

Reassessing American Culture: A Rebel's Guide

Gregory Shafer

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dedication: To Bernie, my best friend and inspiration

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Introduction

Culture is a funny thing. While most people see it as a natural manifestation of their beliefs and values—and the rituals that fill their lives—it is often something that is not easily understood by the very people who practice it on a daily basis.

This book takes a critical look at American culture—at the practices that define us as a people and the forces that drive us to act in certain, culturally-sanctioned ways. Why, for instance, do we continue to celebrate and promote marriage, despite its high failure rate and dubious legacy as an oppressor of women? Why do we see men and women perform gender roles that mirror popular culture? Are the young men who wear baggy pants down to their knees doing this as an act of defiance and independence or as a sign of allegiance to the commercial world? And what about our strange penchant for hunting—a cultural tradition that shambles into the twenty-first century with the same sordid reputation as bull fights or bear-baiting. Why, in a time of such cultural growth and progress do we perpetuate such violent and mindless cultural rituals?

If we are to be more evolved as a people, we need to understand our culture—to scrutinize what we do rather than simply doing it. Culture is a powerful phenomenon. It grips us at birth and sweeps us through our lives, telling us how to dress, speak,

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worship, play, and socialize. What fascinates and troubles me is how culture is manufactured and perpetuated to control us and shape our behavior. While we would like to believe that culture emanates from us, I have come to fear that it is actually fabricated for us by a society of corporations and political institutions that use it as a way to shape our behavior and stymie change.

Marriage is especially interesting in this regard. If more of us stayed single, it would, I believe, radically transform our political and social world. When people stay single and unfettered from the stifling life of a family, they are more adventurous, more driven, more political, and eminently more satisfied. Without the weight of children, they invent and transform their worlds, unencumbered by their kids' manic demands and needs. Marriage, it is revealing to note, is openly promoted by cultural conservatives, like Maggie Gallagher, who argue that it makes us happier and healthier. If this is really true, one wonders why special interests feel the need to defend it so zealously in books and sermons. Does marriage serve the people who practice it or does it domesticate those who might otherwise become politically active?

Some of America's freest spirits were unwilling to marry and accomplished iconoclastic feats in their lifetimes. Margaret Sanger left her husband and devoted herself to the crusade for reproductive freedom, while Susan B. Anthony grappled as a single woman for the right to vote. Emily Dickinson was a prolific writer who had no time for a husband and Kate Chopin's literary career flourished after her husband's death.

This book explores other cultural traditions as well. It is fascinating to peruse magazines and television to see the pervasive hand of media in the way men dress, talk, and live their lives. It is common today to see adult men imitating the baggy pants fashion of the media—one that forces them to stop

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and adjust their pants every few minutes because they are falling down. Why would grown men resort to such an inconvenience? Because media has usurped their autonomy as individuals?

Both men and women are riveted not only by the power of media but also by the specter of fear. I devote an entire chapter to the 2004 election and the shameless way that the Bush campaign used the ruse of terrorism to get reelected. As I point out, fear has been an indigenous part of our culture for centuries and has been used to induce otherwise good people to hang witches, persecute minorities, and oppress the weak. Indeed, our fear of communism has caused us to reject any socialistic idea, no matter how progressive or humanistic it might be.

What is perhaps most disquieting about culture is both its ubiquity and invisibility. Every time we play cowboys and Indians, we unwittingly reinforce an ignominious chapter of our history—one that has been celebrated in decades of television and literature. Instead of reflecting us, culture is designed and packaged to direct us. We eat meat and drink milk because the beef and dairy industries have long told us that it is essential for a good diet. Little is ever said about Benjamin Spock's caveat to stop drinking milk and get one's calcium from safer and more nutritious sources. The same can be said for hunting. It is a time honored tradition—a cultural practice—that tells us that killing helpless living beings is wholesome family fun, as long as they walk on four legs and are unable to retaliate. Culture precludes us from asking why. It becomes a swirling vortex—an inexorable surge in our existences.

