright employs gendered criticisms to effeminize
both the writers and their writings: black writers in no way embody the ideal masculine figure Wright envisions.

Wright’s formulation of an ideal black manhood based on the collectivity and solidarity of the black working class and his emasculation of the intellectuals can be seen in the Foreword of 12 Million Voices (1941), a four-part photo essay comprising famous photographers’ works sponsored by the Works Project Administration (WPA). In lyrical words recounting the tribulations of black life, Wright articulates who is not included in the book. Excluded from the chronicle of African Americans’ journey across the Atlantic Sea to the South, followed by the migration to the North, are “the so-called ‘talented tenth’” and “the growing and influential Negro middle-class professional and business men of the North” (xix).

In the following paragraph, Wright makes clear that those who are omitted from the text are “like single fishes that leap and flash for a split second above the surface of the sea” and are “fleeting exceptions to the vast, tragic school that swims below in the depths” (xix). Wright sets the premise of the collection as the experiences of “the countless black millions,” which are “accept[ed] as basic and centrally historical,” capturing the “collective humanity” (xx). Wright intentionally omits “uplifted” or “professional” blacks from the black collective consciousness he wishes the audience to recognize. The communal identity excluded from the professional, Talented Tenth becomes even more pronounced with Wright’s use of the first-person plural voice “we” throughout the collection. As the emasculated elite group is removed from “we millions of black folk,” “we black slaves,” or “we blacks,” Wright manifests the masculine gender identity of the communal identity.
Unlike Washington and Du Bois who sought to prove the competency of blacks in reaching the same plane of civilization that whites occupy, Wright argues that blacks do not have to be under the burden of demonstrating their assimilability into white society. Washington and Du Bois urged that black men have to continuously demonstrate and prove his suitability to fit into America. Whether it be merit or liberal education, the white audience of the authors, and eventually white society, stand as the ultimate judge in deciding whether blacks can be part of their society. In contrast to Washington and Du Bois who rely on the approval of white society in consolidating black manhood, Wright has no interest in appeasing the white mainstream society. In fact, Wright criticizes these so-called “leaders” as equivalent to the “oppressors” (439). Wright argues that the leaders are the ones who “enjoyed the financial fruits of it in the style of their bourgeois oppressors” and “went hand in hand with the powerful whites and helped to keep their groaning brothers in line” for this was convenient and safe (439).

Wright also points out that the bourgeoisie’ effort to assimilate into the white society is based on the assumption that “by doing so they can lift themselves into a higher social sphere” (98). According to Wright, the version of racial uplift the bourgeois espouses is merely a disguise that harbors its petty objective of joining the “higher social sphere” (98). Unlike the bourgeoisie, Wright celebrates the working class, claiming that “[the working class] have access to a wide social vision and a deep social consciousness” (98). Equipped with such virtues, the working class displays “a greater freedom and initiative in pushing their claims upon civilization than even do the petty bourgeoisie,” thus demonstrating their virile masculinity (98). The concept of civilization that both Washington and Du Bois repetitively highlighted as the utmost state the black race have
to achieve through education (whether through liberal education or vocational training) is actually achievable by the working class primarily because of their ability to achieve self-consciousness, which also constitutes their masculine agency, Wright contends.
Conclusion

As Wallace articulates in *Constructing the Black Masculine*, “at no point in the history of the New World … has race *not* constituted a defining feature of our national manhood” (2). The notion of “man” was constructed by categorizing who is not a man. The definition of (white) man was finely calibrated against black men, who were portrayed as subhuman for their presumed bestiality. The Jim Crow regime legitimized its system through a powerful discourse that morphed black men into a sexually deviant, criminal, and socially irresponsible collective entity. The black beast myth that captured the cultural imagination of white Americans justified racial violence and distorted African American subjecthood. In the face of the dominating discourse of the black beast myth that left an indelible impact on black men, African American writers came up with competing versions of black masculinity by drawing inspiration from and revising each other’s responses. Chief among these writers who set the direction for formulating a new ideal black manhood were Washington, Du Bois, and Wright. For these writers, reforming black manhood was seen as an integral part of racial uplift, a struggle to move beyond the strictures of Jim Crow.

Whereas Washington stresses the significance of vocational training and gradual economic progress, Du Bois emphasizes higher education and immediate political agency. Their clashing ideologies in regard to achieving racial uplift are preoccupied with and inseparable from the issue of forging an ideal manhood. In so doing, both Washington and Du Bois strive to present themselves as the rightful leader of racial uplift and as the embodiment of an ideal black manhood. In this process, Du Bois rhetorically emasculates Washington, arguing that his philosophies are antagonistic to true manhood.
However, as Herbert Sussman accurately captures, both Washington and Du Bois fashion themselves “to the ideals of the hegemonic middle class and the distinctly white definition of manhood” (113). Positing themselves as the exemplars of the self-made man, Washington and Du Bois embrace the tenets of white ideal masculinity.

In contrast to Washington and Du Bois who seek to prove their competency as the leaders of racial uplift and to achieve respect from white society by presenting counterexamples of the black beast, Wright demonstrates the ways in which the adherence to white hegemonic masculinity undercuts the formation of black masculine subjectivity. By presenting the stereotype of the black beast as reality, Wright complicates the construction of an ideal black manhood that was primarily predicated on the terms set forth by his predecessors. Wright envisions Bigger Thomas as a new type of ideal black manhood by both repudiating and embracing the conceptions Washington and Du Bois forge. Analogous to Du Bois’ criticism of Washington by deploying gender-inflected tropes, Wright effeminizes the black elite class and introduces virile, militant black working-class masculinity. Wright’s ideal black manhood requires self-conscious individuality that reckons with the emotionally crippling effect the black beast myth has inflicted on black men.

However, these intellectuals also face the dilemma of having to place the dominant discourse of white hegemonic masculinity at the center in constructing a new type of black manhood that “risks the reconstitution of masculinity into smaller, subtler regimes of heteronormativity and patriarchal prerogatives,” as Wallace warns (15). Furthermore, they are not free from the strictures of using conventional gendered terms to reinforce their manhood. Such an inevitability of forging an ideal manhood based on the
hegemonic white masculinity of the time results in producing contradicting visions of manhood, which cuts across ethnicity and class as I will discuss in the following chapter by focusing on Jewish American literature in the 1930s.
CHAPTER 4

GROWING UP AS AN AMERICAN BOY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MICHAEL GOLD’S JEWS WITHOUT MONEY AND NATHANAEEL WEST’S A COOL MILLION

Introduction

Nathanael West wrote, “Only fools will laugh at Horatio Alger, and his poor boys who make good. The wiser man who thinks twice about that sterling author will realize that Alger is to American What Homer was to the Greeks” (qtd. in Dicknstein 278). The Alger narrative is one of the most emblematic cultural products that sustained the success myth of the American Dream. Jeffrey Decker notes that while Alger published most of his works between 1867 and 1899, the paperback editions sold “more than one million copies annually by 1910,” and the total number of copies sold posthumously was greater than the number sold in his lifetime (1). Aligned with the number of books sold, “the phrase ‘Horatio Alger hero’ obtained popular currency in the language during the 1920s,” Gary Scharnhorst writes (153). The formulaic plot of a rural, naïve boy succeeding in the city by his virtue and industriousness spoke to the American tenets of equal opportunity and individualism so that the Alger narrative became the American success story.

However, the promises of the American Dream enshrined in the Alger narratives were untenable. Unlike the Alger heroes, most people could not be the beneficiaries of the American Dream, and such an impossibility was closely connected to the socio-cultural milieu of the late 1920s and the 1930s when the country was ravaged by the stock market crash of 1929, followed by the Great Depression. As Morris Dickstein points out, the extent to which the Depression challenged the long-held belief in the
success myth and exerted a psychological impact on American society was unprecedented (219). Moreover, the traditional link between men’s masculinity and their breadwinning role proved to be unsustainable against the economic ruin that made the workplace insecure.

Most men no longer were the breadwinner and the head of the household in each arena, and such a loss eroded their masculinity. The marketplace no longer served as a sign of one’s manhood. As a result, men began looking for different avenues through which to reconceive their supposedly lost masculinity. As Josep Armengol points out, “one of the most obvious remasculinization strategies” was the turn to “the male body … the strong, muscular, brawny body of the working-class male” (61).

Michael Gold’s Jews without Money (1930) and Nathanael West’s A Cool Million: The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin (1934) were published when the hardships of the economic crisis ushered out the public’s optimism in the American Dream and its affirmation of manhood. Most critiques of Jews without Money, a representative leftist literary work, prioritize class and political issues over gender concerns. Similarly, the studies of A Cool Million emphasize the literary work’s form and its link to modernity; the narrative is read as a burlesque, parody, satire, or as ironic writing that exposes the

degradation of capitalism. Whereas the scholarship on *Jews without Money* and *A Cool Million* mainly focuses on the genres of each work and their political valence, these works’ gendered themes are overlooked.

To fill this gap, I examine how these two narratives question who can survive the deprivations of capitalism by juxtaposing two teenage boys and their construction and demolition of masculinity accordingly. While one aspires to adopt the dominant masculinity for different political ends (*Jews without Money*), the other succumbs to the capitalist system despite his potential for embodying the hegemonic masculinity (*A Cool Million*). How does the fact that Gold and West are both Jewish writers affect their portrayal of the protagonists in the face of liberal capitalism? How do Gold’s bildungsroman and West’s satire inflect the understanding of the same question?

I contend that Gold projects his vision of an ideal manhood onto the protagonist by navigating and building upon shifting definitions of manhood and masculinity as well as femininity. In so doing, the author shapes an ideal masculine subjecthood that challenges the degradation of capitalism and the stereotypes of associating Jewish men with capitalism and femininity. In contrast to Gold who specifically focuses on the growing of a Jewish boy, West inserts an “All American boy” into the self-made man myth and inverts the conventional plot to demonstrate the unattainability of forging an ideal manhood in the face of capitalist social, economic conditions: the protagonist is rid of not only his body parts but also his subjectivity. The protagonist perishes, and yet the

myth survives. As such, the juxtaposition of these authors’ fictional works demonstrates a turbulent shift in understandings of manhood during the aftermath of the Great Depression.

Gold, who specifically focused on writing Jewish experience, promoted working-class solidarity of the Jewish people against poverty capitalism inflicted on the Jewish community and anti-Semitism. The maturation of Mikey in *Jews without Money* depicts not only his poverty-stricken life of the Lower East Side Jewish community but also the awakening of the protagonist’s working-class collectivity. Gold envisions a masculine figure characterized by virility and political potential, negates the stereotype of the effeminate Jew, and rebukes the genteel tradition of the bourgeoisie.

Unlike Gold, who explicitly identified himself as a Jewish writer and portrayed Jewish experience, West was ambivalent about his Jewish heritage. Jay Martin, West’s biographer, notes that West identified as a “Jew and not-Jew at the same time” (80). Whereas Gold appropriates and modifies the dominant masculinity of the era, West dismantles it by chronicling how the protagonist becomes replaceable and exploitable as

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6 According to Stacey Olster, the extent to which West can be classified as Jewish-American writer is premised on several factors: the negative portrayal of Jewishness, the lack of Jewish protagonist, and West’s substantial interest in Christianity (51-52). West’s parents, who moved from Lithuania, identified as Germans and strove for conventional success by assimilating into America: they neither settled in the Lower East Side nor sent West to Hebrew school, and learned English themselves (Martin 13-27, Olster 52). Although such a disassociation with Jewish heritage was much encouraged as West’s upbringing shows, West was clearly aware of his outsider position (Walden 217). Daniel Walden also contends that West’s oscillation between his Jewish heritage and his desire to be a “white” American informs his writing: “[West] could not have written as he did had he not been Jewish” (214). In his comparison of West to other Jewish writers such as Gold, Samuel Ornitz, and Henry Roth, Walden notes that the former was “compelled to define the larger American experience” which also “substantiat[ed] the collective Jewish experience” (219).
a result of the violence waged by consumer capitalism. Through Lemuel, West unveils the myth of the self-made man that sustains the American Dream and the particular type of masculinity the myth valorizes. As a “Jewish outsider,” West writes a penetrating critique of the Depression-era capitalism that marginalizes even the “All American boy” who his parents wanted him to be.

As a Communist writer and intellectual, Gold (1893-1967) was the leading advocate of proletarian literature. Regarding Gold’s enormous literary influence, Alan Wald writes, “Simply put, no single individual contributed more to forging the tradition of proletarian literature as a genre in the United States after the 1920s” that “All who came after Gold would stand on the shoulders of his legacy” (39). Gold frequently wrote for *The Masses, The Liberator*, and *The Daily Worker*, and later served as the founding editor of *The New Masses*. His writings, such as “Towards Proletarian Art,” “Go Left, Young Writers!” and “Proletarian Realism,” helped define proletarian literature and articulate its critical principles. Even when the Communist Party lost its interest in proletarian art in the mid-1930s, Gold persisted.

Gold’s seminal text *Jews Without Money* vividly captures the early twentieth century lives of Jewish immigrants in the tenements of the Lower East Side. The semi-

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7 In fact, Gold’s intensive and continuous focus on the question of poverty inflicted on the Jewish immigrants speaks to the popularity of the novel, especially during the time of the unprecedented, severe economic crisis in American history. The fact that Gold’s acclaimed autobiographical novel, *Jews without Money*, gained currency with the onset of the Great Depression and is now even considered as a representative text of the Depression years is anachronistic given the publication history of the novel. Pieces of the text appeared in *The New Masses* in the mid-1920s, and the book itself was completed in 1928. However, as Dickstein points out, “The ghetto of 1900, once barely visible to the larger world, suddenly spoke volumes to the acute social distress of 1930” (24). Dickstein argues that Gold’s text resonated with the reader of the 1930s because the author himself
autobiographical fiction centers on the growth of the main character, also named Mike, from his childhood to adolescence. The text is a detailed account of Mike’s survival in the poverty-stricken Jewish community and his ultimate conversion into a proletarian revolutionary at the climax of the novel. The reader witnesses the destitute living condition of the Lower East Side and encounters various figures, such as gang members, prostitutes, Rabbis, as well as Mike’s father, a working-class house painter who falls from a ladder and dies from lead poisoning, and mother, an inspiration to Mike’s proletarian identity. The novel is “85% autobiographical,” Gold claimed, and he brilliantly translates his own life and political convictions into creative writing (Wald 45).

