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MANLINESS

& CIVILIZATION

**A CULTURAL HISTORY OF GENDER AND
RACE IN THE UNITED STATES, 1880-1917**

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"Cowboy of the Dakotas." Instead of ridiculing him as "Oscar Wilde," newspapers were praising his virile zest for fighting and his "blizzard-seasoned constitution."⁵ In 1898, after a brief but highly publicized stint as leader of a regiment of volunteers in the Spanish American War, he became known as Colonel Roosevelt, the manly advocate of a virile imperialism. Never again would Roosevelt's name be linked to effeminacy. Even today, historians invoke Roosevelt as the quintessential symbol of turn-of-the-century masculinity.⁶

Roosevelt's great success in masculinizing his image was due, in large part, to his masterful use of the discourse of civilization. As a mature politician, he would build his claim to political power on his claim to manhood. Skillfully, Roosevelt constructed a virile political persona for himself as a strong but civilized white man.

Yet Roosevelt's use of the discourse of civilization went beyond mere public relations: Roosevelt drew on "civilization" to help formulate his larger politics as an advocate of both nationalism and imperialism. As he saw it, the United States was engaged in a millennial drama of manly racial advancement, in which American men enacted their superior manhood by asserting imperialistic control over races of inferior manhood. To prove their virility, as a race and a nation, American men needed to take up the "strenuous life" and strive to advance civilization—through imperialistic warfare and racial violence if necessary.

Thus, TR framed his political mission in terms of race and manhood, nationalism and civilization. Like G. Stanley Hall and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Roosevelt longed to lead evolution's chosen race toward a perfect millennial future. Yet Roosevelt harbored larger ambitions than either Hall or Gilman. Hall merely wanted to develop a pedagogy that would produce the "super-man." Gilman only wanted to revolutionize society by civilizing women. Roosevelt, on the other hand, yearned to be the virile leader of a manly race and to inspire his race to wage an international battle for racial supremacy. He hoped that, through this imperialistic evolutionary struggle, he could advance his race toward the most perfect possible civilization. This, for Roosevelt, was the ultimate power of manhood.⁷

Civilized Manliness and Violent Masculinity: Claiming the Power of a Man

From early boyhood, Roosevelt longed for the authority of a powerful man. Like the young G. Stanley Hall, young Roosevelt learned early that achieving

Theodore Roosevelt: Manhood, Nation, and "Civilization"

In 1882, a newly elected young state assemblyman arrived in Albany. Theodore Roosevelt, assuming his first elective office, was brimming with self-importance and ambition. He was only twenty-three—the youngest man in the legislature—and he looked forward to a promising career of wielding real political power. Yet Roosevelt was chagrined to discover that despite his intelligence, competence, and real legislative successes, no one took him seriously. The more strenuously he labored to play "a man's part" in politics, the more his opponents derided his manhood.¹

Daily newspapers lampooned Roosevelt as the quintessence of effeminacy. They nicknamed him "weakling," "Jane-Dandy," "Punkin-Lily," and "the exquisite Mr. Roosevelt." They ridiculed his high voice, tight pants, and fancy clothing. Several began referring to him by the name of the well-known homosexual Oscar Wilde, and one actually alleged (in a less-than-veiled phallic allusion) that Roosevelt was "given to sucking the knob of an ivory cane."² While TR might consider himself a manly man, it was becoming humiliatingly clear that others considered him effeminate.

Above all other things, Roosevelt desired power. An intuitive master of public relations, he knew that his effeminate image could destroy any chances for his political future. Nearly forty years before women got the vote, electoral politics was part of a male-only subculture, fraught with symbols of manhood.³ Besides, Roosevelt, who considered himself a man's man, detested having his virility impugned. Although normally restrained, when he discovered a Tammany legislator plotting to toss him in a blanket, TR marched up to him and swore, "By God! if you try anything like that, I'll kick you, I'll bite you, I'll kick you in the balls, I'll do anything to you—you'd better leave me alone!"⁴ Clearly, the effeminate "dude" image would have to go.

And go it did. Roosevelt soon came to embody powerful American manhood. Within five years, he was running for mayor of New York as the

The Winning of the West: Race War Forges the Identity of the Manly American Race

At the same time that Roosevelt was engaged in constructing himself as a manly Western hero, he was also writing a history which explained the larger significance of his new frontiersman identity to the advancement of civilization. In *The Winning of the West*, an ambitious four-volume history of the late eighteenth-century American frontier, Roosevelt depicts the American West as a crucible in which the white American race was forged through masculine racial conflict. By applying Darwinistic principles to the Western tradition, Roosevelt constructed the frontier as a site of origins of the American race, whose manhood and national worth were proven by their ability to stamp out competing, savage races.³²

Even in these scholarly historical tomes, Roosevelt invoked his own persona as a manly frontiersman to signify that he, himself, shared his race's virility, as well as its manly racial destiny.³³ At the very outset of *The Winning of the West*, TR makes his personal connection with the frontier explicit: "For a number of years I spent most of my time on the frontier, and lived and worked like any other frontiersman. . . . We guarded our herds of branded cattle and shaggy horses, hunted bear, bison, elk, and deer, established civil government, and put down evil-doers, white and red. . . . exactly as did the pioneers."³⁴ This stretches the truth: Roosevelt never spent "most of his time" on the frontier. Even during the twenty-six months he considered himself a permanent resident of South Dakota, TR spent more than thirteen months in New York.³⁵ Yet, despite his limited time on the frontier, Roosevelt saw his own life-work in terms of the frontier history he was relating. Invoking his ranchman persona both explicitly and implicitly, Roosevelt used *The Winning of the West* to frame the larger significance of both his political career and his ambitions as a leader of the American nation.