Perhaps, Noam Chomsky is right when he suggests that propaganda is very much alive in our culture and is often concealed in patriotic commercials and heroic war-time movies. "In the U.S. we're taught that only dictatorships use propaganda, but the public relations industry did not develop under dictatorships. It

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developed in the freest countries in the world, the United States and England” (10). Today, we must critique our culture rather than simply practicing it. If we are to be truly free, we must raise our consciousness and ponder the practices that we have long taken for granted. Slavery was once a part of our American culture. It took centuries of debate and rebellion to reveal its perfidious nature. During this time, the elite created literature and political polemics that romanticized and justified the practice of human bondage, while Southern churches told their congregations that slavery was morally sanctioned by the Old Testament.

It is similar to our modern world and the incredible power of political and economic groups that use fashion, fear, and patriotism as a way to control us. Culture is not a manifestation of who we are but a glimmering production of what powerful people want us to be. This book is about culture and the need to scrutinize it so it will not usurp our liberties.

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Chapter One

Media and Men: The Making of a Jackass

What is a man if his chief good and market of his time be but to sleep and feed a beast, no more.

–Hamlet Act IV, Scene 4

This chapter begins on the pages of the August 2004 issue of *Maxim*. In understanding media and its impact on men, such magazines are essential, for they offer a vivid portrait of the twenty-first century male as created and sharply honed by the pop culture machine. Paging through a *Maxim* is a bit like taking a surreptitious stroll through a teenage boy's bedroom, replete with weights, sports posters, and a clandestine stash of pictorials featuring scantily dressed women. Unlike anything you'll find on the female side of the rack, *Maxim* is unabashed in its prurient appeal, in its goal to please the horny, hedonistic sports-fanatic-teenager that lurks inside of every man.

The question that both haunts and intrigues critics of pop culture is why. Why is one virtually assaulted with a ubiquitous montage of sex and sports when browsing through a men's magazine, while a *Glamour* or *Good Housekeeping* offers articles on female improvement and summer desserts. Why are women consumed with appearance and the satisfaction of the opposite sex, while men are conditioned to be action

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heroes and goofy, libido-driven slobs? Is this the result of natural evolution or has culture—as it is produced and marketed by multi-national corporations—sculpted the modern man into a ready consumer—into someone who is easily manipulated?

Clearly, one fact is certain. Men and women are depicted in diametrically opposed ways in magazines, and one needs only to read the headline of a magazine cover to know if it is meant for women or men.

“Are you Good in Bed? Great in Bed?”

“Summer Desserts that Help you Watch your Waistline.”

Were these two headlines in a women's or men's magazine? Before answering, you are already aware that such questions would never be part of a men's monthly or weekly, because men have been socialized to believe that it is wrong, unmanly, even feminine to worry too much about their appearance or what they eat. While women work assiduously, feverishly to fit into clothes that have been made smaller and smaller, men forget to shave and throw on a t-shirt. It is the culmination of the pop culture agenda and it has worked perfectly in establishing the kind of subtle despotism that permeates our twenty-first century culture. Today, corporations control by designing not only style but lifestyle. They dictate not only clothes but the kind of man that wears these clothes. It is a billion dollar campaign that has altered our culture and limited the way we live as men and women.

“Are you Good in Bed?” The question was asked in the September 2004 issue of *Glamour* and is emblematic of what pervades the female media machine. It is as typical as seeing questions and features about guns or super models on the cover of *Maxim*. While women worry about pleasing men, their male counterparts engage in endless pursuits to fit the aggressive, boorish male model that has been given to them. John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Arnold, Bruce, Brad, Jean-Claude have all carried on a legacy that

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was given to them by the media machine. If one is not tough and terse, he is disheveled and perpetually adolescent. Complementing the super hero in the male-media pantheon is the jovial slob, the bumbling hedonist. Such movies as *Saving Silverman* and *Porky's* are good examples, but there is a plethora of others. *Wayne's World*, starring the talented Mike Myers, is also an example of how men are depicted in the media. If they are not men of violence and action, they are silly boys, searching for women and fun. It is no surprise that males of various ages have come to espouse this carefully delivered message.