Nathanael West (1903-1939), a novelist and screenwriter, was born to Lithuanian immigrant parents. Born Nathan Wallenstein Weinstein, West later changed his name and published his first writing in The New Yorker while working as a hotel manager after returning from Paris due to his father’s declining business. He published his first novella The Dream Life of Balso Snell (1931), a story of the titular hero’s passage inside the Trojan horse, and only 500 copies were sold. In 1933, he published Miss Lonelyhearts, which chronicles the physical and mental defeat of a New York newspaper reporter, followed by the publication of A Cool Million in the next year. In his last years West worked as a screenwriter in Hollywood, and his last published book, The Day of the Locust (1939), is set in the same location wherein the denial of people’s dreams results in

was “a witness from the lower depths” who had a better understanding of poverty (25). Marcus Klein also contends that Gold’s status as a cultural outsider who spent his youth in one of the urban ghettos gave the author the advantage of placing the ghetto onto the cultural plane (184).

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mob violence. In 1940, West was killed in an automobile accident. With the publication of his collected novels in 1957, his works, which were largely ignored during his lifetime, attracted renewed attention.

* A Cool Million: The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin* reverses and mocks the Horatio Alger story and its embedded success myth of the American Dream. The protagonist Lem, who sets out to New York City to amass wealth to salvage his mother’s home, is physically and mentally disintegrated. He is exploited by authorities who wield power over Lem’s body without any apparent reason and by fraudulent entrepreneurs who seek to capitalize on his body, which gradually turns into a replaceable machine. In this process, the traditional masculine markers, such as autonomy and self-development, become no longer sustainable. The potentially perfect candidate for one of the Alger heroes falls victim to capitalism, which perpetuates the American Dream the Alger narratives codify.

Centered on the trajectory of two teenage boys’ growth, both *Jews Without Money* and *A Cool Million* draw on and modify the model of the bildungsroman: while Gold alters the traditional bildungsroman to awaken his readers to class consciousness, West inverts the Horatio Alger narrative, which “represents the American bildungsroman in its most orthodox form,” (Graham123). Critics such as Michael Denning and Barbara Foley note that the traditional bildungsroman is bourgeois in its nature, as the ideals this particular genre promotes, in turn reified the values of the bourgeoisie. For example, Denning writes, the genre is “built around the growth of one individual man, a sentimental education into self-control and the social order,” culminating in the protagonist’s participation in the existing class system (170). The Alger narratives closely
follow the bourgeois bildungsroman, and the popularity of the novels is taken “as a sign of the power of middle-class ideals of mobility and success, and the consent given to those ideals by American workers,” Denning adds (170). Foley also points out that the classical bildungsroman accompanies “the bourgeois conceptions of selfhood, personal development, and social accommodation” (284). Predicated on adolescent self-development, the paradigmatic bildungsroman charts the trajectory of a dissenting protagonist reconciling with the modern bourgeois social order and affirms the power of the American Dream in which class mobility is promised.

While the focus of the chapter is not on the genre itself, discussing the particular form these authors adopted is significant because it is directly related to the protagonists’ development of manhood. Bildungsroman, which is a novel of education, is inseparable from imparting the traditional ideals of masculinity to its readers by depicting a boy’s growth into maturation. The protagonists’ masculinity is still in the process of being forged, and in a conventional bildungsroman, they would achieve the markers of the hegemonic masculinity of the time by attaining upward mobility.

However, Gold and West modify the values and beliefs of the bildungsroman. Gold’s *Jews Without Money* is a proletarian fictional autobiography, which appropriates the narrative arc of the bourgeois bildungsroman tradition and culminates in different political ends—the protagonist is awakened to a unique revolutionary perspective speaking for a collective identity (Foley 284-85). As Denning and Foley point out, the working-class bildungsroman Gold writes does not end in the protagonist’s affirmation of

8 However, in terms of the structure, Carren Irr argues that both Alger’s stories and proletarian novels are similar since they culminate in a “wish-fulfillment” (209).
the tenets of liberal capitalism but the in conviction of his capacity in revolutionizing the world, and thus shaping his ideal manhood.

West’s *A Cool Million* is a satire of the Horatio Alger narrative that inverts the conventional *bildungsroman*. In the Alger narratives, a nascent yet virtuous boy’s unwavering optimism and industriousness are rewarded with respectability and material success, and such a didactic message makes the American Dream seem easily attainable. However, the protagonist of *A Cool Million* only encounters defeats after going out into the world and fails at coming to an understanding of himself and an affirmative view of the world. In the end, he suffers from physical violence that ultimately costs his life. By dismantling the “All American boy,” who fails in becoming the ideal self-made man, West’s satire serves a criticism of capitalism, of the gullible mass’s unfounded belief in the national myth, and of the Left’s failure in providing any viable alternatives.
The Jewish Boy in the Ghetto of the Lower East Side

In “Wilder: Prophet of the Genteel Christ,” a book review column of the _New Republic_, Gold condemns the writings of Thornton Wilder, a three-time Pulitzer winner as a playwright and novelist, with gender-inflected tropes against the writer’s class affiliation and effeminacy. Gold dubs him “the perfect flower of the new prosperity,” which is the newly emerged genteel bourgeoisie class that willingly dismisses its “lowly origins in American industrialism” (267). Wilder meets all the qualifications, such as “good breeding, the decorum, priestliness, glossy high finish … conspicuous inutility, caste feeling” the leisure class demands to be considered an accomplished writer who is appropriate to represent the emergent class (267). By instating Wilder as a representative of the leisure class and by discrediting Wilder’s writings for its lack of manliness, Gold in turn signifies his position as a hypermasculine, working-class writer. Gold validates his status by framing Wilder as a feminine leisure class writer.

As Gold’s editorial exemplifies, in the early twentieth century, the strong association between effeminacy and the genteel bourgeoisie became problematic to American male writers, who began to be characterized by their “artistic sensibility and literary refinement” that connote femininity, and thus denigrating (Penner 37). Regarding Gold’s emphasis of masculinity and contempt for femininity, James Penner contends, “his conception of masculine identity is not a bizarre anomaly, but an important part of the Old Left’s nascent political vision” within which lies “the dichotomy of working-class virility and leisure-culture impotence” (29). Penner also notes that the lack of critical discussion on the gender aspects surrounding the Gold-Wilder controversy bespeaks “the critical tendency to overlook gender concerns in Depression literature” as
class issues were given more priority over gender concerns (29). To rebut being branded as effeminate and to legitimize their profession, these male writers had to undergo “a thorough process of remasculinization,” Penner argues (37). As the book review on Wilder’s works demonstrates, Gold is regarded as the forerunner of such a literary movement to revitalize the status of American male writers.

However, what is often overlooked in positing Gold as the leading proletarian writer who sought to remove any trace of femininity associated with literary culture, citing his use of masculine imagery and rhetoric, is his complex and nuanced gender politics that engages both feminine and masculine values. Cynthia Port contends that “Gold’s prescription calls for writing that is both violent and sentimental” in which the first is usually seen as a masculine trait and the latter as a feminine marker (89). The yoking of these two seemingly opposite values is vividly captured in Gold’s autobiographical novel Jews Without Money, which was published in the same year as the editorial was.

Exploring the ways in which Gold navigates both masculine and feminine values in the novel is critical in expanding the gendered framing of the Leftist literary culture as a rivalry between masculine Leftist writers and feminine bourgeoise writers. This dichotomized view is generally attributed to Gold, who arguably “set the tone for the homophobic and antifeminine rhetoric of literary radicals,” as Paula Rabinowitz contends (22-23). In fact, Gold does not reformulate the traditional gender stereotypes but valorizes these gender-informed traits by modeling various figures who either represent or lack these markers. However, the reading of Jews Without Money reveals that Gold was seeking to rebut the degrading influence of American capitalism and counter the
stereotypes of associating Jewish men with capitalism and femininity by drawing on
various gender-inflected traits.

In *Jewish Gangsters of Modern Literature*, Rachel Rubin notes the significance of
the gangster as a literary trope for Jewish writers of the 1920s and 1930s. Redefining
Jewish masculinity through a gangster figure went hand in hand with the Zionist Max
Nordau’s call for new “muscle Jews” that emphasized one’s physical prowess, as
marginalized Jews negotiated the ways in which to assimilate into and differentiate
themselves from “mainstream” society. (5) Through the Jewish gangster, Rubin contends,
Jewish writers sought to “dispense with rigid or reductive positions of Jewish ethnicity”
(14). Gold utilizes the gangster to mediate Jewish masculinity.

The description of the leader of the Lower East Side’s “gangster” bespeaks the
complexity of constructing an ideal vision of masculinity. In a chapter titled “A Gang of
Little Yids,” Mikey confesses his admiration for a friend named Nigger. The pejorative
moniker comes not because he is African American but because of his dark complexion
and resemblance to a stereotypical African American man that draws on the negative
stereotypes of African American men. Mikey describes Nigger’s appearance as such: “He
was built for power like a tugboat, squat and solid. His eyes, even then, had the
contemptuous glare of the criminal and genius. His nose had been squashed at birth, and
with his black hair and murky face, made inevitable the East Side nickname” (42).

Ironically, Nigger is precocious about sex and inclined to criminal activities, thus
reinforcing the worst stereotypes of hypersexuality and criminality that are associated
with African Americans. However, this stereotypical construction of black masculinity
allows Mikey and the boys of the Lower East Side to see Nigger as a heroic figure. As
Rubin points out, the Jewish gangster functioned as an “ethnic hero,” an image widespread at the time Gold was writing this novel, and Nigger embodies such a position (84). Nigger is “bold, tameless, untouchable,” capable of fighting an “eternal war” that takes place in every block of the neighborhood, protecting the Jewish boys (42). The stereotypical portrayal of Nigger that focuses on his physicality demonstrates the qualities the narrator promotes for the Jewish boys. All the traits that characterize Nigger and that endow him with the power to lead the boys are framed as masculine characteristics.

Moreover, the admiration for their fearless leader signifies not the boys’ willingness to join the social order governed by white supremacy but their defiance against it, which in turn marks their masculinity. Nigger fights “boys twice his age” as well as “men and cops,” which further emphasizes his prowess and defiance against authority, an attitude that the boys admire (43). For Mikey and the boys, who are not welcomed by the school and the police, identifying with a figure like Nigger and his “blackness” proffers them a sense of unity and resistance against authority, which also marks their virile militancy. For example, Nigger’s recalcitrance is made clear early on in the novel, as Mikey introduces an incident that involves both him, Nigger, and their schoolteacher. When the teacher, a “ruptured American virgin of fifty-five,” calls Mikey a “LITTLE KIKE,” it is Nigger who bashes the teacher’s nose, thus earning Mikey’s respect (37). For Mikey, Nigger’s action is a symbol of bravery and justice that demonstrates Nigger’s physical virility and defiance against his anti-Semitic teacher (37). As Bernstein points out, Nigger serves as “the conduit for a white Jewish working-class performance of opposition” to class exploitation and anti-Semitism (125). Therefore, the
nickname “Nigger” does not signify the Jewish boys’ willingness to assimilate into white society by advocating white supremacy but their collective resistance against what white society represents—a prosperous, capitalist society made possible by the exploitation of the Jewish community, “eat[ing] the tragedy of millions of immigrants” (Gold 41). Ultimately, the narrator shows the formation of a working-class, resistant masculinity among the Jewish boys facilitated through the figure of Nigger.

However, it also should be noted that the role of the Jewish gangster as a model for an ideal masculinity Gold seeks to forge remains ambiguous in the novel. Although Mikey admires Nigger for his physical valor and resistance to the authority, this admiration, or “the positive embodiment of Jewish gangsterism” does not extend to other gangsters (Rottenberg, “Margins” 131). In contrast to Nigger, the other prominent gangster, Louis One Eye, only reinforces the “popular representations of the Jew as foreign corrupter” (Rubin 83). He is “a despot” instilling fear among the Jewish community for his ruthlessness, and eventually attempts to rape Mikey’s aunt Lena (125). Louis One Eye also protects his neighbors, but he fails to fulfill the role of a rebel against the dominant society. In fact, he is the victim of it and later joins a gang and exploits his own people, subscribing to the system of oppression. While both Louis and Nigger become professional gangsters, Louis is complicit in persecuting the immigrants, whom he used to defend. As forging working-class solidarity and masculinity based upon is paramount for the narrator, it seems inevitable for him to denounce Louis, who becomes part of the system.

In contrast to Nigger who serves as an ideal masculine figure for the Jewish boys, there are several male figures whom Mikey finds ineffective and effeminate: Joey, his
father, and the religious leaders. The narrator simultaneously draws on and rebuts the persistent stereotype of the effeminate Jew by stressing these figures’ inability to join the mainstream society primarily due to their un-masculine traits. The foregrounding of their “failure” to assimilate into America as sign of effeminacy demonstrates the particular masculine traits that the narrator emphasizes. Moreover, these traits are not different from what the dominant society prizes. While it is not Gold’s goal to urge the Jews to assimilate into America, thus subscribing to the type of capitalism that the nation upholds and operates in, he further makes the point that specific masculine qualities are mandatory for survival in a capitalist society.

Whereas Mikey’s identification with Nigger endows him with a sense of masculinity that overturns the stereotypical depiction of the Jews as feminine, the narrator further establishes the essentiality of virile masculinity through the portrait of his friend Joey Cohen, who is “a dreamy boy with spectacles” and “precocious in the Jewish way, full of a strange kindness and understanding” (43, 50). Followed by the valorization Nigger’s physique and prowess is Mikey lamenting the death of Joey, who embodies the negative stereotypes of Jewish male femininity. Mikey recounts one summer day when their excursion was interrupted by a pederast who assaulted Joey. He is a bookish, feminine Jewish boy who fails to protect himself from the molester, and such a lack of valor compromises his masculinity. Through this portrayal of Joey, the narrator emphasizes the undesirableness of such feminine qualities in surviving the poverty-stricken life in the Lower East Side. Juxtaposed with the death of Joey, “the very survival of the narrator demonstrates his own unquestionable manliness,” as Porter contends (104).
As seen in Joey’s case, the narrator reinforces the feminine stereotypes imposed on Jewish male subjects to contrast his manliness against it. However, the death of Joey does not automatically endow young Mikey with a proletarian masculinity that Gold seeks to forge. By juxtaposing Mikey’s father Herman and mother Katie, the narrator demonstrates that his proletarian values are inspired by his mother, not his father. As much as Nigger leaves an indelible impact on Mikey’s formation of manhood, Katie Gold and Aunt Lena awaken Mikey to a sense of solidarity with the working class.