Like Mayne Reid's *Boy Hunters* and other Western adventures, Roosevelt's *Winning of the West* told a story of virile violence and interracial conflict. Yet while the hero of the traditional Western adventure was a *man* whose race was implicitly white, the hero of Roosevelt's story was a *race* whose gender was implicitly male. The hero of *The Winning of the West* was the manly American race, which was born in violence on the Western frontier. Like many Victorian novelists, TR began his story by relating his hero's origins and partridge. Chapter 1, subtitled "Spread of the Modern English Race," describes the history of the English race, which TR saw as the American race's parent.³⁶ TR outlined the familiar Anglo-Saxonist history of the English race, as

it began in the forests of Germany, overran prehistoric Europe, and finally established itself as Anglo-Saxon England.³⁷

The Winning of the West then narrates, in much greater detail, a similar origin tale for the American race as it began in the forests of Kentucky, overran the American continent, and began to establish itself as the great United States. The settlement of the American West, according to Roosevelt, echoed the establishment of ancient England in that a race of primarily Germanic descent reconstituted itself in an extended act of racial conquest. As Roosevelt saw it, this act of manly conquest established the American race as a race apart—a race different from its English parent.³⁸

Americans belong to the English race only in the sense in which Englishmen belong to the German. . . . The modern Englishman is descended from a Low-Dutch stock, which, when it went to Britain, received into itself an enormous infusion of Celtic, a much smaller infusion of Norse and Danish, and also a certain infusion of Norman-French blood. When this new English stock came to America it mingled with and absorbed into itself immigrants from many European lands.³⁹

TR made much of this point: The American race was not the same as the English race, since it had been reconstituted of new racial stock in the act of winning a new and virgin continent. Americans were literally of a different blood than the British. However, since most of the new, immigrant additions to English stock in America had come from the same superior Germanic and Celtic races that had long ago formed the British race (Germans, Scandinavians, Irish, and Dutch), the new American race retained all the superior racial traits of the older British race. In other words, the American race was a brand new race, but it shared both ancestry and "blood" with the English race. Long after he wrote *The Winning of the West*, Roosevelt continued to insist that Americans were a new and separate race.⁴⁰

Yet although the manly American race was forged of various immigrant races, all of those contributing races were European. Black Americans played no part in TR's frontier history, nor did he consider them part of the American race. As he saw it, African Americans were racial inferiors whose presence in America could only damage the real (that is, white) American race. TR lambasted slave importers as "the worst foes, not only of humanity and civilization, but especially of the white race in America." Slave importation was not only "ethically aberrant," it was a biological crime because it encouraged non-eugenic interbreeding. Worse, the African race remained a prob-

lem in perpetuity. The inferior "negroes" could live peacefully with the superior whites for generations, unlike the Indians, who picked fights with the white man and thus could be killed off. In short, in constructing his racial hero, TR envisioned an American race that was exclusively white.⁴¹

The Winning of the West goes on to tell a story of racial origins in which the hero, the manly white American race, proves its manhood by winning a series of violent battles with inferior, savage Indians. Roosevelt depicts the violence of this frontier race war as the mechanism which forges the various groups of white European immigrants into one powerful, unified American race. Most of *The Winning of the West's* four volumes recount this race-forming warfare in loving detail.

The logic behind TR's story of heroic racial formation revolves around "civilization's" three basic aspects: race, gender, and millennialism. The millennial evolutionary imperatives behind nature's quest to develop the most perfect men and women demanded that white Americans and Indians, thrown together on one continent, compete to establish which race had the strongest, most powerful men. Warfare between the white man and the Indian was thus, as TR repeatedly put it, "inevitable."⁴² Only virile, masculine combat could establish whose men were superior and deserved to control the land and its resources. But the outcome was never in doubt. The new American race, able to advance civilization to ever greater heights, was "predestined" to prevail against the barbarous Indians.⁴³ "It is a sad and dreadful thing that there should of necessity be such throes of agony and yet they are the birth-pangs of a new and vigorous people," sighed Roosevelt.⁴⁴ Thus, in the violence of race war, the manly American race was born.

Manhood was the key to the American frontiersmen's victory in this race war, just as it had been the key to Roosevelt's own frontiersman identity. "The west would never have been settled save for the fierce courage and the eager desire to brave danger so characteristic of the stalwart backwoodsmen." Like the heroes of Western novels, these virile frontiersmen were bold, resourceful and self-reliant.⁴⁵ "The young men prided themselves on their bodily strength, and were always eager to contend against one another in athletic games, such as wrestling, racing, jumping and lifting flour barrels."⁴⁶ Moreover, the men and women of the American race clung tenaciously to "natural" sex roles: "The man was the armed protector and provider, the woman was the housewife and child-bearer."⁴⁷ As TR described the virile backwoodsmen, in another context, they were "every inch men," whose manhood was essential to their racial character. "There was little that was soft or outwardly attractive in their character; it was stern, rude, and hard, like the

lives they led; but it was the character of those who were every inch men, and who were Americans through to the very heart's core."⁴⁸

TR repeatedly contrasts the virile manliness of the Americans to the brutal unmanliness of the Indians.⁴⁹ Manhood was the essential characteristic of the American race, whereas Roosevelt's Indians "seemed to the white settlers devils and 'not men.'" These devilish nonmen "mercilessly destroyed all weaker communities, red or white" and "had no idea of showing justice or generosity towards their fellows who lacked their strength."⁵⁰ Manliness meant helping the weak; Indians attacked the weak. Therefore, Indians—like the Negro rapists in contemporary reports of lynching—were the opposite of manly. Indeed, Roosevelt repeatedly described Indians as brutal despoilers of women and children, invoking (like so many of his contemporaries) the ubiquitous cultural figure of the savage primitive rapist. According to Roosevelt, the white frontiersman

was not taking part in a war against a civilized foe; he was fighting in a contest where women and children suffered the fate of the strong men. . . . His sweetheart or wife had been carried off, ravished, and was at the moment the slave and concubine of some dirty and brutal Indian warrior, . . . seared into his eyeballs, into his very brain, he bore ever with him, waking or sleeping, the sight of the skinned, mutilated, hideous body of the baby who had just grown old enough to recognize him and to crow and laugh when taken in his arms. Such incidents as these were not exceptional.⁵¹

Roosevelt described this savage unmanliness in pornographic detail, lumping together every Indian atrocity he had ever heard of—events occurring years apart, in different parts of the country—so that it appeared that Indians were typically rapists and baby killers.⁵² (In contrast, modern historians have found that rape was practically unknown among most Indian tribes.)⁵³ Drawing on the discourse of civilization, TR constructed his Indians in the same terms which were currently depicting African Americans as unmanly, congenital rapists.