In his novel *1984*, George Orwell writes of a society that is manipulated by an inexorable rush of information control. While the oppressive nation of Oceania has secret police that makes people disappear, much of the subjugation is orchestrated through media—through messages and images that tell people what to believe and how to act. Even history is quickly rewritten to fit the agenda of the repressive regime, and for those who still have doubts, there is the “ten minutes of hate,” a government sponsored propaganda program that mingles hate of an enemy with pleasing images of the status quo. Within minutes of its start, the people are reduced to a frenzy of irrational rancor, aimed in various directions and symbolic of how effectively media can control people.

Much of the same kind of control is orchestrated to shape and coerce men in our society. Media has long been in the business of making reality by telling people what they want them to hear and fashioning news and entertainment to yield certain results. Perhaps the most ignominious example of this is the Spanish American War, where newspaper owner Randolph Hearst decided that a conflict would sell lots of newspapers, so he directed his writers and photographers to fabricate mendacious stories about the Spanish in Cuba as a way to incite American anger. Much evidence suggests that the entire war

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was manufactured by politicians and business interests and sold to Americans through media hyperbole. Indeed, American corporations had long yearned for new geographic possessions but needed an excuse to invade Cuba and other Spanish colonies.

And so, Hearst dispatched a cadre of artists and writers to Cuba and told them to fashion stories that would generate the desire for war in the American mind. Hearst's campaign included dramatic stories of Cuban suffering as they struggled bravely against the Spanish oppressor. The only problem, of course, was that the stories of heroism were apocryphal, fabricated so as to persuade Americans that their moral duty was to liberate their Cuban neighbors. "The stories were counterfeit, composed by an atelier of thirty-odd artists and writers, among them Frederick Remington and Richard Harding Davis, that Hearst had dispatched to Cuba to dramatize the revolution presumably taking place in the mountains," writes Lewis Lapham. Unfortunately, adds Lapham, "the revolution was nowhere to be found and so Hearst's correspondents stationed themselves in wicker chairs on the terrace of the Hotel Inglaterra in Havana, where they sipped iced drinks and received news by telepathy. Borrowing from one another's store of adjectives, they sent word of imaginary atrocities and non-existent heroes, descriptions of battles that never occurred, fanciful but stirring tales of Spanish officers roasting Catholic priests on charcoal fires and feeding prisoners to sharks" (Lapham 11).

From a media perspective, Hearst's actions illustrate the sweeping power of the media—of magazines, newspapers, and books—to foment action and manufacture truth. Prior to the stories, there had been no popular support for war, but with the unremitting collection of atrocities radiating from Hearst's newspapers, popular sentiment began to change minds and sway the public toward the conflict. Later, when the battleship *Maine* was sunk in Havana

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harbor, the outcry for war went from tepid to belligerent, and suddenly the nation was embroiled in war. Like magic, the media had made a war where none was warranted. Few were aware of the ruse that had been played upon them.

If a newspaper can orchestrate a war against another nation, one can only guess at the power of multinational corporations—with interests in television, movies, books, and CDs—to sway public opinion and create a culture that is to their advantage. With billions of dollars in profits to be garnered from the right kind of marketing, media giants are going to do more than sell a book or shirt to a young man. Rather, the goal is to produce a style that can be emulated. And so, what we see in our information culture is an assiduously crafted campaign to possess certain demographics of our society. Girls are not simply sold a blouse or some hip-hugger jeans but a fashion that touches their speech, sexuality, and their total appearance. Much of the same plan has been tailored for men, who are socialized to live, dress, and think in certain ways, so as to fit the paradigm of success that is meted out in a blitz of corporate images.