Mikey’s father, Herman, fails to serve as an exemplar of virile masculinity because of his incompetence in supporting the family. Herman is “a romantic and dream[s] of a bright, easy future,” in contrast to his wife, Katie, who has “a strong sense of reality” (157-58). Enraptured with his romantic dream of succeeding in America, Herman soon becomes the victim of his dream. Eventually, he has no means to make money but has to sell bananas on a pushcart, which for him, is a symbol of “defeat, of utter hopelessness” (298). Mikey, then twelve-years-old, is forced to quit school to help support his family. For Mikey, his father is an ineffective person who is captivated by the myth of the American Dream that is unachievable.

It is his mother, “with female realism,” who desperately seeks “to beat the foolish male dreams out of his [father’s] head,” which exemplifies the inefficacy of a bookish Jew (81). Unlike Mikey’s father who awaits fortune to take place miraculously, Katie, Mikey’s mother, serves as an authoritative figure of the household and the tenement. While Nigger was capable of becoming a leader through his physical prowess and capacity to utilize it, Katie does it by helping out the prostitutes and forming solidarity with her neighbors. When her husband is ill-stricken, incapable of working, it is Katie,
who supports the household. Mikey reflects, “It hurt my father’s masculine pride to see his wife working for wages. But my mother liked it all” (246). Here, the narrator does not portray the reverse in traditional gender roles to be problematic. Mikey’s father is ineffective as a patriarch not because of his wife’s domineering authority in the household, but because of his nature and tendency.

Mikey’s aunt Lena also plays a significant role in cementing his decision to join the labor movement and to align himself with the working class. At first when she arrives in the Lower East Side, she is “crazy” about America, “scarcely sleep[ing] for excitement” (131). Such a display of naivety is similar to Herman’s outlook on America. However, unlike his father who never succeeds in facing and solving troubles, Mikey notices that “her mind had grown in the struggle” upon her return from working at a sweatshop (236). Additionally, “her eloquence [and] her proud courage and dignity” fascinate everyone (236). Although Lena becomes sick and aged from working, she gains new power, primarily because of her commitment to the labor movement. The integrity that Mikey discovers from his aunt leaves an impressionable impact on him, just as his mother has inculcated him with a sense of unity with the working class. What lacks from the male figures is compensated by the female characters, and this demonstrates that the narrator is constructing an ideal masculinity not based on the difference in the biological sex but gender traits the narrator frames as specifically important.

Just as Herman turns out to be an effete patriarch, who is crushed by his fantasy of the American Dream, the religious leaders are ineffectual when it comes to forming unity among the Jews to revolutionize their poverty-stricken lives. Furthermore, besides Joey, both Herman and the religious leaders, who are the older generation that emigrated
from Eastern European countries, are depicted as emasculate because their authority as the patriarch of the Jewish community is no longer sustainable in the Lower East Side. For example, Reb Samuel, the “spiritual leader” of the Chassidim sect of the Lower East Side and the owner of an umbrella factory, fails both in protecting his people’s faith and securing the business. The “air of grandeur that surrounds so many old pious Jews” disappears from Reb Samuel as America “[breaks] the old man, because he [cannot] bend” (191). Here, America is portrayed as an evil force trying to infiltrate the Jewish community, and he is incapacitated, prevented from fighting against “the enemy” (196). As a result, just like Katie, Reb Samuel’s wife intervenes to restore the household: she takes over both the factory and the household, and Reb Samuel is satisfied with the decision, again demonstrating his incapability and unwillingness to perform his traditional gender role as a patriarch.

Thus, the narrator underscores specific gender traits that the dominant society values as well as the necessity of appropriating these qualities. As Herman and the religious leaders exemplify, the narrator grounds his vision of ideal masculinity in the competence to support the family and the community to survive the degradation of capitalism. Through the juxtaposition of these male figures and their wives, the narrator demonizes the American market economy that only brings poverty to the Jewish immigrants. Foley argues that “the cruelties Mikey experiences are directly traceable not simply to the hard lot of the urban immigrant but to capital’s structural compulsion to exploit and oppress” (305). Religion and feminine virtues that the Jewish male subjects display are inadequate to overturn capitalism, the very cause of the immigrants’ destitution.
The narrator not only shows the primary masculine traits necessary for survival but also dislodges the stereotypical connection between Jew and capitalism. Corinna Lee points out that “Gold’s effort to redefine, through his mother, Jewish identity as proletarian identity is partly meant to combat anti-Semitic stereotypes of Jews as the symbols of capitalism” (44). As Derek Penslar succinctly articulates, “the metonymic association between Jew and capitalism … was a driving force” behind the pervasive anti-Semitic milieu in the early twentieth century (3). Gold, with his disdain of the leisure class and its feminine characteristics, aims to counter the negative reputation of Jewish people regarding capitalism through Katie, Lena, and Mikey, all of whom embody a proletarian identity. Mikey rejects the path to bourgeois assimilation and instead chooses a socialist one, and such a decision bespeaks his proletarian masculinity. Contrary to his father who believes that “each man should make his own fortune,” which is one of the foundational premises of the American Dream, and “be selfish in America,” Mikey finds solidarity with the workers as the ultimate measure to fight poverty, and ultimately America (235, 163). In the end, as Lee stresses, the conviction Mikey displays is “rooted in his [mother’s] collectivist ethos” (43). Mikey, inspired by his mother and aunt, joins the labor movement, which also bespeaks his masculinity. As Rubin notes, “conversion to socialism becomes a triumph of manhood” (95).

Nevertheless, the characters’ subscription to American national ideals conveyed in popular culture is not absent from the novel: it plays a significant role in constituting the boys’ manhood, which also coalesces with Gold’s conceptualization of a virile, working-class masculinity. The appropriation of specific masculine traits through popular culture, most notably the idea of the West, inserts Mikey into the myth of the national
origin and enables him to become a bearer of frontier masculinity. In his reproduction of the myth of the West, Mikey negotiates his racial identity within the fluid race relations witnessed in the early twentieth century: at times he identifies with Indians while also fantasizing about being Buffalo Bill who sets out on adventures to kill them.

The ideas of the West, the frontier, and the gang capture the imagination of the Jewish boys. As each street gets involved in a fight, the Jewish boys, “with the power of imagination,” turn Delancey Street lots, a limited space, into “a vast western plain” they must defend against the enemies from other streets (46). Protecting the street turns into an imaginary battle, and the narrator addresses the opponents as “a band of Indians,” who are led by a “dark fearless boy” (47). In contrast to the enemies, Mikey and the Jewish boys naturally identify themselves as whites. Strategically, the narrator both reinforces the centrality of whiteness in the frontier myth from which the Jews were historically excluded and inserts Mikey and the Jewish boys into the myth by demonstrating that they are assimilable into the concept of whiteness.

At the same time, the narrator also aligns the Jewish boys with Indians, ostensibly appropriating the desirable traits of the imaginary Indians portrayed in popular culture. The boys perform “Indian rituals” and form a group known as the “Young Avengers of Chrystie Street” under the guidance of Nigger to “avenge wrongs done to a member, and to hold pow-wows and roast sweet potatoes” (260). To protect themselves from the boys in other blocks, the Jewish boys utilize “Indianness,” which signifies primitive strength and masculinity.

Mikey playing white is exemplified through his fantasy about Buffalo Bill as well. When Mikey decides to go to another side of the city unaccompanied by his usual
“gang of little Yids,” he imagines himself to be Buffalo Bill. Although Mikey knows that passing by Mulberry Street, which is “the land of the hereditary enemy,” is dangerous, he decides to traverse the street, because he “must make [himself] as brave as Buffalo Bill,” who is his hero (186-87). The streets turn into the Wild West where Mikey chases buffalos in the vast plains alongside Buffalo Bill. He then embarks on a mission to rescue “a beautiful white maiden” who is captured by the Indians and successfully escapes with her in the face of “two hundred cruel redskins” (187). In his imagination, Mikey assumes the identity of a fearless white frontiersman, which is both masculine and racist.

The valorization of stereotypical black and Indian masculinity as well as whiteness demonstrate the way in which the narrator is forging a new ideal masculinity by appropriating specific masculine features that are associated with physicality and racial identity. The narrator constructs Mikey into a virile working-class man who rebuts the association between Jewish people and capitalism as well as the long-held stereotype of seeing Jewish men as feminine.
In *A Cool Million, or the Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin*, West’s satirizes the Horatio Alger rags-to-riches narrative, the central national narrative that flourished even amid a series of economic downfall and political unrest. Through the textual appropriation and distortion of the Alger narrative, West traces the disintegration of the self-made man, who supposedly fulfills the American Dream of upward mobility through individual will and moral character. Moreover, through the physical mangling of the protagonist, Lemuel Pitkin, West unearths the privilege of the able body that Alger’s heroes take for granted. In so doing, the author also underscores the ways in which even a white “American boy,” who has all the legible characteristics of becoming a successful self-made man in Alger’s stories, is destroyed by the force of capitalism to the point of being exploited as a fascist propaganda tool posthumously.

Unlike Mikey, whose self-determination and physical ableness go unquestioned in his maturation into a virile working-class man, for Lemuel, the assumed innateness of these two qualities is challenged. Lemuel’s agency is destroyed by external forces, and his body diminishes to a set of replaceable parts, as a result of a series of violent acts targeting him. Agency and the able body, which are supposedly fundamental in materializing the American Dream, are paralyzed in the face of capitalism. As Sonnet Retman points out, “West shows how the American Dream is consolidated through stereotypical figures of success … and also figures of failure, such as Lem” (84).

Whereas the corrosive power of capitalism motivates Mikey to forge his vision of ideal masculinity to fight against it, Lem falls victim to the same destructive force and fails to function as a proper man.
Lem embodies a set of stereotypes the Alger folk figure possesses. From the beginning of the story, the narrator identifies the protagonist, Lemuel as “our hero,” informing the reader’s expectation that the hero is set for an adventure that results in his success (145). Lem does not evade from the impending difficulty and embarks on a journey to settle the problem he faces. Not only the protagonist is framed as the typical Alger hero, also the narrative closely resembles the Alger stories. When Lem inquires with Shagpoke Whipple, the former president of the United States, about lending money to the foreclosure of his mother’s house in Vermont, Shagpoke refuses to do so, for he has ample opportunities to raise the money required for the mortgage, since “This is the land of opportunity and the world is an oyster” (149). Such banal statements punctuate the narrative, demonstrating the extent to which the narrative riffs on and distorts the formulaic Alger stories. Moreover, Mr. Whipple points out that Lem as “an almost certain chance to succeed” because he was “born poor and on a farm” (173). Even a cursory introduction of the main characters and the plot reveals that West is utilizing a multitude of legible tropes.

However, the motifs and formulae of the Alger narrative that are supposed to guarantee the hero’s success disassemble. The distortion of the conventional Alger tales manifests as soon as Lem decides to leave his village and make a fortune in New York City upon the counsel of Mr. Whipple. The protagonist’s display of moral authority along the plot of luck and pluck do not lead to his success, thus betraying the reader’s horizon of expectation. For example, Lem is devoid of manly virility and fails to protect Betty

9 Critics have noted that more than one-fifth of the novel is lifted “word for word” from Alger’s stories (Blyn 112).
Prail who suffers multiple attempts of sexual assault and abduction. Lem kills a dog that attacked Betty, and gets into a fight with the dog’s owner, Baxter, the town bully. Surprisingly, Lem remains unhurt even after Baxter pounds him several times. When Baxter, befuddled, asks Lem to shake hands, he does not hesitate to do so, since Lem is “a fair-dealing lad” who believed that “everyone was the same” (154). However, as soon as Lem offers his hand, Baxter batters him unconscious and rapes the girl. The incident demonstrates that moral authority, which is an integral part of the Alger tales as it bespeaks the significance of one’s character in upward mobility and formation of manhood, does not apply in West’s narrative. Lem’s courage to protect the girl despite his physical disadvantage as well as his belief in his opponent’s integrity demonstrate his moral authority as well as his naivety that is not rewarded.

The belief in “character-based success” was one of the most essential themes Alger’s uplifting stories offered its readers that the heroes in these stories were rewarded with occupation and wealth for their moral acts (Decker 2). In his study of the historical transformation of the self-made man figure, Decker discusses the significance of moral character the representative “self-made men,” such as Roosevelt, Carnegie, and Washington championed in their speeches and writings. Decker points out that the idea of character-based self-making remained widely available for the public as evidenced by the popularity of Alger’s uplifting tales that reached its peak in the early twentieth century (2-4). Moral character and the ensuing opportune luck that the heroes of the Alger narratives encounter are essential for the heroes to achieve upward mobility, marked by amassing personal wealth and finding an occupation, which in turn signals their manhood especially in the public sphere.
However, even when Lem encounters such an opportunity, the anticipated prize is not available for him. In another example, Lem saves an old gentleman, who turns out to be the president of the Underdown National Bank and Trust Company and his daughter from being ran over by a horse-drawn carriage. In a traditional Alger story, this would have been the moment in which the protagonist is rewarded for his action by a wealthy benefactor like Mr. Underdown. However, in West’s narrative, Lem is mistaken as an irresponsible groom who let the horses go loose. Instead of being rewarded for his moral deed, Lem is forced to surgically remove his eye, which is injured in the course of saving Mr. Underdown and his daughter, and replace it with a glass eye. As such, West manipulates the conventional Alger story to expose the hollowness of its promise and to reduce the protagonist into a mere reproducible type represented through his replaced body parts, which also bespeaks his failure to become the Alger hero.