Yet civilized manliness was not the only thing that made the American race superior to the barbarous Indians. The American frontiersmen also proved their racial superiority by the potency of their violent masculinity—their ability to out savage the savages. Although the primitive Indians were powerfully violent foes, Roosevelt depicted the white frontiersmen's violence as even more powerful: "Their red foes were strong and terrible, cunning in council, dreadful in battle, merciless beyond belief in victory. The men of the

border did not overcome and dispossess cowards and weaklings; they marched forth to spoil the stout-hearted and to take for a prey the possessions of the men of might."⁵⁴ Again, the virile white man is both like the Indians and superior to them. The strength of the white Americans' violence proved them the most masculine of men and the most advanced of races.⁵⁵

One might think that by regressing to brutal savagery, American men might be devolving toward a lower evolutionary stage, instead of advancing to a higher civilization. And Roosevelt conceded that, in the short run, this brutal race war was more likely to retrograde than to advance manliness and civilization. "A sad and evil feature of such warfare is that the whites, the representatives of civilization, speedily sink almost to the level of their barbarous foes, in point of hideous brutality."⁵⁶ Yet, as Roosevelt saw it, this regression to savagery was only temporary and proved the Americans' racial superiority. Since the Indian men fought at the brutal level of savagery, it was they who forced the white men into equal brutality in order to prevail in the struggle for survival. The superior race needed to match their red foes' masculine savagery in order to win the war and safeguard the future of civilization.⁵⁷ Having met the savages on their own primitive ground and having proven themselves the fitter race and the better men, the American men could claim their continent and reclaim their place as the most advanced of civilized races. This temporary reversion to the primitive in order to build a more powerful civilization thus echoes G. Stanley Hall's pedagogical vision of a primitive boyhood giving civilized men the masculine power to resist overcivilization and develop into the super-man.

For, brutal as it was, this bloody war between red and white men had a higher purpose: it served the sacred interests of civilization. Here, Roosevelt's own political mission comes into sharper focus, and the meaning of his own frontiersman persona takes on a cosmic tint. The American race had a sacred duty to advance civilization by wresting the continent from the Indians and installing a higher civilization. Indeed, the white man's race war against the Indians was really a holy crusade for human evolutionary advancement.

The most ultimately righteous of all wars is a war with savages, though it is apt to be also the most terrible and inhuman. The rude, fierce settler who drives the savage from the land lays all civilized mankind under a debt to him. . . . It is of incalculable importance that America, Australia, and Siberia should pass out of the hands of

their red, black, and yellow aboriginal owners, and become the heritage of the dominant world races.⁵⁸

This cosmic imperative mooted all lesser questions of morality. "Whether the whites won the land by treaty [or] by armed conquest . . . mattered comparatively little so long as the land was won. It was all-important that it should be won, for the benefit of civilization and in the interests of mankind."⁵⁹ Without such conquests, all human progress would cease and civilization itself would stop. "The world would have halted had it not been for the Teutonic conquests in alien lands; . . . the world would probably have gone forward very little, indeed would not have gone forward at all, had it not been for the displacement or submersion of savage and barbaric peoples as a consequence of the armed settlement in strange lands of the races who hold in their hands the fate of the years."⁶⁰ By killing the Indians, the virile American frontiersmen were unselfishly safeguarding the future advancement of all civilization.

Here, then, is the millennial importance of the race-making work of manly frontiersmen like Crockett, Boone, and, by implication, ranchman Roosevelt himself. By 1896, when Roosevelt published the fourth and final volume of *The Winning of the West*, he had embarked on his political career as an advocate of manly imperialism; and it might have appeared that his work as a scholarly historian was related only tangentially to his growing political prominence. Yet in *The Winning of the West*, Roosevelt had distilled the larger significance of both his political philosophy and his ambitions for the United States. As he saw it, history proved that manhood and race were integrally connected—almost identical—and the future of the American nation depended on both. History showed that, from the time the American race was born in violent racial conflict on the frontier, the American race had been superlatively manly. Indeed, superior manhood itself had allowed the American race to prevail against the Indians, win a continent, and build a mighty nation. Thus, America's nationhood itself was the product of both racial superiority and virile manhood.

But mere nationhood alone was not enough for Americans, according to Roosevelt, who (like Hall and Gilman) saw a cosmic importance in advancing evolution. Americans had a sacred duty to strive to develop the highest possible civilization. For Roosevelt, the mechanism of this human evolution came through a Darwinistic survival of the fittest. The American race must continue striving manfully to wrest the world's "waste spaces" from the infe-

rior races who were currently "cumbering" them. And if all domestic territory had been wrested from the savages, then American men must turn their attention overseas. Indeed, as Roosevelt originally envisioned *The Winning of the West*, its story would have continued until the Alamo fell in 1836. By concluding with a different racial foe, Roosevelt's history would have signaled that in his own time the American race needed to summon its manhood to face a new opponent in its struggle for racial expansion: the "semicivilized" mestizo races of Latin America.⁶¹ And who was more fit to lead American men in this fight than the modest, scholarly western ranchman who was so well versed in their racial history?