Are we talking of conspiracy theories here? Is this a concerted effort to control and stymie, one that is sanctioned by power elites in various positions of authority? Before answering, consider the vast influence that media has had to shape American society. Today, we see incredible uniformity in the way men dress, socialize, and act. Despite the array of endless freedoms available to them, young men tend to subscribe to a very predictable mode of existence—one that can easily be identified in the movies they watch, the music they hear, and the magazines they read.

“Masculinity today is a myth that has been turned into a comedy,” writes Harold Rosenberg. “A ten-gallon hat still seems to bestow upon the wearer courage and

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love of solitude. At the same time, the virility of the cowboy and the truck driver, like that of the iceman of yesterday, is a joke that everyone sees through" (44). Implicit in Rosenberg's quotation is a sense of impotence in the large biceps and swaggering grin of the average man. Despite countless assurances to the contrary, men are mandated to think and act in culturally validated ways, and the result is good neither for society nor the individual.

In the issue of *Maxim* that began this chapter, the feature is tennis star Anna Kournikova, but there is nothing about her skills, tournament record, or life as an athlete. Indeed, what is most stark and ironic about the seven-page pictorial is the almost total lack of print about the person, despite the fact that her biography could yield much intriguing information. If the magazine were interested in Kournikova the person, they could easily discuss her move from the Soviet Union, her feelings as both an athlete and sex symbol, and the ambivalence felt by many in the tennis world concerning her ability to generate money from her appearances off the court. Clearly, there is much to discuss in terms of Kournikova as a celebrity who has been propelled to fame on her physical measurements and what that says about our culture. But, as the first page of the article suggests, "when Anna Kournikova gets half-naked for her 2005 calendar, why clutter things with an interview."

Such a mentality—where words and complicated stories are deleted so as to avoid "cluttering" the eye candy offered to males—is a quintessential example of how media molds the American male. With few exceptions, the media has created a rather vacuous boy who roams the T.V. screens and magazine pages searching for salacious pictures and moronic wrestling theatrics. Never mind the fact that the wrestling is staged and dramatized to a mortifying level of stupidity. Never mind the fact that incredible hours of time are frittered away on whether one giant will

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defeat another by throwing him over the ropes and out of the ring. In the world of the male, people don't think about reality—in many cases they don't think—because the content of the material doesn't require it.

In his essay "How Men Have Sex," John Stoltenberg suggests that sexuality is not a result of nature but nurturing—that men acquire a sexual identity in the act of processing information in their environment and acting to confirm their place in the appropriate gender category. To be questioned as to your sexuality is anathema to most men, so most over compensate and embrace all of the rough and tumble attributes that signify manhood.

Men are not born with the desire to eschew the erudite so they can devote endless hours to sports and sex but are socialized to value these qualities as part of being a man. "So much of most men's sexuality is tied up with gender actualizing—with feeling like a real man—that they can scarcely recall an erotic sensation that had no gender specific cultural meaning," argues Stoltenberg. In the world of media, both men and women are carefully prescribed their designated role by the torrent of ads and entertainment that wash over them as a populous. In an inexorable parade of commercials and movies, men are taught to be physical while women are discerning. Men are silent and aggressive, while women are chatty and passive. "Most people born with a penis between their legs grow up aspiring to feel and act unambiguously male, longing to belong to the sex that is male and daring not to belong to the sex that is not, and feeling this urgency for a visceral and constant verification of their male sexual identity—for a fleshy connection to manhood—as the driving force in their life," adds Stoltenberg (128).

The result, of course, is that boys become men physically while retaining much of the intellectual qualities of the boy. Men in our society are conditioned to frequent bars and sports events, to

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consume large quantities of beer, and engage in fights and the endless pursuit of sex. In the advertisement that follows the Kournikova pictorial is a picture of football player Michael Vick, who is modeling for Nike. What is distinctive about the commercial is the menacing glare that covers Vick's face as he holds his football. His back is to the audience, and as he looks back, he seems to be giving spectators a look of warning. As a whole, the picture radiates a quiet but palpable aggression. In volumes of American content, it is the paradigm meted out to boys for their inculcation and emulation. Don't talk or think but be ready to act—to fight.