The assumed bodily wholeness of the Alger protagonist is undermined: Lem’s body parts are maimed, signaling his downward spiraling into a subhuman status. Irres stresses the beauty of “the physical handsomeness” of the Alger hero in his rise to the bourgeoisie class, as the bodily beauty symbolizes the boy’s virtue (199). The bourgeoisie is only reserved for those with wholesome body and virtue, which are seen as analogous. However, as Lem’s physical disfigurement exemplifies, his bodily condition and moral authority do not align. The juxtaposition of the Alger hero’s invisible, yet assumed perfect, healthy body with Lem’s mutilated, grotesque body accentuates the fact that one must possess a wholesome body to enact the myth of the American Dream. Without a functioning body, Lem cannot be constituted as a citizen, the definitive marker of manhood. Moreover, the series of physical disfigurement—his teeth, eye, parts of fingers,
leg, and scalp—Lem is subject to is a symptomatic expression of the debilitating power modernity inflicts upon modern subjects.

Lem’s body is not only dismantled but also reassembled as if his body is manufactured as parts of a machine on an assembly line. The interchangeability of body parts implies that Lem is replaceable, just like a consumable good, which in turn demonstrates the dehumanizing power of the capitalist society. Even when Lem is reduced to a set of artifacts, however, he does not have value as a product. As parts of his body get mangled, starting first with his forcefully removed teeth followed by his right eye, Lem is provided with a set of prostheses for replacement. However, the prosthetic parts are inoperative: both his false teeth and glass eye comically fall out, exacerbating his pain.

The machine-like body part, which does not “properly” function, only aggravates Lem’s situation, which is exemplified by his interchangeable glass eye. After the carriage accident, a gentleman, who later turns out to be a con man, approaches Lem and makes a proposition: “My man, if you can wear this glass eye, I have a job for you” (191). The “job” is simple, requiring Lem to repeat the same act of pretending that he has lost his prosthetic eye in some luxurious stores. He is unwittingly being manipulated by the con man and is naïve enough to play “his part by heart,” since the job reminds him of the plays he had participated in as a student (197). Lem is employed since his eye is replaceable. However, because of this job, he again lands in prison. In an industrialized system in which one’s worth is measured by one’s efficiency of labor, Lem fails both as a laborer and as a machine due to his brutalized body and replaceable body parts that fail to function: he is neither a human being nor a machine who cannot properly operate.
Without an able body, Lem is bereft of any job prospect, and thus forced to rely on others’ assistance for survival, in contrast to the Alger hero whose autonomy hinges upon the proper functioning of the able body. Volition and self-determination, which are integral to the Alger hero of the self-made man are nowhere to be found in Lem, as his fate is manipulated by external forces. As Almanza contends, “Lem’s violated body upsets myths of wholeness, autonomy, and self-care upon which modern notions of individualism rely” (60). Lem cannot be a self-made man but “a mechanism out of working order” because of his passive acceptance of his fate (60). Lem is no longer an individual but a dysfunctional machine that can be appropriated and altered to fulfill certain purposes other than his own will. The dismantled subject Lem is “a counter to Alger’s self-made man as a socio-cultural ideal and ideologically charged symbol” (Almanza 58).

Robin Blyn further notes that the passivity of the protagonist also indicates his incapacity to serve as a revolutionary subject. Whereas West’s critique of liberal capitalism is not lost on critics, such as Rita Barnard and Jonathan Veitch, Blyn contends that West is also satirizing the Communist Party for its incapability to provide any viable solutions to undo the ruins capitalism raged in the 1930s. In other words, the protagonist, who is made into a human machine by capitalism, fails to become “a subject of revolutionary action or desire” (Blyn 123). For West, the proletarian worker who the Leftist writers and the Communist Party endorse is not a “viable alternative to the autonomous liberal individual,” an embodiment of liberal capitalism that Alger represents (Blyn 120). Unlike Mikey, the ideal proletarian worker premised on virile, working-class
masculinity, Lem, stripped of subjectivity and physical wholesomeness, offers no hope in fighting against liberal capitalism that verges on transforming into American fascism.

The commodification of Lem’s body reduces the protagonist to a laughingstock. Corporeally disqualified as a hero, Lem turns into a spectacle primarily because of his machine-like body. Lem is hired by Riley and Robbins as a stooge in their vaudeville routine. They were looking for “a one-eyed man” and the fact that Lem “also had a wooden leg, wore a toupee and store teeth” further enhanced Lem’s electability as the “perfect” stooge (247-8). Lem’s mangled body and replaceable parts improve his job prospect. He soon becomes “the object of [Riley and Robbins’] merriment,” and the narrator also admits that “there was much to laugh at in our hero’s appearance” (248). As a stooge, Lem’s only task is to stand still between Riley and Robbins without uttering a word. After delivering each joke, however, the comics violently beat Lem: “Their object was to knock off his toupee or to knock out his teeth and eye” (249). When every replaceable body part falls out, then, Lem bends over and rummages the box he is standing on, looks for the parts he is missing, and replaces them “with sober dignity” (250). The final act of the vaudeville undoes the reassembly of the fake body parts: with a

10 The job proprietor additionally reports that Lem was fortunate enough to get the job, because a man in the same agency room tried to mutilate one of his eyes upon hearing whom Riley was looking for so that “he could qualify for the job” (247). Ironically, even with the able body that Lem does not possess, the man fails to find a job and is desperate enough to hurt himself for employment, which bespeaks the constrained job market of the time contrary to Mr. Whipple’s reiteration of American as “the land of opportunity.” As Almanza points out, Lem’s physical disability is depicted “not as a problem of the individual body, but as a social reality” in which “disablement [is] inherent to industrialization and the logic of capitalism” (67-8).
mallet labeled “The Works,” Riley and Robbins “completely demolishe[s] our hero” and “the spectators [are] convulsed with joy,” laughing even after the act is over (250).

The audience misrecognizes the staging of Lem as a sight to be laughed at, incapable of realizing that they are in a similar situation that Lem occupies. The grotesque spectacle of Lem’s body does not elicit sympathy but only creates distance between the object put on view and the audience as well as the reader. Regarding the machine-like status many individuals were subject to in the face of the capitalist system of exchange and production, William Solomon explains that “in Depression-era rhetorical strategies, the grotesque body was frequently gendered female, as in fact was the realm of carnivalized amusements, even when associated with the machine” (19). Solomon points out that the distance between the object and the audience allows them to reaffirm the “‘masculine’ integrity” of the spectators in contrast to a “‘feminine’ lack” Lem embodies (147). Masculinity has been traditionally associated with autonomy and power. Therefore, one might say it is valid for Solomon to point out that the audience’s sense of masculinity is being reinforced in opposition to the passivity Lem displays as a stooge.

However, such a “traditional” gendered reading that presumes stabilized gender poles risk reifying the masculine/feminine dyad. It should be noted that Lem being commodified as an artifact put on display does not automatically feminize him. West is not utilizing Lem as an example that signals the feminization of modern subjects in the hands of capitalism. Most of all, West does not use any gender-associated terms to describe the protagonist. The suggestion that Lem’s lack of subjectivity is associated with femininity is imposed by critics, not the narrator. Instead, Lem’s egregiously damaged physicality and mentality demonstrate that the gendering of the subject is yet another
privilege reserved only for those who are deemed “normal.” The gullible hero does not register any feelings of humiliation for being an object of ridicule and believes that he is “quite happy” because “with millions out of work he [has] no cause to complain” (250). Lem, who first set out as a naïve boy, gradually loses the ability to comprehend the situations into which he is forced. Although Lem is allowed to read the newspapers with which he is beaten, he no longer can read them because “the mental reactions of the poor lad had been slowed up considerably by the hardships he had suffered” (250). Such an injured intelligence inflicted on him by the system further drives Lem into frightful hardships from which the protagonist cannot escape. Lem’s somatic and mental impairments unsettle the stability of gender terms.

As such, Lem’s machine-like body is not legibly masculine or feminine. His physical disintegration erodes the privileges of masculinity. Unlike Gold who sought to reinforce his masculinity by framing femininity as an antagonistic opposition to masculinity, West is contesting the stability of this binary by positing Lem not as a desirable, feminized commodity but as an object to be laughed at and thus depersonalized. The audience aligns with “the active agents rather than the humiliated victim” and in their laughter, they “unknowingly accede to the corporeal barbarism enacted within capitalist social relations” (Solomon 147). The audience is granted the fantasy of false dominance over the dismantled victim, assenting to the system that inflicts harm on Lem.
However, the sight of the audience enraptured by the stooge in turn appalls the reader.\textsuperscript{11} Pointing out the unfavorable reception of the novella at the time of its publication, Veitch argues that such a distance between the reader and the audience was what West intended. Veitch contends that since Lem is a machine, he is “unsuitable as a cause célébre or an object of nostalgia” (101). Through the depiction of the cartoonish yet cruel staging and beating of Lem and the audience’s reaction to it, West deliberately prevents his readers from “retreating to a sentimental humanism” that in turn reifies the logic of liberal capitalism (Veitch 101). West reveals both the brutality of capitalism that mechanizes and commodifies individuals and the public’s impervious acceptance of it by disallowing the reader from identifying with the audience and the protagonist.

The exploitation of the body and the public’s unwitting accession to such a phenomenon move into an unexpected direction. Lem’s disfigured body, which mirrors the systemic violence of capitalism, is simultaneously exploited for the dissemination of the fascist propaganda. Lem is ultimately put on display to galvanize the masses to organize a fascist movement led by Mr. Whipple. In the final section of \textit{A Cool Million}, the boy is approached by a man, who identifies himself as one of Storm Trooper Zachary Coates led by Mr. Whipple. Lem reluctantly accepts the man’s request to make a speech, which will elevate Lem into “one of the martyrs” (252). However, as soon as he

\textsuperscript{11} In ““Inanimate Hideosities”: The Burlesque of Racial Capitalism in Nathanael West’s \textit{A Cool Million},” Sonnet Retman finds that West is inviting the reader to identify with the audience of the burlesque in the hope of transforming the reader to become more critically aware of the situation (106). However, to realize West’s intention of enlightening the reader, the gap between the reader and the audience should be maintained. It is the distance that enables the reader to recognize Lem’s mechanized body and its reduction to an object of ridicule. Robin Blyn also do not distinguish between the reader and the audience (121).
articulates the first line of the speech, remarking “I am a clown … but there are times when even clowns must grow serious,” the protagonist is assassinated (253). The final words of the boy are scripted by the one who initially deceived Lem into believing in the false clichés of the American Dream. Even when Lem meets his final destruction, he is stripped of his voice, merely iterating someone else’s words as a proxy.

Even after his death, Lem is appropriated and abused as he transforms into the Alger hero for fascist demagoguery. Lem, who is denied by the Alger success story, is again re-appropriated as a tool for Mr. Whipple’s fascist narrative in the guise of “the American boy” (255). As Solomon accurately explains, Lem rising to “the status of the heroic martyr of a fascist revolution” demonstrates “the way in which the fragmented body may be utilized to fabricate a collective ego” (148). His birthday is now a national holiday, and in honor of him, hundreds of boys parade down Fifth Avenue singing a song: “A million hearts for Pitkin, oh! / to do and die with Pitkin, oh! / To live and fight with Pitkin, oh! / Marching for Pitkin” (254). As Almanza argues, “the rhetorical manipulation of the individual’s biography” serves to “solidify mass identification with a larger movement” that Lem is commodified for mass consumption (74). However, the anthem is not for Lem, but for Mr. Whipple, who inserts the boy into a narrative that promulgates fascism.

To make Lem into a political icon, Mr. Whipple first must effectively suppress every specificity of Lem by making his body non-existent, the very site on which Lem’s history is mapped out. Through this act of silencing Lem, Mr. Whipple refashions the protagonist to fit into the Algerian myth. The nationalist narrative gains its rhetorical strength by resituating Lem as an abstract, representative American boy in the Alger tale
that allows the boys in the marching to identify themselves with an American hero who (falsely) sacrificed his life for a justifiable cause. Lem speaks “of the right of every American boy to go into the world and there receive fair play and a chance to make his fortune by industry and probity without being laughed at or conspired against by sophisticated aliens,” Mr. Whipple recites (255). While the Alger tale stresses the achievability of class mobility through the hero, the fascist version of the same tale emphasizes the social cleansing of America, free of Marxists and Jewish bankers in particular.

The principles of both capitalism and fascism are reinforced through an identical story of an all-American boy with a humble background going through hardships but finally overcoming them with industry and integrity, thus becoming “the American boy” in the end. The collective investment in the national narrative that fortifies the American Dream foregrounds the able body hero. The inversion of the Alger tale not only upends the myth of the American Dream but also demonstrates the ways in which the identical story presenting an able body hero can be appropriated for fascist cause, further disclosing the fact that the myth is “an incipient or potential form of fascism” as Dickstein points out (287).
Conclusion

In “The Gun is Loaded, Dreiser,” published in The New Masses, Gold latches on to what he perceives as Theodore Dreiser’s anti-Semitic remarks he made in a correspondence to Hutchins Hapgood in 1933 which was later published in The Nation in 1935. In response, Gold criticizes Dreiser’s stereotypical and narrow view about Jewish people, who Dreiser generalizes as “lawyers, bankers, merchants, money-lenders, and brokers, and middlemen” are “very money-minded, very pagan, very sharp in practice… with the single objective of plenty of money” (qtd. in “Gun” 14). Gold contends that Dreiser is ignoring the degradation of the working-class Jewish people all around the world. In his characteristically polemical language, Gold argues that there is a causal connection between capitalism and racism, which makes him “want to howl like a dog with rage and fight” (14).

He further contends that anti-Semitism is the product of capitalism, as “the rich Jews, the exploiting Jews” are indifferent to the issue of poverty and even “complacent under anti-Semitism” (15). Therefore, Gold contends, “As long as capitalism endures, they will endure” (15). The “better America” is a socialist country led by the working class, free from anti-Semitism. While Gold’s argument that racism is non-existent in the working-class movement might be misguided, the writer’s claim demonstrates his conviction in locating capitalism as the root cause of anti-Semitism.