The Meaning of the Strenuous Life

Roosevelt never had the time to write the two final volumes of *The Winning of the West*. Instead, he took up the mantle of his heroic Indian fighters himself, urging American men to embrace a virile imperialism for the good of the race and the future of all civilization. Beginning in 1894, unhappy with President Cleveland's reluctance to annex Hawaii, Roosevelt began to exhort the American race to embrace a manly, strenuous imperialism, in the cause of higher civilization.⁶² In Roosevelt's imperialistic pronouncements, as in *The Winning of the West*, issues of racial dominance were inextricably conflated with issues of manhood. Indeed, when Roosevelt originally coined the term "the strenuous life," in an 1899 speech, he was explicitly discussing only foreign relations: calling on the United States to build up its army and to take imperialistic control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. Ostensibly, the speech never mentions gender at all. Yet the phrase "the strenuous life" soon began to connote a virile, hard-driving manhood, which might or might not involve foreign relations, at all.

How did the title of an essay calling for American imperialism become a catchphrase to describe vigorous masculinity? To answer this question, we need to understand the logic behind Roosevelt's philosophies about American nationalism and imperialism. For Roosevelt, the purpose of American expansionism and national greatness was always the millennial purpose behind human evolution—human racial advancement toward a higher civilization. And the race that could best achieve this perfected civilization was, by definition, the one with the most superior manhood.

The Dangers of Unmanly Overcivilized Racial Decadence

It was not coincidental that Roosevelt's advocacy of manly imperialism in the 1890s was contemporaneous with a widespread cultural concern about effeminacy, overcivilization, and racial decadence. As we have seen with Hall and Beard, throughout Europe and Anglo-America intellectuals were worried about the emasculating tendencies of excessive civilization. Roosevelt shared many of his contemporaries' fears about the future of American manly power; and this gave his imperialistic writings an air of especial urgency.⁶³

Although Roosevelt never despaired about the future of American civilization, he believed racial decay was distinctly possible. He warned the nation that overcivilized effeminacy could threaten the race's fitness to engage in the sort of race wars he had described in *The Winning of the West*. He fretted over "a certain softness of fibre in civilized nations, which, if it were to prove progressive, might mean the development of a cultured and refined people quite unable to hold its own in those conflicts through which alone any great race can ultimately march to victory."⁶⁴ Publicly, Roosevelt professed faith that the American race retained the superior manhood which had allowed it to wrest the continent from the Indians. He denied "that the martial type necessarily decays as civilization progresses."⁶⁵ Yet in his private letters Roosevelt conceded that he believed American racial decadence was distinctly possible.⁶⁶

Whereas Hall had seen decadence in terms of a physical or biological evolutionary backsliding, and Gilman had seen it in terms of the growth of excessive sex traits, Roosevelt understood decadence in terms of the racial conflict through which he believed civilizations rose and fell. As he had shown in *The Winning of the West*, TR believed that manly racial competition determined which race was superior and deserved to control the earth's resources. A race which grew decadent, then, was a race which had lost the masculine strength necessary to prevail in this Darwinistic racial struggle. Civilized advancement required much more than mere masculine strength, of course; it also required advanced manliness. Intelligence, altruism, and morality were essential traits, possessed by all civilized races and men. Yet, as important as these refined traits were, they were not enough, by themselves, to safeguard civilization's advance and prevent racial decadence. Without the "virile fighting virtues" which allowed a race to continue to expand into new territories, its more civilized racial traits would be useless. If American men lost their

primal fighting virtues, a more manful race would strip them of their authority, land, and resources. This effeminate loss of racial primacy and virility was what Roosevelt meant by overcivilized racial decadence.

In order to help American men ward off this kind of racial decadence, Roosevelt wrote a series of articles exhorting American men to eschew overcivilized effeminacy. In 1893, for example, he suggested in *Harper's Weekly* that athletics might be one way to combat excess civilization and avoid losing Americans' frontier-bred manliness:

In a perfectly peaceful and commercial civilization such as ours there is always a danger of laying too little stress upon the more virile virtues—upon the virtues which go to make up a race of statesmen and soldiers, of pioneers and explorers. . . . These are the very qualities which are fostered by vigorous, manly out-of-door sports, such as mountaineering, big-game hunting, riding, shooting, rowing, football and kindred games.⁶⁷

Elsewhere he urged men to take up politics in order to cultivate "the rougher, manlier virtues. . . . A peaceful and commercial civilization is always in danger of suffering the loss of the virile fighting qualities without which no nation, however cultured, however refined, however thrifty and prosperous, can ever amount to anything."⁶⁸ Decadence could only be kept at bay if American men strove to retain the virile fighting qualities necessary for a race of soldiers and pioneers.

This concept of overcivilized decadence let Roosevelt construct American imperialism as a conservative way to retain the race's frontier-forged manhood, instead of what it really was—a belligerent grab for a radically new type of nationalistic power. As Roosevelt described it, asserting the white man's racial power abroad was necessary to avoid losing the masculine strength Americans had already established through race war on the frontier. Currently the American race was one of the world's most advanced civilized races. They controlled a rich and mighty continent because their superior manhood had allowed them to annihilate the Indians on the Western frontier. If they retained their manhood, they could continue to look forward to an ever higher civilization, as they worked ever harder for racial improvement and expansion. But if American men ever lost their virile zest for Darwinistic racial contests, their civilization would soon decay. If they ignored the ongoing racial imperative of constant expansion and instead grew effeminate and luxury-loving, a manlier race would inherit their mantle of the highest civilization.

By depicting imperialism as a prophylactic means of avoiding effeminacy and racial decadence, Roosevelt constructed it as part of the status quo and hid the fact that this sort of militaristic overseas involvement was actually a new departure in American foreign policy. American men must struggle to retain their racially innate masculine strength, which had originally been forged in battle with the savage Indians on the frontier; otherwise the race would backslide into overcivilized decadence. With no Indians left to fight at home, then, American men must press on and confront new races, abroad.