A Day of Hockey

Lessons are learned simply by watching a sporting event and impressionable boys quickly find their place by observing hockey players as they fight and scrap and toss curses at each other. They also get additional education from the commercials that are so prominent a part of the sporting event. While watching the Stanley Cup Playoffs in 2004, I was intrigued by the image of the young man that was presented by most beer commercials. When not witnessing the violent checks and words of the hockey players, men were subjected to a series of Labatt Beer commercials that include a bear, which frequents bars and personifies the lazy, silly boy. In one commercial, the bear presents his girl friend with a helmet full of Labatt Beer. As the woman gushes over the present, other men look with incredulity at the improbable success of the bear. How could he make a woman so happy by offering beer when we all know that women want conversation while men want inebriation and sex. The inversion of sex roles is humorous and again demonstrates how clearly defined sex roles are cemented in our culture.

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In another ad the bear helps his friends construct a contraption that delivers beer to them while they watch T.V. The contraption, which was suppose to be a bookcase, works well until one of the guy's girl friends walks in and looks at them with consternation. Again, the roles are clear. Men are hopeless goofs, fashioning bookcases into beer machines, while women are the mothers, scolding the men with a knowing smile and reassurance.

Commercials for other brands of beer are similar and help to explain much about the industry and its strategy in selling beer to young men. With few exceptions, commercials construct a world that is simple, hedonistic, perpetually adolescent, and irrepressibly lazy. It is *Animal House* in prime time, the slob model for men, and is utterly fascinating in the way it has grabbed and controlled the way men dress, act, and perceive themselves and women. In their attempt to draw men in and teach them how to live, the commercial world acts as a kind of technological despot, selling men a worldview that affects virtually everything they do. Commercials don't sell beer and tobacco but appropriate men for the commercial world. To buy a certain beer positions the buyer in a particular demographic. It corresponds to a particular worldview and allows the timid teenager to find his place in a chaotic existence. Indeed, if a twenty-year-old man has problems finding his identity in society he needs only to view a few hours of Saturday afternoon sports to see his image in baggy jeans that hang down below his butt, ogling women, playing pool, and watching sports. It's what men do—or what they are told to do.

In much of his research, Michael Parenti has suggested that the media's grip on society constitutes a major violation of democratic principles. In their ability to control information that we get and in their practice of using commercials and entertainment to shape and orchestrate our behavior, the media limits

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democracy by limiting choices. Clearly, as one gazes at the parade of carefully tailored ads for men, one can see a model or style emerge—one that is placed before men as an implacable, ubiquitous presence in their lives. “Media bias usually does not occur in random fashion; rather, it moves in the same overall direction again and again. . . (149) writes Parenti. Indeed, it is in the interests of corporations to sell passive men to beer and clothing industries rather than trying to sell the shirt or beer to a thinking individual. Adds media critic Robert McChesney, in the *Boston Review*: “The American media system is spinning out of control in a hyper-commercialized frenzy. Fewer than ten transnational media conglomerates dominate much of our media” (Boston Review Summer 1998).

In their book *Propaganda and Persuasion* Jowett and O'Donnell contend that advertising is clearly an element of the propaganda and persuasion that are used to shape opinion and formulate culture. If one wants to control a society, it is best done implicitly, by creating cultural trends and marketing a certain ethic, a certain attitude at the target audience. “There is little doubt,” they write, “that under any definition of propaganda, the practice of advertising would have to be included.”