Moreover, according to Gold, capitalism is responsible not only for racism but also for poverty. In the same stinging response to Dreiser, Gold continues to accuse Dreiser of his dismissive attitude towards the Jewish poor: “Shame on those who insult the poor! More shame to you Mr. Dreiser, born in poverty and knowing its bitter
humiliations!” (14) After detailing the East Side Jewish ghetto, Gold extends the
description of the Jewish poor to “the mass of Jews” all over the world. He continues,
“the ghetto has been the historic home of the Jewish race, and the ghetto is not
picturesque. I can assure you; it is bedbugs, hunger, filth, tears, sickness, poverty!” (14)
As Gold was born and raised in the East Side Jewish ghetto, he posits himself as a
rightful witness of the circumstances plaguing the community. In so doing, Gold
disassociates the metonymic connection between Jewish people and capitalism. Also,
Gold can once again reiterate his advocacy of revolutionary class struggle, as it is “an
antidote to despair” that is caused by poverty (Dickstein 31).

While not as straightforward in its style as Gold’s political message conveys,
West expresses his view of social criticism in one of the letters sent to Malcolm Cowley
in 1939. In the correspondence, West shares his anxiety over writing about social ills:
[I] write out of hope for a new and better world – But I’m a comic writer and it
seems impossible for me to handle any of the ‘big things’ without seeming to
laugh or at least smile … When not writing a novel – say at a meeting of a
committee we have out here to help the migratory worker – I do believe it and try
to act on that belief. But as the typewriter by myself I can’t (qtd. in Barnard 156).

In this letter, West’s position is not much different from that of a proletarian writer.
Unlike Gold, who uses polemical language and naturalist style to explicitly deliver his
political view, West deploys “an uneasy blend of dark satire and sentiment, of savage
humor and sincere empathy” that implicitly yet creatively manifests his sense of
“political justice and social compassion” as Joseph Entin points out (60, 62). Entin continues that the motif of physical damage underscores “the depth of the cultural and social problems of the poor confront in mass-mediated, Depression-era America,” which reflects “West’s political concern for the less fortunate” (63). By delineating the link between physical damage and devastating social circumstances, West makes his political position clear. West’s unconventional, experimental form challenges the tendency to sentimentalize the less fortunate (Entin 65). Unlike West’s worry that he might be incapable of writing for “a new and better world,” the author provides the reader with an alternative point of view that is unsettling yet genuine.

For a class-based critique of America, Gold and West each narrates the lives of two adolescent boys growing up in a rapidly transitioning capitalist society in two very different genres—one a proletarian fictional autobiography and the other a satire. These two authors examine the possibility of an “American” boy growing up amid the devastating impacts of a capitalist society, and each text ends with a drastically different conclusion: one survives and seeks to revolutionize the society and the other succumbs to and killed by the system. Through these two individuals, Gold and West question the definition of the “All American boy” who embodies the tenets of the American Dream and its sustainability. The ascent of Mikey and the descent of Lem in the capitalist society

12 Here, Entin discusses West’s political affiliation with the progressive movement and the Leftist writers in a section analyzing Miss Lonelyhearts, which was published a year before A Cool Million. However, West’s critique of the societal problems “plaguing poor and working-class people” through their bodily deformities can not only be found in Miss Lonelyhearts but also in A Cool Million in which his political message is made even more explicit.
of America bespeak the distance between the two protagonists’ masculine subject position and the hegemonic masculinity of the time.
CHAPTER 5

THE MULTIPLICITY OF ASIAN AMERICAN MASCULINITY IN YOUNGHILL KANG’S EAST GOES WEST: THE MAKING OF AN ORIENTAL YANKEE AND CARLOS BULOSAN’S AMERICA IS IN THE HEART

Introduction

Citing the U.S. legal immigration history of Chinese male immigrant laborers, Lisa Lowe concludes that “Whereas the ‘masculinity’ of the citizen was first inseparable from his ‘whiteness,’” as the state extended citizenship to nonwhite male persons, it formally designated these subjects as ‘male,’ as well” (11). Racialized exclusionary immigration and labor practices were at odds with endowing Asian immigrants with the hegemonic masculinity ideal, gendering the Asian American subject as Lowe remarks (11). The denial of legal status resulted in Asian immigrants’ fall-out from “normative” masculinity, naturalizing the idea that Asian males are emasculate and feminine. Specifically, the incapability to form a “natural” family due to the relative absence of Asian women in America and the concentration of “feminized” jobs, such as laundry, domestic works, and restaurants that Asian males undertook contributed to the gendering of Asian American male subjects (Wong and Santa Ana 178).

Prior to the repeal of immigration exclusion in 1943, Lowe observes that Chinese male immigrants occupied “a ‘feminized’ position in relation to white male citizen” (11-12). The impact of racialized gendering of Asian American men is still pervasive. Drawing on the intersectionality of race, gender, and sexuality as Lowe formulates, David Eng explicates Asian American masculinity “must always be read as an overdetermined symptom whose material existence draws its discursive sustenance from
multiple structures and strategies relating to racialization, gendering, and (homo)sexualizing” (18).

Such a conceptualization of early Asian immigrants’ racialized gender is significant in understanding the way in which their gender identity was interconnected with various legal measures America imposed. However, it is just as important to note that there are literary representations that do not neatly fit into such a mold. In other words, assuming that the general status of Asian men’s gender and sexuality was emasculate and feminine from the beginning of their immigration into the United States simplifies the multiplicities of early Asian male immigrants’ masculinity. The argument that the “feminized” jobs early Asian immigrants performed emasculated them risks reinforcing the binary of femininity and masculinity, thus simplifying the gendering process early immigrants underwent.

In contrast to the legal, political emasculation inscribed on Asian male immigrants, many critics find early Asian American writers’ construction of the protagonists’ manhood emulates the dominant masculinity of the time. For example, in her comparison of the early and midcentury Asian American writers, such as Younghill Kang, Carlos Bulosan, Milton Murayama, and John Okada, Patricia P. Chu argues that the trope of the white woman all present across the authors’ works points to the significance of establishing the authors’ literary authority and Asian American subjectivity via their desire for and relationship with the white woman (28). Chu argues that the examination of the fictional narrators’ relationship with white women demonstrates how the authors constructed their “male Asian American subjectivity” or “Asian American subjectivity as normatively male” (61).
Viet Than Nguyen also examines the protagonist’s effort to claim manhood in relation to white women. Nguyen argues that Carlos recuperates his manhood within the boundary of the dominant society: Carlos compromises his erotic desire of embracing white American women, aware of the way Filipino Americans’ sexuality was “dehumanized and even criminalized” by white Americans, and therefore perceived as inassimilable (164). According to Nguyen, Carlos is clearly aware of this problematic representation of Filipino men in the United States, and therefore the protagonist forsakes his desire for white women and presents himself as “sexually chaste” to establish his “public identity” as a writer and activist (164, 163).

As the examination of the protagonists’ masculinity in Chu and Nguyen’s studies show, discussing masculinity almost always entails exploring their relationship to (white) women. Sheng-mei Ma also points out the ways in which the (white) female characters in America is in the Heart can be categorized into “the Mary-Eve stereotype,” portrayed either as “Florence Nightingales who tend to [the protagonist] in the hospital” or “entrancing, statuesque ‘nudes’” (70). Sheng-mei Ma contends that such a stereotypical depiction of white women is prevalent in early Asian American texts. He further argues that this tendency bespeaks the authors’ forging of “male subjectivity through the labyrinthine move of eroticizing white female bodies,” adopting the dominant culture’s way of affirming one’s masculinity by objectifying women (77).

While I agree that the white woman might serve as a useful framework in interrogating the male protagonists’ masculinity, such a limited focus generally leads to the conclusion that the authors constructed Asian American subjectivity at the expense of female subjectivity. Therefore, I seek to extend the discussion of the protagonists’
negotiation of manhood beyond their relation to white women. In so doing, I explore the multiple ways in which early Asian immigrant writers sought to construct an emergent masculine subjectivity: the construction of Asian male immigrants’ masculine identity was the product of not one, but many competing paradigms of masculinity.

I will compare the protagonists of Younghill Kang’s *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee* and Carlos Bulosan’s *America is in the Heart* to examine the emergence and negotiation of Asian American masculinity in the 1930s. The interrogation of their masculinity through their acceptance and eventual rejection of formal education provides critical entry points for discussing the making of their manhood because they are excluded from the dominant narrative of succeeding as a businessman via college education, a process integral to the construction of (white) manhood.

Additionally, numerous exclusionary labor and immigration policies barred immigrants from gaining legal citizenship. In addition to the tremendous impact this had on the shaping and reading of Asian men’s masculinity, the national narrative of the self-made man conjoined with the increasing importance of college degree and the apparent democratic vision the narrative promises inform not only Asian men’s exclusion from the dominant masculinity but also the emergence of their liminal masculinity. Therefore, I examine the multivalent nature of the protagonists’ masculinity through their relation to formal education.

Regarded as the first Korean American novelist, Younghill Kang left Korea, then a colony under Japanese rule, for the United States in 1921. Kang attended Boston University and Harvard University. He was the first Asian ever to win a Guggenheim
Fellowship in creative literature, an honor he received twice. In New York, Kang worked as a curator at the Metropolitan Museum of Arts, an editor for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and an instructor at New York University. Kang’s fellow professor, Thomas Wolfe, introduced him to Maxwell Perkins, the legendary editor of Scribner’s, who published Kang’s novels *The Grass Roof* (1931) and *East Goes West: The Making of an Oriental Yankee* (1937). The novels were reviewed favorably, but Kang soon vanished from the public eye. His works gained renewed attention with the republication of *East Goes West* in 1997.

Picking up from the narrator’s childhood account on the Korean peninsula in *The Grass Roof*, *East Goes West* illustrates the peripatetic journey of Chungpa Han, the author’s fictional avatar, and his trials and tribulations of life in the United States. The narrator’s ambivalence towards Americanization, either through education or economic success, permeates the novel. In fact, Maxwell Perkins originally suggested Kang cut the manuscript and revise the ending to make it more marketable for an American audience (Sorensen 46). Kang’s rejection of this request illustrates his refusal to write a typical immigrant assimilation narrative purely for the sake of being “successful.”

Born in the Philippines to a peasant family, Carlos Bulosan (1911-1956) migrated to the United States in 1930. He became a union activist and taught himself to write for the exploited working class. In 1942, Bulosan published *Letter from America*, a collection of his short works, and *Chorus for America: Six Philippine Poets*. The following year, he published *The Voice of Bataan*, his first book of poems. *The Laughter of My Father* (1944), a collection of 24 satirical short stories most of which were previously published in *The New Yorker* and *Harper’s Bazaar*, details the turmoil in the
archipelago right after its 1898 annexation by the United States. It was an instant critical and public success and made the national best seller list. As a labor activist and radical worker, Bulosan was watched closely by the FBI for his alleged connection to the Communist Party. After his untimely death due to malnutrition, Bulosan was largely forgotten, until his works drew new attention in the late 1960s and became a staple in Asian American and ethnic studies.

_America is in the Heart: A Personal History_ (1943), Bulosan’s most famous book, is a semi-autobiographical novel that tracks the narrator’s migration from the Philippines to the United States fleeing poverty and debt. The text details the narrator’s experience of racism and violence on a daily basis, pursuit of literacy, and development of his working-class consciousness. The contradictions between Bulosan’s celebratory and optimistic view on America and his critique of capitalist democracy punctuate the narrative, adding complexity to the text.

The protagonists’ racialized gender excludes them from the dominant model of masculinity America seeks to perpetuate and reinforce only for a specific group of people. However, they are not, by extension, emasculate and feminine as a “natural” consequence. Through the gendered notion of education in the early to mid-twentieth century, we can see that the configuration of the protagonists’ masculinity hinges on multiple nodal points, such as gender, class, and occupation, which points to their emergent, multivalent masculinities in the making.
The Failed Promise of Higher Education and the Construction of Masculinity in *East Goes West*

The examination of the gendered notion of “going to college” and the role it played in forging an ideal masculinity shows how the masculinity of a foreign student is perceived and constructed. The juxtaposition of Han’s pursuit of higher education to become a scholar and the new self-made man myth centering on the significance of college education demonstrates new ways of reading Han’s masculinity. Under the guise of democratic vision, the agenda of creating a new self-made corporate hero that incorporates the values of the traditional self-made man was applicable only to native white men. This narrowly defined ideal masculinity sheds light on the ones who were excluded from the formula. Through Han, I will examine the ways in which his ambition of being a scholar, his pursuit of multiple college degrees, and self-teaching inform his masculinity.

The protagonist of *East Goes West*, Chungpa Han, arrives in New York with a determination to become a scholar in America. To achieve this dream, the protagonist believes that he needs a college education. In fact, about the first two sections of the book is devoted to Han’s peripatetic journey of searching for colleges that would grant him scholarships followed by his experience in a number of educational institutions. To compensate for his lack of tuition, Han must take up a variety of jobs, such as waiter, domestic worker, salesman, and clerk. The desire to be a scholar and the jobs he needs to perform to do so inform the way in which an Asian immigrant’s masculinity is shaped as well as the multiple masculinities the protagonist embodies.

In *East Goes West*, the protagonist’s pursuit of higher education and disillusionment with it distinguish his story from other general assimilationist narratives,
and such a subversion of the genre resists measuring Han’s masculinity against the
degree to which he assimilates into the dominant society. Han’s determination to become
a scholar and claiming his rightful place in society does not neatly align with the regular
immigrant narratives of the early twentieth century that feature “plucky and eager
immigrants” who “make their way through various democratic institutions … in their
nearly holy desire to become ‘American,’” as Julia Lee notes (141). According to Lee,
the discrepancy between East Goes West and other immigrant narratives stems from
Han’s interest in higher education; Lee claims, “he does not pursue an education to the
exclusion of all else” (141).