Imperialism: The Masterful Duty of the Manly Race

From 1894 until he became president in 1901, Roosevelt wrote and lectured widely on the importance of taking up what Rudyard Kipling, in 1899, would dub "the White Man's burden." Kipling coined this term in a poem written to exhort American men to conquer and rule the Philippines. "The white man," as we saw in the Wells chapter, simultaneously meant the white race, civilization itself, and white males as a group. In "The White Man's Burden," Kipling used the term in all these senses to urge white males to take up the racial burden of civilization's advancement. "Take up the White Man's burden," he wrote, capitalizing the essential term, and speaking to the manly civilized on behalf of civilization. "Send forth the best ye breed"—quality breeding was essential, because evolutionary development (breeding) was what gave "the White Man" the right and duty to conquer uncivilized races.

Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
Half-devil and half-child.⁶⁹

Like Teedie throwing cake in the mouths of hungry beggars, manly men had the duty of taking unselfish care of those weaker than themselves—to "wait in heavy harness" and "serve their captives' need." And by calling the Filipinos "half-devil and half-child," Kipling underlined the essential fact that whatever these races were, they were not *men*.

Roosevelt called Kipling's poem "poor poetry but good sense from the expansionist standpoint."⁷⁰ Although Roosevelt did not use the term "the white man's burden" in his writings on imperialism, he drew on the same sorts of race and gender linkages which Kipling deployed in his poem. TR's

speeches of this period frequently conflate manhood and racial power, and draw extended analogies between the individual American man and the virile American race.

For example, "National Duties," one of TR's most famous speeches, represents both American men and the American race as civilized entities with strong virile characters—in popular parlance, both were "the white man." Roosevelt begins by outlining this racial manhood, which he calls "the essential manliness of the American character."⁷¹ Part of this manliness centered around individual and racial duties to the home. On the one hand, individual men must work to provide for the domestic needs of themselves and their families. On the other hand, the men of the race must work to provide for their collective racial home, their nation.⁷² Men who shirked these manly homemaking duties were despicably unsexed; or, as TR put it, "the willfully idle man" was as bad as "the willfully barren woman."⁷³

Yet laboring only for his own hearth and nation was not enough to satisfy a real man. Virile manhood also required the manly American nation to take up imperialistic labors outside its borders, just as manhood demanded individual men to labor outside the home: "Exactly as each man, while doing first his duty to his wife and the children within his home, must yet, if he hopes to amount to much, strive mightily in the world outside his home, so our nation, while first of all seeing to its own domestic well-being, must not shrink from playing its part among the great nations without."⁷⁴ It would be as unmanly for the American race to refuse its imperialist destiny as it would be for a cowardly man to spend all his time loafing at home with his wife. Imperialist control over primitive races thus becomes a matter of manhood—part of a male-only public sphere, which TR sets in contradiction to the home.

After setting up imperialism as a manly duty for both man and race, Roosevelt outlines the imperialist's appropriate masculine behavior—or, should we say, his appropriate masculine appendage? Roosevelt immediately brings up the "big stick." It may be a cheap shot to stress the phallic implications of TR's imagery, yet Roosevelt himself explained the meaning of the "big stick" in terms of manhood and the proper way to assert the power of a man: "A good many of you are probably acquainted with the old proverb: 'Speak softly and carry a big stick—you will go far.' If a man continually blusters, if he lacks civility, a big stick will not save him from trouble; and neither will speaking softly avail, if back of the softness there does not lie strength, power."⁷⁵ Just as a manly man avoided bluster, relying instead on his self-evident masculine strength and power, so virile American men should build

a powerful navy and army, so that when they took up the white man's burden in primitive lands, they would receive the respect due to a masterful, manly race.

This imperialistic manliness underlay the virile power of both man and race; yet it was not self-seeking. It was intended only for the advancement of civilization. Therefore, Roosevelt insisted, Americans never directed their virile expansionism against any civilized race. "No nation capable of self-government and of developing by its own efforts a sane and orderly civilization, no matter how small it may be, has anything to fear from us."⁷⁶ Only barbarous nations incapable of developing "a sane and orderly civilization"—for example, the Hawaiians and the Filipinos—required the correction of the manly American race.

Unfortunately, Roosevelt conceded, this unselfish civilizing duty might well become bloody and violent. Civilized men had a manly duty to "destroy and uplift" lesser, primitive men, for their own good and the good of civilization: "It is our duty toward the people living in barbarism to see that they are freed from their chains, and we can free them only by destroying barbarism itself. The missionary, the merchant, and the soldier may each have to play a part in this destruction and in the consequent uplifting of the people."⁷⁷ Yet this unselfish racial uplift would be worth the bloodshed, even for the destroyed barbarians themselves. Both Indians on the Great Plains and the Tagalogs in the Philippines—at least, those who still survived—would be far happier after the white man had conquered them, according to Roosevelt.⁷⁸

Roosevelt closed his speech by reiterating his analogy between the manful race and the race's men. By conquering and civilizing primitive races, the American nation was simply girding up its racial loins to be "men" of the world, just as they had long been "men" at home in the United States: "We gird up our loins as a nation, with the stern purpose to play our part manfully in winning the ultimate triumph; and therefore . . . with unflinching steps [we] tread the rough road of endeavor, smiting down the wrong and battling for the right, as Greatheart smote and battled in Bunyan's immortal story."⁷⁹ In its imperialist glory, the virile American race would embody a warlike manliness, smiting down and battling its unmanly foes in the primitive Philippines. Were American men to be frightened from this work, they would show themselves, as TR put it, "weaklings."⁸⁰

Roosevelt always considered imperialism a question of both racial and individual manhood. Privately, he scorned anti-imperialists as "beings whose cult is non-virility."⁸¹ Publicly, he derided men who refused to take

up the white man's burden as decadent, effeminate, and enemies of civilization: "In the ages distant future patriotism, like the habit of monogamous marriage, will become a needless and obsolete virtue; but just at present the man who loves other countries as much as he does his own is quite as noxious a member of society as the man who loves other women as much as he loves his wife."⁸² Like the advocates of free love, anti-imperialists professed a civilized high-mindedness, but their actions showed them as unmanly and weak as adulterers.