How exactly does the creation of this affable slob, this interminable teenager help subvert culture? Quite simply, the government and the large multi-national corporations that run our country do not want people to be politically active. Where there is critical thought and reflective observation, there is much more risk that the inherent injustices in our nation will be revealed and combated. During the 2003 War in Iraq, it was virtually impossible to find a majority of men, especially twenty to twenty-five, who opposed the war. With the long legacy of the gritty soldier forever reverberating through their consciousnesses and reinforcing the ethic of the good fight, a clear majority of men supported both President Bush and the Iraq

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war. Of course, the war was a profitable endeavor for corporations that wanted access to oil and that sought contracts to either destroy or rebuild the nation, so media was careful in presenting a biased, pro-combat perspective in the early days of the conflict. According to McChesney and Nichols, writing in *The Nation*, CNN chief Walter Isaacson distributed a memo effectively instructing the network's domestic newscasts to be sugarcoated in order to maintain popular support for the President and his war" (*Nation*, December 20, 2001). This was only compounded by Dan Rather's declaration that he would support the President during the conflict. "George Bush is the President...he wants me to line up, just tell me where." Indeed, support for the war—as support for a certain lifestyle—was produced and advertised on various media outlets.

While news stations equated support for the war with patriotism, advertisers sold cars and clothing with the caveat that it was good to spend money during a weak economy so as to support the American cause. And, of course, we cannot forget the omnipresence of the recruiting commercial and the romantic image of the soldier, going off and fighting for a noble cause. It was media manipulation at its best, with poor, disaffected soldiers being recruited to fight so that corporations could expand their reach into Iraq.

Going to the Movies

It is equally easy to understand the pro-military character of the male in looking at the way cinema manipulates and molds the profile of the real man. At the movies, one would be hard pressed to find a leading man—and most movies are created around men—who is not aggressive, war-like, terse, and physical. The mantra in Hollywood is to shoot first and ask questions later, leading to glittering one-liners

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and colorfully choreographed scenes of carnage. Decades ago, the male was raised on a steady diet of Clint Eastwood, Charles Bronson, Lorne Green, Alan Ladd, and, of course, John Wayne. Who of us who grew up in the late 60s and early 70s, can forget the prominence of the private detective or the stoic cowboy, where men work to expunge evil from the world through dazzling gun and fist fights. There was Clint Eastwood inviting a criminal to “make his day,” while John Wayne charges into the fray with a simple curse and a gun in each hand. Alan Ladd, about whom I will discuss more later, enters the movie *Shane*, as a solitary loner, someone who has no future and only his gun and good looks to work as assets. And yet, after befriending a family, he uses his gun and fists to eliminate the imperious forces that hold power over the land and allow it to be settled by homesteaders.

In each instance, men are subjected to a model of manhood that is stark in its elemental components. Whether we speak of John Wayne, Eastwood, Ladd, or a cadre of other heroes, we see that each speaks infrequently and is quick in using physical force to accomplish tasks. In fact, it is John Wayne's earthy, unadorned courage—his gritty no-nonsense persona that probably makes him such a mythic character in the American mind. Wayne, like all action heroes, speaks in absolute terms, is good with a gun, fights well and often, and has little to say about society or government. In *Chisum*, one of his later movies, Wayne lives as a bachelor, unable to maintain a relationship because of his hard life. When his niece visits Wayne's character, we discover that he has existed as a mythic conqueror, someone who came to the land and fought the Indians, outlaws, and the land itself to become the Western king that he is. *Chisum* has earned admiration for his willingness to fight and eliminate all that stands in his way. Throughout the movie, his character fights often,

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never once being able to count on the government or the law to assist him in finding real justice.

In many intriguing ways, the Western model established for America began with James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* and the other Leatherstocking Tales which followed. In each, we are introduced to Hawkeye, the classic lonesome hero, the man on a horse, with only a gun at his side, someone who eschews the fancy adornments of European society and who lives close to the land. Following in Hawkeye's wake was Alan Ladd's character in *Shane*, who uses violence to destroy all that stands in his way. In writing of *Shane* and *Hawkeye*, Sardar and Davies suggest that in these two characters "we have all of the essential elements of America's manifest destiny" (176). "Ever since Cooper," they write later, "the western has been central to the growth of American popular culture, a mainstay of its forms of popular entertainment, a genre that provides the location for self-reflection on America's history" (177).