Elaborating on Lee’s observation, I argue that Han’s pursuit of higher education
stands out from the rest of the immigrant narratives and the master narrative of the self-
made man myth, because the protagonist’s goal is to become a scholar, not a
businessman. Given that the representative self-made man symbolizing American success
and masculinity, Kang establishes the protagonist’s gender subjectivity as one that resists
the “inevitable” feminization of Asian male subjects. By demonstrating how Han
navigates different planes of masculinity construction, the author imparts the protagonist
with critical insight to assess America and the values it promotes. However, such a
capability risks rendering the protagonist “genderless” at the same time, since his gender
identity cannot be articulated through the conventional gender binary.

Becoming a scholar and assimilating into the dominant society are not identical in
Han’s case, and such an attitude inflects the shaping of the protagonist’s masculinity,
unlike the other models of American masculinity I examine in the first two chapters. For
example, as Lapham and Gatsby seek to join the upper class through material gain, they
wrestle with the ideals of hegemonic masculinity that the dominant society defines. For these protagonists, material wealth is a sign of both the upper class and the dominant masculinity. Therefore, the protagonists must prove their capacity as successful businessmen. Similarly, for Du Bois and Washington, establishing their public identities as civilized intellectuals aligns with their desire for upward mobility. For these four figures, entering the dominant society is commensurate with attaining a more dominant form of masculinity.

However, as Lee notes, “[Han’s] attitude toward Americanization and assimilation is one of amiable confusion at best, and he often seems entirely indifferent to the process of achieving an American identity” (141). Unlike Lapham, Gatsby, Du Bois and Washington, whose goal is to join the dominant society by establishing, presenting, and affirming their masculine identity, Han’s ambivalence towards attaining an American identity and being part of America resists fitting his masculinity within the binary of hegemonic masculinity and “subordinate” masculinities. For example, Han recalls George Jum, who “attempted to be [his] teacher in things American” and who embodies everything “American,” who looks very “Americanized” because of his “red leather slippers and a bathrobe of heavy striped black-and gray necktie silk” (31).

For Han, “Americanization” consists of several markers, and the concept itself serves as an object of inquiry. Mr. Lively, who hires Han as a sales agent in charge of selling worthless encyclopedias door to door, represents the ideals of “America.” Mr. Lively claims that he lives in “a real American home” and drives a “big Cadillac car, as expensive, good-looking and morally shiny as its owner” (132-3). Additionally, he has “a superior wife and mother” and claims that the marriage enabled him to step “another rung
up the great American ladder of Success” (132). As evident from the descriptors, such as “real,” “shiny,” and “superior,” Mr. Lively is portrayed as a caricature of the self-made man who lives the American Dream.

Moreover, while Han acknowledges that he is not “Americanized” despite Jum’s teaching, he does not reveal any signs of regret about failing to do so. In fact, he does not explicitly show what he thinks about the idea of being Americanized and rather reports what he means by the term “Americanized.” For Han, acclimating to America and establishing male subjectivity do not necessarily align. Therefore, I contend that it is constricting to read the degree to which one has assimilated into America as a sign of one’s masculinity (and femininity).

At the same time, the narrator does not suggest that Han is exempt from the “feminization” of Asian men resulting from the U.S. legal system and the material demands of the United States. The anecdote of Han’s first job as a housekeeper serves as evidence that only domestic jobs were available for Asian men. Another Korean named Pak, who resided in America longer than Han and therefore who is more knowledgeable of the country, understands that domestic jobs are the only available option for immigrants like him. Recounting his work experience in America, Pak implies that the only job he was able to secure for the past seven years since he moved to America was to work as a domestic laborer. The limited choices Han has even after he learns the language and custom shows that the pathway to other “un-feminine” jobs was still blocked from male immigrants. Assuming his employer’s expectation regarding the foreign houseboys, Pak advises Han to “be shy like a Korean bride” (55). The need to assume a semblance of femininity can be seen as a sign of his emasculation.
However, his employer disapproves of Han performing the role of a demure Asian woman and chastises him for his incapacity as a house worker. Inexperienced, Han reminds himself that he must act like a “Korean bride,” but this idea does not help him complete the assigned tasks. What his employer expects from the new houseboy is not shyness but efficiency. Because of his lack of training in domestic work, Han is “treated just like a dog or cat” (60). As a result, he and Pak are laid off in a week. However, such a failure in performing the job does not discourage Han. He recalls what Pak had said about him: “he did not believe that I would ever make a good cook, or even could keep a houseboy’s job … he thought I ought to make a great scholar” (61). For Han, domestic worker and scholar are mutually exclusive occupations, and Pak’s remark reinforces his faith in his capacity of becoming a scholar. Han’s distinction between the two occupations might imply that he is forging his masculine identity by rejecting domestic work, which is normatively gendered feminine.

Interestingly, the protagonist fails to register the gendered notion of the job. This unawareness implies Han’s naivety as a newcomer; it illustrates the way in which the protagonist negotiates the prescribed gender identity that the material conditions in the United States imposes on him. What further makes the gendering of Han more difficult stems from his incapability of accomplishing the jobs successfully. As seen in the case of Han’s job as a house boy, he miserably fails. What does such an incompetency tell us about his masculinity? Does it accentuate his masculinity because he in inept at carrying out domestic works? Or, does it further emasculate his masculinity for the same reason? The author deliberately leaves the answer unclear. In fact, the job Han first undertook is just one of the examples that demonstrates the ways in which Han registers and
negotiates his masculine subjectivity. Working as a domestic worker, college student, and businessman affords Han with multiple subject positions that enable him to resist the simple labeling of his masculinity as emasculate or effeminate. While cognizant of the ways in which Asian male subjects are gendered, Han does not internalize this gender politics. As Jinqi Ling accurately observes, “a simple delineation of gender roles” is insufficient to address the complexity of gender politics in Asian American literature (332).

Moreover, Han is not ignorant of the racialized sexual politics in the United States that bars him from joining the dominant society. Han gradually learns about the material conditions of the United States that racialize and sexualize him. For example, a self-professed pious Christian, Mrs. Lively, the wife of Han’s employer, warns Han that “it is not wise for an Oriental boy to go around with an American girl” and that “he should marry his own kind” because doing otherwise is not what “the Lord intended” (145). Han remains silent, “unable to open [his] mouth to say anything” (145). In another instance, Han coincidentally meets Senator Kirby, who urges him to declare that he is American, not Korean (345). Han responds by saying that he is legally not allowed to become an American. Senator Kirby promises that he will amend such a regulation when he wins the next election. However, the narrator knows that this is a futile promise, noting that the Senator’s party “had been out for a long time” (346). Han does not have (and is prevented from) access to the idealized hegemonic masculinity of the time because of his legal status and race.

However, lacking access to hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily suggest that he is therefore inevitably emasculated and feminized. The novel interweaves
exclusionary policies that barred Asian immigrants from entering America and gaining citizenship as well as the concentration of “feminized” jobs available for Asian men, which largely are responsible for the “emasculcation” and “feminization” of the Asian American subject. However, Han not only learns the material conditions concerning his racialized gender identity but also demonstrates his capacity to discern and critique the position Asian men occupy in America. In so doing, the author resists portraying Han only as an effeminate Asian man. Employing the dominant discourse of an ideal masculinity to articulate Han’s masculinity reveals the shortcomings of representing his masculinity that is marked either by effeminacy or bestiality.

Interestingly, Han’s search for his place in America in East Goes West parallels the popular narrative Clark advanced; the protagonist’s reverence for a college education and the performance of a series of endeavors parallel the emerging significance of higher education within the self-made man myth. For Han, the promoted values of college education and the notion of Americanization are identical. In fact, Maxwell Perkins, the editor of Kang’s publisher Scribner’s, originally suggested “The Americanization of Younghil Kang” and “Rebirth in America” for the title of this novel (EGW 384). Should Han have succeeded in assimilating into America through formal education just as the popular narrative of the time promoted, Han could have been portrayed as an ideal man who embodied the ideas of hegemonic masculinity. Yet, though Han earns multiple college degrees, his path forward is limited. The author reveals the fallacy of the dominant discourse through Han’s peripatetic journey in search of his place in America, which is affected by the shifting paradigm of masculinity.
In the late nineteenth century, institutionalized formal education was seen as detrimental to the cultivation of the traditional self-made hero who was marked by autonomy and self-growth. Irving G. Wyllie observes the shifting conception regarding college education and its connection to the construction of idealized masculinity. The self-made man is epitomized in his comprehensive account of the central myth of America, *The Self-Made Man in America: The Myth of Rags to Riches*. Citing Andrew Carnegie’s remark that “college education as it exists seems almost fatal to success in that domain,” Wyllie argues that such denunciation of higher education stems from the belief that “higher learning undermine[s] the rugged personal qualities necessary for success,” such as a “strong will, diligence, persistence, ambition, good health, and self-discipline” (102).

In contrast to the self-made man whose success can be traced back to these desirable personal traits, the college man was “awkward, hypersensitive, impatient, conceited, pedantic, confused, tactless, bookish, and utterly impractical” (Wyllie 103). Similarly, Catano argues that the emerging corporate class “scorned” traditional college education as a marker of the upper class, endowing its recipients with feminine traits that are “out-of-date and enervating,” (424). Catano contends that the traditional self-made man myth was sustained by putting “the real world of economic action,” which is gendered masculine, and “the ‘feminine’ dream world of the academy,” in opposition to one another (424).

However, the gendered understanding of college education shifted at the turn of the twentieth century. According to Wyllie, the general disdain for higher education changed largely due to the evolution in the American economic system in which
“corporations replaced the personal dynasties built up by self-made men” (108).

Similarly, in *Creating the College Man: American Mass Magazines and Middle-Class Manhood*, Daniel Clark examines how the idea of going to college has become an essential component of middle-class masculinity since the early twentieth century. In Clark’s view, the transition from producer-based economy to consumer-oriented economy, an influx of immigrants, and the emergence of women laborers in the workplace at the turn of the century prompted (Anglo-Saxon) men to reshape their idea of masculinity in the face of these “challenges” to their presumed masculine superiority and authority.

It is during this period, Clark argues, that “the notion of going to college seeped into the commonplace assumptions surrounding middle-class male identity, success, and mobility” (9). In the face of the shifting economy and diminishing work opportunities, college emerged as fertile ground to cultivate one’s civility and physical prowess while retaining the ideals of the traditional self-made man. Clark writes, “through college education, a professional and civilized education that naturally marked one for leadership, while the idea of working up-through-the-ranks to management allowed [men] to claim to have earned it in self-made fashion” (142). In this way, the college man transformed into a new type of self-made man, signifying the ideal masculinity of the time.

Central to this refashioning of the gendered notion of college, in Clark’s view, were mass magazines targeting a middle-class audience. These widely circulated publications featured stories and examples of young men who went to college and became successful businessmen, the archetype of the self-made man. Among these
college men, students who supported themselves were especially emphasized:

“[magazine editors] crafted the self-supporting student from the self-made hero mold and thus aided in the formation of a new American hero” (Clark 129). Adapting the schema of the self-made man myth in which a young man of humble origin advances towards success, magazine editors highlighted the model of a self-supporting college man who eventually became an accomplished businessman climbing the ladder of advancement. The periodicals perpetuated the idea that the self-supporting college man, a new type of self-made man, embodies the notion of American success. Moreover, the egalitarian appeal of the self-supporting college man offered every man the opportunity to fashion himself with the new idealized masculinity. However, the seemingly democratic ideal of becoming the next self-made man promoted by magazines was, as Clark acknowledged, reserved only for white, native-born men.

If education puts Han in a privileged position and thus marks his masculine authority, then how do the “feminized” domestic works the protagonist takes up inflect his masculinity? Unlike the self-supporting (white) college man who represents the new masculinity of the time, Han’s pursuit of a college education only underscores his lack of manhood when seen from the dominant understanding of Asian immigrants’ gender and sexuality of the early twentieth century. It is ironic that the jobs “white” college men performed are marked as a sign of manhood since self-supporting was seen as integral to self-making, while the same jobs are seen as effeminate when performed by Asian immigrants. Depending on the ethnicity and race of the person performing the job, one is either feminized or masculinized.
As Clark points out, the path towards success via college education was blocked from a foreign student like Han primarily due to his racial difference. On the first day of attending Maritime College, Han is “overwhelmed by the racial, national, and religious homogeneity” and overhears one of his classmates referring to Han as a “yellow dog [the students] have to live with” (94). The school, which was supposed to be a democratic ground upon which he can cultivate his intelligence, is “set in a rigid mold” that emphasizes “the superiority of the Briton above all races” (94). Han soon becomes a laughingstock and the object of racism; he appears on the cartoon section of the college paper, which makes fun of Han wearing Korean garments at a track race after being tricked by his classmates. In another incident, he is accused of stealing a fellow student’s skates. Considered “queer and alien,” Han asks himself “The magnificent journey to America, the avid desire for Western knowledge, had it come to this? (101, 103). The racism he experiences on a daily basis strips the vision he had about college education. As Lee observes, Han’s decision to drop out of this school shows that “the last bastion of American acceptance in the mythology of the American immigrant has been shown to be a fraud” (158). There is no place willing to accept him. Han is prevented from joining the “promised” way of establishing his masculinity.

Finally, Han is disillusioned by the advantages that college education supposedly offers him. After years of working and attending colleges, Han declares, “My period of conventional education was over, my self-teaching days had not begun” and leaves for Philadelphia (275). After departing Boston, Han recounts the difficulties of matriculation and earning a college degree: “I got by somehow on partial scholarships, the college loan funds, my friend’s help and jobs that were given me mostly out of sympathy” (275). At
the same time, he recognizes the advantage his status as a student provides him: “In a way I might have starved if I had not been a student … Just by being a student, I had got fed, clothed, sheltered, as guest in the house of Western civilization” and realizes that there are many “quasi-professional students here from the Orient,” for the same reason (275). He recognizes the privileges of being a foreign student, but those benefits are of no use for Han.

Whereas Han initially viewed college as a cradle for learning and gateway to becoming a scholar, he admits that he was in pain because he was “getting more collegiate up in Boston without getting more educated” (275). He discovers that college education is “a curious convention … the specialty supposed to specialize, the minoring to broaden, the scraps of mathematics, science, and psychology supposed to develop higher reasoning powers, lastly the physical training supposed to finish off the rounded man” (275). That rounded man was the very same mass magazines of the time promoted, as Clark demonstrates. Sarcastically, Han claims, “Aha, there is! the cap and gown gentleman with a sheepskin under his arm. How suave his functioning mind! How sound his body! He has met all the requirements that college has measured to him” (275).