An unmanly, anti-imperialist race was as despicable as an unmanly, anti-imperialist man. As TR saw it, overly peaceful races were like unsexed decadents who refused to breed, whereas expansive races left heirs, just as fathers left sons. "Nations that expand and nations that do not expand may both ultimately go down, but the one leaves heirs and a glorious memory, and the other leaves neither."⁸³ As TR saw it, the only way to avoid effete, unmanly decadence—on the part of either race or man—was to embrace virile imperialism.

In short, racial health and civilized advancement implied both manhood and imperialism. An effeminate race was a decadent race; and a decadent race was too weak to advance civilization. Only by embracing virile racial expansionism could a civilization achieve its true manhood. This, as TR saw it, was the ultimate meaning of imperialism.

The Rough Rider: The War Hero Models the Power of a Manly Race

Roosevelt was not content merely to make speeches about the need for virulent, imperialistic manhood. He always needed to embody his philosophy. The sickly boy had remade himself into an adventure-book hunter-naturalist; the dude politician had remade himself into a heroic Western rancher. The 1898 outbreak of the Spanish-American war—for which he had agitated long and hard—let Roosevelt remake himself into Colonel Roosevelt, the fearless Rough Rider.

Reinventing himself as a charismatic war hero allowed Roosevelt to model the manful imperialism about which he had been writing for four years. TR became a walking advertisement for the imperialistic manhood he desired for the American race. Indeed, from the moment of his enlistment until his mustering out four months later, Roosevelt self-consciously publicized himself as a model of strenuous, imperialistic manhood. In late April 1898, against all advice, Roosevelt resigned as assistant secretary of the navy and enlisted to fight in the just-declared war on Spain. Aged thirty-nine, with an

important subcabinet post, a sick wife, and six young children, no one but Roosevelt himself imagined he ought to see active service. Roosevelt's decision to enlist was avidly followed by newspapers all over the country. Several editorialized against his enlistment, saying he would do more good for the war effort as assistant secretary of the navy. Roosevelt enlisted nonetheless and lost no opportunity to publicize his reasons to friendly newspapers. As he explained to the *New York Sun*, it would be unmanly—hypocritical—to allow other men to take his place on the front lines after he had agitated so strenuously for war. "I want to go because I wouldn't feel that I had been entirely true to my beliefs and convictions, and to the ideal I had set for myself if I didn't go."⁸⁴ Embracing the glare of publicity, TR demonstrated to all that when a member of the manly American race took up the white man's burden, he risked his life willingly and joyously, for the good of civilization.

Roosevelt, commissioned at the rank of lieutenant colonel, raised a volunteer cavalry regiment which he described as "peculiarly American."⁸⁵ It was designed to reflect Americans' masculine racial power as well as their civilized manly advancement. TR accepted only a fraction of the host of men who tried to enlist in his well-publicized regiment. Most of those he accepted were Westerners—rough cowboys and frontiersmen, the heirs and descendants of the masculine Indian fighters who had been forged into the American race on the Western frontier. But, to emphasize the American race's civilized superiority to the Spanish enemy, TR also enlisted several dozen young Ivy League college graduates, many of them athletes. These Harvard and Yale men, presumably the beneficiaries of the race's most advanced moral and intellectual evolution, represented the ever-advancing heights of civilization to which the manly American race could aspire. The regiment's combination of primitive Western masculinity and advanced civilized manliness dramatized the superior manhood of the American race. They would undoubtedly whip the pants off the inferior Latin Spaniards, and show Americans the glories of imperialistic manhood.

The press, fascinated by the undertaking, christened the regiment "Roosevelt's Rough Riders."⁸⁶ Roosevelt's heroic frontiersman identity thus came full circle, as he no doubt intended. As Richard Slotkin has pointed out, the term "Rough Riders" had long been used in adventure novels to describe Western horsemen. Thus, by nicknaming his regiment the "Rough Riders," the nation showed it understood the historical connections Roosevelt always drew between Indian wars in the American West and virile imperialism in Cuba and the Philippines.⁸⁷

But lest anyone miss the connections he was trying to draw between con-

tinued manhood and racial expansion, Roosevelt made certain the press, and thus the public, remained fully informed about the Rough Riders' doings. He encouraged several journalists to attach themselves to the regiment throughout its sojourn in Cuba and even rounded up an interested motion picture crew.⁸⁸ The public avidly followed the newspaper reports of the Rough Riders' masculine cowboy heroics, manly collegiate athleticism, and overall wartime heroics.

Roosevelt, himself, was the core of the Rough Riders' popularity—he embodied the whole manly, imperialistic enterprise. Like his Western recruits, Roosevelt was both a masculine cowboy-hero and (by reputation and association, although not in reality) an Indian fighter. But TR was also a civilized Harvard man, manfully sacrificing his life of ease and privilege to take up the white man's burden and do his duty by the downtrodden brown Cubans. His widely reported, dashing exploits, including the heroic charge up "San Juan" Hill, proved the American race's violent masculinity had lost none of its potency since the bygone days of the Western frontier. According to Edmund Morris, when Roosevelt returned from the war he was "the most famous man in America."⁸⁹

After his mustering out, TR the politician continued to play the role of virile Rough Rider for all he was worth. In November, he was elected governor of New York, campaigning as a war hero and employing ex-Rough Riders to warm up the election crowds. By January 1899, his thrilling memoir, *The Rough Riders*, was appearing serially in *Scribner's Magazine*. And in 1900 his virile popularity convinced Republican party leaders that Roosevelt could counter Bryan's populism better than any other vice-presidential candidate. Roosevelt had constructed himself and the Rough Riders as the epitome of civilized, imperialistic manhood, a model for the American race to follow. His success in modeling that imperialistic manhood exceeded even his own expectations and ultimately paved the way for his presidency.