One could add, of course, that the western has been integral in the growth of the boy as he grew into a man, as he donned cowboy boots and holsters, and considered Billy the Kid or Wyatt Earp as his hero and role model. "There are some things a man just can't walk away from," says Wayne in *Stagecoach*. Such a mentality captures the consummate man yesterday and today. There are things to be done and they will be accomplished with fists, with guns, and without the rumination that is needed in a civilized society. "It is this American propensity to eulogize violence and not to contemplate its human cost, not to empathize with the human experience of consequences of violence, that strikes fear and enmity into the hearts of people the world over," (186) add Davies and Sardar. It is the media manufactured male that has controlled the American government and used it to live the dangerous romance of the Western, of the intrepid warrior who combats evil.

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Today, it is interesting to note, a new generation of boys are celebrating the movies of a new set of Western cowboys, a new collection of action heroes who practice the same violence of John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. In Arnold Schwarzenegger, twenty-first century boys are celebrating the methodical violence of a killer who kills with the same indifference and moral absolutes that graced the people before him. Today, when watching a Schwarzenegger film, boys are given a model hero who is either literally or figuratively a killing machine. In *Terminator*, Schwarzenegger plays a machine that has come to kill a little boy, who will one day be a leader in a future war between two factions. Throughout the movie, he causes mayhem in spectacular scenes of carnage, dropping memorable lines like, "I'll be back" and "Hasta La Vista, Baby." Radiating from the film—and others that come later—is the curious American mixture of violence and fun. It is hard not to feel a strange sort of trepidation and admiration for the killing machine, as he operates in a leather jacket and sun glasses, plowing through police stations and wielding guns and other weapons.

Much like the cowboy before him, Schwarzenegger has little to say and is adroit at killing as a way to solve problems. Indeed, as a machine, he has little nuances in his persona, which is emblematic of the men who come to town and kill as their objective. When some terrorists kidnap his daughter in *Commando*, Schwarzenegger again becomes a killing machine, moving Rambo-like through a population of soldiers and combatants until he wins the safety of his daughter. Through much of the film, he engages in colorful and even humorous killing scenes, cracking a joke before and after he drops a villain from a cliff. "I had to let him go," he tells his friend after she asks what happened. And, of course, one can never forget Clint Eastwood's preacher in the movie *Pale Rider*. In it, Eastwood is as enigmatic as Schwarzenegger's

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machine. After riding into town and saving a miner from a beating, he proceeds to befriend the community of miners and eventually—and without explication—challenges the entire power of the town, killing one bully after another until the miners are free to live without fear. And of course, after the killing is completed, Eastwood rides away in as enigmatic a style as when he came. No talk and little cogitation that might detract from his violent character.

Radiating from the commercial world of media—from magazines, ads, T.V. commercials, and most movies—is a standard for men that is easy to identify and emulate. It is quintessentially undemocratic in its desire to produce a generation of men who are averse to intellect, who exalt violence, and who favor the truculent over the contemplative. More importantly, it is critical to understand that this depiction of the American male is not a mistake. It did not materialize as a result of error or coincidence. Rather, the careful construction of the ideal American male is very much the brain child of corporate America and is designed to control that male by dictating to him how to live and what values he should exult.

“An alternative conception of democracy,” writes Noam Chomsky, “is that the public must be barred from managing of their own affairs and the means of information must be narrowly and rigidly controlled” (6). For Chomsky, it is necessary for information and entertainment to be given to the public in ways that will shape certain actions and attitudes. Corporations don’t want America to be active politically. They don’t want Americans to scrutinize their destruction of the environment, their exploitation of workers, their presence in the execution of a questionable war like the one with Iraq. “As I mentioned earlier,” writes Chomsky, “they don’t want decision-makers and participants; they want a passive, obedient population of consumers and political spectators—a community of people who are so atomized and isolated that they