Beneath the façade of lofty ideals college education supposedly imparts in guiding young men to become the new self-made man, Han discovers the hollowness of the promised values of higher education. The democratic ideals guaranteeing the possibility of opportunity and advancement are not available for him.

Han’s false, naïve belief in college education is again reinforced in Philadelphia where he meets Mr. Boshnack and earns an opportunity to work at his department store. The prospect of working as a clerk is seen as “the opening in the actual world which
[Han] has waited for,” the protagonist confesses (278). Han’s goal is to work up through the ranks from clerk to buyer. In his detailed account of the operation of the organization, Han soon learns that “only the owners made any profits” (280). The exhaustive rules that govern his interaction with the employees of various ranks and the customers, and the regimented tasks that need to be completed betray Han’s goal of becoming a buyer: “in Boshnack’s I saw the blindest, deafest, dumbest collection of human beings I had yet seen, though many were college graduates” (282). Although the clerks were said to be “educated,” Han finds them “dumb” (285). Ultimately, Han concludes that “big stout Mr. Boshnack, looking down on the clerks and the customers” was “for all his Benjamin Franklin spirit … almost like a great spider in the midst of his web” (285). The department store is “worse than a factory” aiming only “money, things, sales … never life,” turning “humanity into just a stuff-handling machine” (287). Still, the job he has is an object of envy. George, Han’s friend, expresses his wish to “get out of housework and place himself with a firm” like the department store, “where a man could climb” (288).

Han realizes that the dominant narrative of climbing the social ladder with the aid of college education and becoming a figure like Mr. Boshnack in the guise of Benjamin Franklin is just a fantastical myth. His experience contradicts the ideals America seeks to perpetuate and opens his eyes up to fact that “This is American life” in which one works tirelessly while putting on a false smile in a fear of losing his/her job (288). Han asks, “But where were all the enchantment and romance, the glorious vision, which I had seen in my dreams of America as a boy” (288). When the promises of college education and corporate businessman both turn out to be empty, the concomitant construction of an
ideal masculinity is of no use for Han. The discredited ideals of America fail to become the model for his formation of manhood.

While it is true that he does not fit the new model of middle-class masculinity college education supposedly offers, he also willfully resists branding as a model minority, a role stereotypically associated with Asian men. By “elevating” Asian men as an avatar of model minority, his masculinity becomes invisible. In her reading of the novel, Karen Kuo argues that Han assumes a privileged position as an educated man and as Asian, which contrasts sharply when juxtaposed with Laurenzo, an educated black man. Positioned “within a tripartite racial system of white, black, and Asian,” Kuo argues that Han constructs his masculine position as “a nascent Asian model minority” (773). However, while Kuo demonstrates how Han creates his racial position between white Americans and black Americans by taking advantage of his status as an educated foreign student, she does not delve into the question of his masculinity. Kuo assumes that Han’s relatively privileged racial position entitles him to an analogous masculine status. In other words, she does not discuss the way in which Han’s subject position as an avatar of the model minority intersects with his masculinity. Han’s failure to serve as a houseworker and become a scholar and businessman reveals not only how these occupations are marked in gendered terms but also how these jobs inflect the protagonist’s gender subjectivity.

It is known that Perkins suggested Kang revise the ending. In a letter to Kang, Perkins wrote:

the main change should be at the end, to make much more of Trip, and to show definitely that you married her,--because the fact that you did makes one of the
principal points of the book, in that the Easterner becomes a Westerner through this experience. (qtd. in Sorensen 20)

Instead of the suggested ending of the happy union of Han and Trip, the final section describing Han’s dream concludes with Han in limbo: he identifies as neither American nor Korean. As Chu points out, Han is “doubly alienated,” as he is “too Americanized to return to Korea, yet cannot “gain full entry into America” (31). In his dream, Han seeks to cross a suspension bridge. Over the bridge awaits “a paradise of wild and flowery magic,” a scenery that reminds him of an “old Chinese landscape” as well as his childhood friends in Korea (361). However, just before he reaches the other end of the bridge, everything disintegrates as “money and keys, contracts and business letters” fall out (361). Among the fallen objects, Han notes the significance of his car key: he cries out, “the key to my car, my American car” in which Trip has been sitting next to him (361).

The final dream sequence represents Han’s conflicted perception of Americanization: he neither meets his playmates nor recovers his objects, the symbols of material comfort. Han’s pursuit of education leads to nowhere. As Audrey Wu Clark notes, the novel’s absence of the focus on “the development or education of its protagonist” bespeaks “the problem of Asian subjecthood during Asian exclusion” (101). In the end, Han’s repeated attempts at constructing his subjectivity is thwarted by his racialized sexuality and legal status. At the same time, his journey to become a scholar via multiple professions demonstrates the way in which Han embodies plural masculinities that resist a single representation of his masculinity. As such, the limitations of discussing Han’s masculine subjectivity in terms of the conventional discourses
addressing Asian male subjectivity, such as emasculation of Asian men and the model minority myth, demonstrate the needs to broaden the discourse on gender.
The Acquisition of Knowledge and the Construction of Masculinity in 
America is in the Heart

In the final passage of America is in the Heart, the protagonist Carlos 
determinedly proclaims his allegiance to America:

It was something that grew out of the sacrifices and loneliness of my 
friends, of my brothers in America and my family in the Philippines—something 
that grew out of our desire to know America, and to become a part of her great 
tradition, and to contribute something toward her final fulfillment. I knew that no 
man could destroy my faith in America that had sprung from all out hopes and 
aspirations, ever. (326)

Whereas Han’s inability to cross a suspension bridge in the final dream sequence 
represents his ambivalence towards both Korea and America, Carlos’s statement 
explicitly shows where he wants to belong—America. This final gesture is not a sign of 
his willful naivete. Carlos knows that his unflinching faith in America is based on his 
“defeats and successes,” his struggles as well as “the sacrifices and loneliness” of others 
(325-6). He aspires to fulfill the ideals of America despite the exploitive reality that 
compromises his endeavor. By presenting himself as a person who is capable of both 
critiquing the material conditions of America and praising American ideals, Carlos 
affirms his place in America. He is not simply subscribing to the promised values of 
America. Instead, equipped with critical perspective, Carlos establishes his place in his 
new homeland. In so doing, Carlos modifies the national myth of the self-made man, and 
affirms his masculinity.

This examination of Carlos’s relation to education allows the reader to see the 
lasting impact of the hegemonic masculinity represented through the myth of the self-
made man and his struggle to construct his own masculine subjectivity vis-à-vis the dominant understanding of masculinity. For both Han and Carlos, formal education promotes and represents the ideals of America. More specifically, in my analysis of *East Goes West*, I have underscored that a self-supporting college man who turned into a successful businessman became the new self-made man. College education became one of the essential traits of the hegemonic masculinity that America promoted. In *America is in the Heart*, formal education justified America’s colonial occupation of the Philippines: in the name of civilizing “inferior” Filipinos, America marshaled literacy education as a chief means for the “benevolent” assimilation of colonial subjects (Wesling 3).

As such, in both texts, education represents particular values of America, and the protagonists’ struggle to come to terms with the promises of formal education. Unlike Han, whose vexed relation to college education undercuts his vision of America, Carlos affirms his faith in America despite his contradictory understanding of colonial education. Carlos’s initial faith in and eventual rejection of higher education, as well as his emphasis on the redemptive power of self-education, demonstrate how the protagonist appropriates the traits of the traditional self-made man.

Solidarity with working-class immigrants and critical insight gained outside formal education are vehicles through which the protagonist forges his masculinity, which is still rooted in the discourse of the hegemonic masculinity. The type of masculinity the narrator envisions, an intellectual in solidarity with the working class who is critical of the dominant society and its attendant hegemonic masculinity, undercuts the dominant masculinity. At the same time, Carlos adopts the self-made man myth’s emphasis on the “self” as his insistence on the acquisition of knowledge on his
own in the United States evinces. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Carlos is fully
complicit in assimilating into the dominant society. The latent critical insight he gains
allows Carlos to deploy the knowledge that American imperialism and capitalism played
out in the Philippines and the United States irresolutely. Through the newly formed
masculinity Carlos embodies, the reader observes the exclusivity of hegemonic
masculinity that the self-made man figure buttresses.

Carlos’s ability to detect the contradictory nature of American education
constitutes the masculine subjectivity that the narrator promotes. The first section of
*America is in the Heart* recounts the protagonist’s childhood and adolescence in the
Philippines. The narrator notes the propagation of the American educational system, the
false promise it brings, and the economic toll it has taken on his family to provide
education for Macario, the oldest son. At first, the narrator notes the wide availability of
American education in the Philippines, in contrast to the exclusivity of education
reserved only for the ruling class during Spanish colonial rule of the Philippines, and the
promise of enlightenment that popular education guarantees: “Popular education was
spreading throughout the archipelago and this opened up new opportunities. It was a new
and democratic system brought by the American government into the Philippines, and a
nation hitherto illiterate and backward was beginning to awaken” (15).

However, while the narrator notes the common people’s captivation with the idea
of popular education, he also laments the financial burden placed on every household:
“every family who had a son pulled its resources and sent him to school” (15). The desire
to educate the oldest son and the means of doing so ravage Carlos’s family as well: “We
had deprived ourselves of any form of leisure and simple luxury so that my brother could
finish high school” (16). Hoping that their only educated son would elevate the family economically once he completes school, the illiterate parents sell the last remaining piece of their inherited land. Moreover, the entire household works ceaselessly for him, terrified that he might quit school.

The narrator’s deferred realization of the duplicitousness of colonial education bespeaks the critical capacity he gains through experience and self-acquisition of literacy, not through formal education. The narrator astutely uncovers the exploitive nature of colonial education under the guise of a benevolent tutor, which legitimizes American colonialization of the Philippines. In her examination of the role colonial education plays in constructing the colonial subject, Meg Wesling contends that American colonial tutelage encapsulates “the contradictory status of America as that ideological entity that promises what it structurally cannot deliver” (11). It is the narrator’s ability to comprehend the maneuvering of colonial education that eventually awakens him to his understanding of America. The protagonist’s capacity to see beyond the veneer of colonial education, which disguises America’s colonial project, is continuously invoked throughout the text, and such a capacity to do so is repetitively gendered as male, constituting his masculine subjectivity.

Malini Johar Schueller argues that the duplicitous nature of colonial education and Bulosan’s attitude towards it highlight the difficulty the colonial subject faces when “critiquing the rhetoric of colonialism as benevolence” (426). Schueller rightly observes Carlos’s ambivalent relation to education, as the narrator “continually reveres the possibilities of book learning despite the indictment of the actual system of schooling” (441). Citing Wesling’s observation of Carlos’s equivocal evaluation of colonial
education at length, Schueller notes that education should be distinguished into knowledge promoted by formal education and decolonial knowledge.\textsuperscript{13} For Schueller, while the peasant family’s pursuit of formal education is for its promise of social mobility, Carlos’s search for decolonial knowledge is for its potential as a means of liberation from the colonial power (441). As Schueller astutely points out, “What Bulosan idealizes in his reading is thus not learning as a means of rising from peasantry to individualism through the world of capitalist modernity ushered in through colonialism, but rather the radical learning to unite the working classes” (442). As a colonial subject, Carlos recognizes the maneuverings of the American system of education put in place under colonialism. Such a critical insight is made possible through what Schueller terms as decolonial knowledge (or counter-knowledge), which he defines as a knowledge “gained outside of, and despite the technologies of, colonial education” (437).

Wesling’s focus on Carlos’s discovery of the contradictory nature of colonial education and Scheuller’s distinction between colonial knowledge and decolonial knowledge help the readers to conceive the protagonist as a colonial subject whose awareness informs his criticism of the colonial system masquerading as benevolent tutelage. However, it also should be noted that Carlos’s reverence for education does not diminish. Drawing on these critics’ arguments, I contend that the protagonist’s vexed

\textsuperscript{13} Of Bulosan’s ambivalence towards education, Wesling observes as such:

It is precisely because the text vacillates between a valorization of the institutionalized, formal education used to justify the imperialist occupation of the Philippines on the one hand, and the challenges Carlos faces living within the racist logic of that occupation on the other, that the reader is forced to confront the contradiction between these two paradigms. (Wesling 2011, 159)
relation to education illustrates his contradictory facets of masculinity as well. While the
narrator seeks to construct his masculinity by emphasizing the significance of his
fulfillment of self-education, he is also entrapped by the gendered position of the colonial
subject, who at best is described as asexual, if not effeminate.

Moreover, the denied opportunity of popular education in the Philippines and the
impossibility of having formal education in America in turn reinforce Carlos’ striving for
self-education, which parallels with the emphasis on autodidacticism in the self-made
man myth. Learning English, understanding the systemic exploitation immigrant laborers
endure, and writing for them anticipate the type of masculine subjectivity the narrator
idealizes. For instance, on his way to San Louis Obispo after losing money gambling,
Carlos declares that a phase of his life has come to a closure. He discovers his
“compassion for the workers in the fields” that seals “the end of a strange flight” (181).
Not only is Carlos awakened to a sense of solidarity with working-class immigrants, he
also learns that he can write in English. As he tries to write a letter to Marcario, he
exclaims: “Then it came to me, like a revelation, that I could actually write
understandable English. I was seized with happiness” and he composes a letter about “a
story of [his] life” (182). He cries out, “They can’t silence me anymore! I’ll tell the world
what they have done to me!” (182). His alliance with immigrant laborers and newly
gained proficiency in English culminate in this dramatic moment, signaling his masculine
subjectivity as an intellectual who identifies with working-class immigrants.