"The Strenuous Life"

On April 10, 1899, Colonel Roosevelt stood before the men of Chicago's elite, all-male, Hamilton Club and preached the doctrine of "The Strenuous Life." As governor of New York and a fabulously popular ex-Rough Rider, he knew the national press would be in attendance; and though he spoke at the Hamilton Club, he spoke to men across America. With the cooperation of the press and at the risk of his life, TR had made himself into a national hero—the embodiment of manly virtue, masculine violence, and white American

racial supremacy—and the antithesis of overcivilized decadence. Now he urged the men of the American race to live the sort of life he had modeled for them: to be virile, vigorous, and manly, and to reject overcivilized decadence by supporting a strenuously imperialistic foreign policy. When contemporaries ultimately adopted his phrase "the strenuous life" as a synonym for the vigorous, vehement manhood Roosevelt modeled, they showed they correctly understood that his strenuous manhood was inextricably linked to his nationalism, imperialism, and racism.

Ostensibly, "The Strenuous Life" preached the virtues of military preparedness and imperialism, but contemporaries understood it as a speech about manhood. The practical import of the speech was to urge the nation to build up its army, to maintain its strong navy, and to take control of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. But underlying these immediate objectives lay the message that American manhood—both the manly race and individual white men—must retain the strength of their Indian-fighter ancestors, or another race would prove itself more manly and overtake America in the Darwinian struggle to be the world's most dominant race.

Roosevelt began by demanding manliness in both the American nation and American men. Slothful men who lacked the "desire and power" to strive in the world were despicable and unmanly. "We do not admire the man of timid peace. We admire the man who embodies victorious effort."⁹⁰ If America and its men were not man enough to fight, they would not only lose their place among "the great nations of the world," they would become a decadent and effeminate race. Roosevelt held up the Chinese, whom he despised as the most decadent and unmanly of races, as a cautionary lesson. If we "play the part of China, and be content to rot by inches in ignoble ease within our borders," we will "go down before other nations which have not lost the manly and adventurous qualities."⁹¹ If American men lacked the manly fortitude to go bravely and willingly to a foreign war, the race would decay, preached TR, the virile war hero.

In stirring tones, the Rough Rider of San Juan Hill ridiculed the overcivilized anti-imperialists who had lost the "great fighting, masterful virtues." Lacking the masculine impulse toward racial aggression and unmoved by virile visions of empire, these men had been sapped of all manhood.

The timid man, the lazy man, the man who distrusts his country, the over-civilized man, who has lost the great fighting, masterful virtues, the ignorant man, and the man of dull mind, whose soul is incapable of feeling the mighty lift that thrills stern men with em-

pires in their brains—all these, of course shrink from seeing the nation undertake its new duties; shrink from seeing us build a navy and an army adequate to our needs; shrink from seeing us do our share of the world's work. These are the men who fear the strenuous life. . . . They believe in that cloistered life which saps the hardy virtues in a nation, as it saps them in the individual.⁹²

Like "cloistered" monkish celibates, these "over-civilized" men "shrink, shrink, shrink" from carrying the "big stick." Dishonorably, they refused to do their manly duty by the childish Filipinos. Had the United States followed these anti-imperialists' counsel and refused to undertake "one of the great tasks set modern civilization," Americans would have shown themselves not only unmanly but also racially inferior. "Some stronger, manlier power would have to step in and do the work, and we would have shown ourselves weaklings, unable to carry to successful completion the labors that great and high-spirited nations are eager to undertake." As TR saw it, the man, the race, and the nation were one in their need to possess virile, imperialist manhood.⁹³

Then TR got down to brass tacks, dwelling at length on Congress' responsibility to build up the armed forces.⁹⁴ After again raising the specter of Chinese decadence, which American men faced if they refused to strengthen their army and navy, Roosevelt stressed America's duty to take up the white man's burden in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. If the American race was "too weak, too selfish, or too foolish" to take on that task, it would be completed by "some stronger and more manful race." He ridiculed anti-imperialists as cowards who "make a pretense of humanitarianism to hide and cover their timidity" and to "excuse themselves for their unwillingness to play the part of men."⁹⁵

"The Strenuous Life" culminates with a Darwinian vision of strife between races for the "dominion of the world," which only the most manful race could win.

I preach to you then, my countrymen, that our country calls not for the life of ease but for the life of strenuous endeavor. . . . If we stand idly by . . . then the bolder and stronger peoples will pass us by, and will win for themselves the domination of the world. Let us therefore boldly face the life of strife, resolute to do our duty well and manfully.⁹⁶

American men must embrace their manly mission to be the race which dominates the world. Struggle for racial supremacy was inevitable, but the most

manful race—the American race—would triumph, if it made the attempt. Its masculine strength was proven by military victories over barbarous brown races. Its manly virtue was evident in its civilized superiority to the primitive childish races it uplifted. White American men must claim their place as the world's most perfect men, the fittest race for the evolutionary struggle toward a perfect civilization. This was the meaning of "The Strenuous Life."