As such, through self-education, Carlos deploys his knowledge not only for
immigrants in the United States, but also his fellow men in the Philippines. The
knowledge he gains on his own is used to enlighten and unite the marginalized others,
thus eclipsing the traditional understanding of the self-made man, which treasures individual success. Upon learning his brother Luciano’s death, Carlos resolves to become a writer: “my remembrance gave me a strange courage and the vision of a better life. ‘Yes, I will be a writer and make all of you live again in my words’” (58-9). Carlos details his tenuous life in his homeland and in America, his family’s sacrifice to send Marcario to school, and the collective striving of “all [his] brothers” to find their place in the world (58). He does not erase the past to assimilate into America. Instead, his yearning to enunciate the stories of the past galvanizes him into becoming a writer, thereby molding the protagonist into a masculine subject the narrator envisions. As Schueller points out, “if at one level [the text] buys into the gendered trope of benevolent tutelage symbolized by the female teacher … it also critiques the trope by spelling out its ideological investments and powerfully challenging and inverting its power dynamics” (444-5). By reversing the gender dynamics that he was subjected to, Carlos becomes a writer representing the voices of immigrant workers.

Finally, Carlos places himself in the tradition of great America writers, such as “Hart Crane, Malcolm Cowley, William Faulkner” as well as “Carl Sandburg, John Gould Fletcher, Vachel Lindsay” who are “definitely American, something positively vital,” and such a gesture constructs his masculine subjectivity (228). He envisions himself as a torchbearer of enlightenment who can “help liberate the peasantry from ignorance and poverty” (228). He finally becomes capable of writing for Filipinos and Americans: “I did not know, however, that I would someday write a book about my town’s characters; that because I wrote about them as human beings, I would invoke the philistinism of educated Filipinos and the petty bourgeoisie, and the arrogance of officials
The type of writer that Carlos becomes is not an assimilationist author seeking acceptance only from the dominant society as Chu and Viet Than Nguyen point out through their analysis of the protagonist’s relation to women. Instead, Carlos becomes a writer who discloses the degradation of colonialism in the Philippines and the material conditions of working-class immigrants in the U.S by teaching himself English and writing. In so doing, the protagonist shapes his masculinity that resists subscribing to the unattainable promises America promotes.

Chu argues that Bulosan’s construction of American subjectivity is “intimately linked with the project of constructing the subject as an author” as claiming a profession allows him to enter the dominant society (60). According to Chu, what makes his authorship normatively male is his capacity to interrogate American democratic rhetoric, which marginalizes Asian immigrants from the public sphere (62). To emphasize her argument that the early Asian writers framed Asian American subjectivity as “normatively male,” Chu pays attention to the fictional tropes of women. She argues that the construction of the protagonist as an author and the stereotypical positions the women occupy in the text are interconnected. Asian women represent the embodiment of the homeland and the past hampering the progress; white women are portrayed as mediators guiding the entry of Asian men into the dominant society. Altogether, the women in Bulosan’s text are not imagined as part of Asian American subject and are left out of the plot while Carlos claims “progressiveness and revolutionary force for himself,” qualities that are gendered masculine, Chu claims (53).

I agree with Chu’s argument that Bulosan’s construction of Asian American subjectivity is closely connected to his profession as an author. However, it is
constricting to claim that the protagonist’s pursuit of literacy and authorship is masculine because of the narrator’s treatment of women. While there are instances in which the narrator treats white women as “aides (and obstacles)” and Asian women as the embodiment of the past, there are other examples that demonstrate how Carlos’s pursuit of masculine subjectivity is compromised because of his legal status and race. For example, Carlos’s relationship with Marian, who provides refuge for him, illustrates his position of sexuality. Fleeing from the beating of a few unknown men, Carlos runs into Marian’s house. Recalling the flight, Carlos contrasts the violence inflicted on him by the white men, and says, “… here was another white person, a woman, giving me food and a place to rest” (211). She insists on supporting Carlos despite his hesitance and repeatedly addresses him as “poor boy” (211). Determined to accompany Carlos, Maria says, “I would be happier if I had something to care for—even if it were only a dog or cat. But it doesn’t really matter which it is: a dog or a cat” (213). While there are incidents in which Carlos eroticizes white women and seeks their approval, this passage demonstrates that he is treated as an object of care, not much different from a household pet. Here, his masculinity can be conceived of as asexual or even effeminate. As such, Carlos’s masculinity is contingent on his relation to numerous women he encounters, and such fluidity resists any definitive characterization of his masculinity.

Whereas Chu connects Carlos becoming an author to the construction of his masculine subjectivity in America, Nguyen contends that Carlos presents himself as asexual in order to assimilate into America. According to Nguyen, as a sign of complicitous assimilation into the dominant society, the protagonist presents himself as a person who lacks any eroticized desire and is therefore harmless. Nguyen points out that
Carlos claiming his place in America requires two different approaches: “a disavowal of the ‘natural’ sexual desires that white men take for granted as well as of the ‘criminal’ sexual desires projected onto Filipinos” (164). Nguyen argues that Carlos’s failure to satisfy his sexual desire through white women forces him to turn to “chaste women,” the embodiment of America, in turn signaling his asexuality (165). Nguyen further contends that by foregrounding asexuality and deploying the trope of America as a female body, Bulosan “compromises with American pluralism,” and thus consenting to the unattainable ideals the nation promises (166). However, reading the final passage in which Carlos claims that “America is in the heart” as consent and compromise based upon the narrator’s asexual, ineffectual masculinity erases his other acts of formulating his masculinity. In other words, his masculine subjectivity is not solely defined and constricted by his relationship with white women.

Wesling observes, “literary production is a highly gendered and racialized endeavor,” a point that is not lost on Carlos (10). He understands how popular education glosses over the exploitative practices of American imperialism in the name of civilizing colonized Filipinos. Yet, Carlos does not lose his faith in the regenerative power of education and literacy production. So, he teaches himself English, becomes an author, and writes for his fellow workers. Critiquing the ideals of America that he gains through self-education, Carlos constructs a new type of masculinity that appropriates and manipulates the hegemonic masculinity the self-made man emblematizes.
Conclusion

Towards the end of the autobiography, Carlos seeks guidance by turning to other writers’ works as his memory of the Philippines and the lack of conviction in his writing ability hamper him from writing. Upon his discovery of Younghill Kang, Carlos states, “[Kang’s] indomitable courage … rekindled in me a fire of hope” (265). Kang’s successful career motivates Carlos. He continues, “[Kang] had come from a family of scholars and had gone to an American university—but was he not an Oriental like myself? Was there an Oriental without education who had become a writer in America? If there was one, maybe I could do it too!” (265) Despite their class difference, Carlos finds courage from their shared marginalized status as “an Oriental” (265).

His lack of college education is not a hindrance in becoming a writer. The past that he sought to escape no longer haunts him, and Carlos decides “to utilize [his] experiences in written form” as he has “something to live for now, and to fight the world with” (305). Forging race and class solidarity as well as enlightening working-class immigrants are his goals. He repeatedly emphasizes the fact that he taught himself to do so: the significance of self-education certainly follows the tradition of the self-made man myth. However, Carlos critiquing the ideals of America equipped with the knowledge he gains through self-education and experience disrupts the hegemonic masculinity of the self-made man, thus carving out a space for his unique construction of masculinity.

It should be noted that unlike what Carlos perceives, Kang also creates a figure whose education inflects one’s masculinity in an unexpected way. Receiving formal, higher education does not define Han as a successful entrepreneur, the epitome of the self-made man, but further complicates his position in the dominant society. His
masculinity is constantly reshaped, contingent on his legal and racial position in various workplaces and colleges. Therefore, discussing masculinity only in terms of one’s relation to women, especially white women, risks reinforcing the gender binary essentialism of masculinity and femininity.

In *Recovered Legacies*, editors Keith Lawrence and Floyd Cheung explicate the need to reassess earlier Asian American literary works that were published before 1965. Critical of the presentist agenda of Asian American literature scholarship that mostly studies works published following the 1960s, the editors warn “employing the presentist model” leads scholars to analyze texts “with a moral judgment or prescription already in mind” (6). As these editors point out, re-reading early literary works attuned to the “original” circumstances of publication and applying recent theories allow us to “rediscover what was valuable about the texts for their initial audiences” and affords a new lens to analyze these texts, free from the prescriptive nature of the existing scholarship (1). Extending the editors’ argument, I have shown how the gendered notion of education and the protagonists’ relationship to it demonstrate the malleability of masculinity. It also broadens the scope of reading Asian American masculinity beyond the binary of pre-scripted feminization and the reversal of this stereotypical representation.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

Focusing on American fiction published in the first three decades of the twentieth century, my chapters have demonstrated how each protagonist and writer navigates and registers different paths in coming to terms with the question of constructing and (re)defining masculinity. My dissertation has shown the ways in which the literary works both mirror and shape understandings of masculinity by taking account of the authors’ preoccupation with their gender identity, its influence over their literary representations of male subjectivities, and the construction of an ideal masculinity. In so doing, I also interrogated how the tension among different types of masculinities resists one version of masculinity gaining complete dominance over that of others.

As such, no single trait alone constitutes one’s masculinity. As Lapham and Gatsby exemplify in the second chapter, the narrowing definitions of masculinity as regulated by the upper class complicate the protagonists’ construction of masculine subjectivity. The juxtaposition of Lapham and Gatsby, who are emblematic self-made man figures, reveals that the constitution of hegemonic masculinity always shifts. In the following chapter, I argue that black intellectuals Du Bois and Washington rebutted the primitive, “unmanly” images projected onto blacks to become part of the dominant (white) society. For both of them, establishing the terms of leadership for racial uplift was intimately connected with the definition of black manhood. Therefore, Washington and Du Bois actively strove to defy the stereotype of the black rapist by demonstrating the extent to which they are civilized. Wright, however, complicates the construction of an
ideal black manhood that was primarily predicated on the terms set forth by his predecessors by presenting the stereotype of the black beast as reality.

In Chapter 4, I argue that the ascent of Mikey and the descent of Lemuel in the capitalist society of America bespeak the distance between the two protagonists’ masculine subject position and the hegemonic masculinity of the time. Gold draws on various gender-inflected traits that the dominant society values and underscores the necessity of appropriating these qualities. However, West reveals the futility of assuming such gender-marked traits by showing the dismantling of Lem, who embodies the defining markers of the self-made man. In the final chapter, I contend that the construction of Asian male immigrants’ masculine identity was the product of not one, but many competing paradigms of masculinity by examining the gendered notion of formal education and the role it played in forging an ideal masculinity. In so doing, I show the limitations of using the conventional discourses, such as the emasculation of Asian men and the trope of eroticizing white women, in addressing Asian male subjectivity.

In concert with the historical perspectives I offer in the dissertation, as I hope my analyses have indicated, I refine the ways in which American literary figures sought to navigate the complex terrain of manhood, which operated in disparate ways for each ethnic group. My chapters show the seemingly perpetual dominance and attraction of hegemonic masculinity as the dominant norm against which other “subordinate” masculinities redefine theirs. However, the constitution of hegemonic masculinity was always refuted and reshaped by those who did not fit into the dominant norms of masculinity. As a result, (white) men with authority had to utilize a variety of maneuvers
to keep the privilege of defining the boundary of hegemonic masculinity under their control.

At the same time, despite the disparate historical specificities that the literary figures of my subject were responding to, it was common practice for these writers to establish and consolidate the vision of an ideal manhood by disassociating men from anything that counted as feminine. The trajectory of historical changes to definitions of masculinity, undergirded by the intersection of race and class, demonstrates how the binary construction of masculinity/femininity underwent a myriad of processes to secure the presumed stable boundary of the dichotomy. This in turn solidifies the ground upon which male dominance and privilege are founded.

In Trasiter’s overview of American masculinity scholarship from the 1980s to early 2000, he claims, in general, “masculinity studies” means “heterosexual masculinity studies” (275). He continues to map out the way in which the presumed (hetero) masculinity studies gradually expanded its parameter by acknowledging the “concomitant construction and consideration of” homosocial relations and homosexuality (275). The subject of my reading is not free from the limited scope of focusing only on the heterosexuality of the authors and the protagonists. I also recognize that there are myriad venues that allow us to mediate and extend our understanding of masculinity: class and femininity are just a few examples.

Attending to the unique conditions that dictated the shaping of masculinity reveals the ways in which the authors I discuss sought to respond to and counter the shifting expectations and conventions of manhood. Ultimately, the imprint hegemonic masculinity has left on the reconfiguration of other masculinities also reveal how
femininity, in general, was simplified and even demonized for the purpose of buttressing the superiority of masculinity. In other words, the divergent, plural models of masculinity were built on the same premise: the inferiority of femininity. As such, my comprehensive, chronological overview of the construction of masculinity is relevant to the study of the transforming understanding of femininity.

I also call attention to the stereotyped association of class and gender identity: for example, the upper class is generally marked as effeminate while the working class is usually characterized as virile. Whereas the authors I examine are constricted by contemporary gender conventions that dictated their understanding and portrayal of gender subjectivity, today’s scholars should disarticulate such a fixed understanding of gender identity vis-à-vis one’s class status. In fact, as seen from the texts I examine, the desire for class mobility and assuming upper-class status do not correspond to the dominant masculinity that had currency at the time. For example, W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington’s insistence on civilization runs the “risk” of effeminizing them and African American men in general, when both urgently seek to construct their masculine identity as a representative African American leader. Also, one’s class status does not naturally endow him with the purported gender identity. Mike Gold unquestionably assumes that the protagonist joining the working-class movement signals the latter’s virile masculinity. As such, these authors reveal that class conflict is also gender conflict: the effort to either join the upper class or identify with the working class is implicated in securing one’s masculine identity.

However, the “natural” and allegedly monolithic connection between certain gender traits and class status render other “incongruous” associations invisible.
Therefore, the unchanging, fixed connection between a particular gender identity and class status needs to be disrupted. While rooted in the conventional foundational thinking of masculinity that still dictates our conceptualization of gender at large, my study seeks to unmoor the reading of gender identity from that foundation. Mapping the sites of change reveals the interdependent, asymmetrical, and parallel construction of masculinity(ies), which dictated the understanding of femininity as well. The notions stabilized at the turn of the twentieth century still wield tremendous influence in shaping our modern subjectivities. Finally, my dissertation points to the urgency of dismantling the binary and developing a new understanding that liberates us from that gender dichotomy.
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