We can now answer the question, "How did the title of an essay calling for American dominance over the brown races become a catchphrase to describe virile masculinity?" Roosevelt's desire for imperial dominance had been, from the first, intrinsically related to his views about male power. As he saw it, the manhood of the American race had been forged in the crucible of frontier race war; and to abandon the virile power of that violence would be to backslide toward effeminate racial mediocrity. Roosevelt wanted American men to be the ultimate in human evolution, the world's most powerful and civilized race. He believed that their victory over the Indians on the frontier proved that the American race possessed the racial superiority and masculine power to overcome any savage race; and he saw a glorious future for the race in the twentieth century, as it pressed on toward international dominance and the perfection of civilization. The only danger which Roosevelt saw menacing this millennial triumph of manly American civilization came from within. Only by surrendering to overcivilized decadence—by embracing unmanly racial sloth instead of virile imperialism—could American men fail. Thus, American men must work strenuously to uphold their civilization. They must refuse a life of ease, embrace their manly task, and take up the white man's burden. Only by living that "strenuous life" could American men prove themselves to be what Roosevelt had no doubt they were—the apex of civilization, evolution's most favored race, masterful men fit to command the barbarous races and the world's "waste spaces"—in short, the most virile and manly of men.

In later years, as Americans came to take international involvement for granted and as imperialism came to seem less controversial, the phrase "the strenuous life" underwent a subtle change of meaning. Always associated with Roosevelt, it came to connote the virile manhood which he modeled for the nation as imperialistic Western hero and Rough Rider—the peculiar combination of moral manliness and aggressive masculinity which he was able to synthesize so well. As Roosevelt's presidency wore on, Americans grew accustomed to taking up the white man's burden, not only in the Philippines, but also in Cuba, Panama, and the Dominican Republic. The "strenuous life" came to be associated with any virile, manly effort to accomplish

great work, whether imperialistic or not.⁹⁷ Yet on a basic level, "the strenuous life" retained TR's original associations with the evolutionary struggle of the American race on behalf of civilization. "The strenuous life," as it came to be used, meant the opposite of "overcivilized effeminacy." Or, as Roosevelt summed it up himself in his *Autobiography*, the man who lives the strenuous life regards his life "as a pawn to be promptly hazarded whenever the hazard is warranted by the larger interests of the great game in which we are all engaged."⁹⁸ That great game, for Roosevelt, was always the millennial struggle for Americans to perfect civilization by becoming the most manly, civilized, and powerful race in the world.

"Civilization" in the White House: Race Policy and Race Suicide

In 1901, Theodore Roosevelt finally grasped the ultimate manhood which he had sought for so long: to be the preeminent manly leader of the virile American race. As president, TR believed his duty was to usher the manly American nation ever closer to the racial preeminence and perfect civilization he had long predicted for it. Not surprisingly, then, considerations of manhood, race, and "civilization" shaped many of Roosevelt's presidential policies.

Internationally, as Frank Ninkovich has so eloquently shown, Roosevelt relied on the ideology of civilization to frame his foreign policy. Ninkovich refutes those historians who see TR as engaging in realpolitik or upholding balances of power between the European nations, and argues that TR's concern was always to uphold the interests of "civilization." Or, as Secretary of State Elihu Root summed up TR's diplomatic objectives, Roosevelt always "viewed each international question against the background of those tendencies through which civilization develops and along which particular civilizations advance or decline." As we have already seen in his pre-presidential speeches, TR believed that manhood required civilized nations to pacify and rule savage and barbarous nations. The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine stemmed directly from this ideology of manly, civilized stewardship of the savage and barbarous races.⁹⁹

As Roosevelt described it in his *Autobiography*, this diplomacy of "civilization" was essentially a diplomacy of manliness. "In foreign affairs, the principle from which we never deviated was to have the Nation behave toward other nations precisely as a strong, honorable, and upright man behaves in dealing with his fellow-men."¹⁰⁰ Like the manly man, the manly nation kept

its promises, fearlessly faced down strong, civilized nations, and was patient with weak, barbarous ones.¹⁰¹ For example, Roosevelt wrote that the Monroe Doctrine was intended to apply, not to "civilized commonwealths" like Canada, Argentina, Brazil, or Chile (all with large white populations), but only to uncivilized "tropical states" which (like unmanly men) were too "impotent" to do their own duty or defend their own independence.¹⁰² Yet always behind this upright moral manliness lay the virile masculine potency of the race's capacity to wield "the big stick."

President Roosevelt's belief in manly civilization shaped his domestic policies, too, especially regarding interracial relations. His actions toward both Japanese immigrants and African Americans were shaped by his longstanding assumption that when men of different and incompatible races lived together, they would battle until one race reigned supreme, just as they had on the American frontier.¹⁰³ Yet although TR believed that African American and Japanese men both presented a racial challenge to white American men, his policies toward the two races differed because, as he saw it, the two races had attained different degrees of civilization.

Roosevelt believed that "Negroes" were the most primitive of races—"a perfectly stupid race."¹⁰⁴ As he had written in *The Winning of the West*, he always believed that their very presence in the United States was a tragic but irreversible historical error.¹⁰⁵ Black Americans were somewhat less backward than "Negroes" anywhere else in the world because they had extensive contact with civilization in the United States. Yet even so, Roosevelt warned, it might take "many thousand years" before "the descendant of the Negro" in the United States evolved to become even "as intellectual as the [ancient] Athenian."¹⁰⁶

The disparity in racial capacity between black and white threatened the nation with race war, since the "fundamental . . . fact of the conflict between race and race" at such different evolutionary points inevitably led men into racial violence.¹⁰⁷ TR deplored such racial violence as uncivilized and made headlines in 1903 and 1906 by denouncing lynching. (He also repeated uncritically the myth that African American men had catalyzed those lynchings by raping white women, thus reinforcing widespread belief in black men's lack of manliness.)¹⁰⁸ Yet, although he deplored lynching, Roosevelt assumed racial violence was all but inevitable when men of such dissimilar races lived together.¹⁰⁹

Thus Roosevelt saw the "Negro Problem" as a question of male power. The men of the masterful white American race had an irresistible evolutionary imperative to assert control over any race of inferior men in their midst.