

## Book Reviews

Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

Among historians of the civil rights movement, how one narrates a story does matter, and Steve Estes is certainly aware of methodological concerns within existing scholarship. For Estes, absent in current literature is attention to the role of manhood, especially how it informed the politics of race in the civil rights movement. *I Am a Man!* takes up this question to chronicle the interplay of race and manhood in the struggle for Black freedom and white opposition to civil rights from the years surrounding World War II to the early 1970s. The central argument of this book is that the interconnectedness of Black men's struggle for manhood and citizenship challenged and redefined racial and gender identities on both sides of the colour line, ultimately transforming the course of events in US history. In a broad sweeping narrative, Estes offers some insights into the gender dynamics within the civil rights movement. However, he never fully recasts the story in a way that pushes the field to a new direction.

The book covers numerous familiar events and developments in the civil rights movement to explore the shaping power of race and manhood, as well as the limitations and possibilities of Black manhood. His analysis of the Black experience during the World War II period, for instance, shows just how the Black Americans' struggle for manhood and white Americans' determination to make Blacks less than men were inseparable and at the centre of the debate over citizenship. The irony was that for whites the war heightened the difficulty of denying manhood to Black men since they performed the manly responsibility of citizen soldiers, albeit within segregated units. Estes also explores the activism of the Citizens' Councils in the South to explain how the struggle over citizenship ensued around the question of manhood throughout the 1950s. Whites continuously reproduced the image of Black men as an immediate danger to white women and the southern way of life to deny Black manhood and full citizenship to Black people. Interestingly, the interaction between race and manhood figured in the Citizens' Councils' criticisms of moderate southern whites as well: these men were characterized as 'women' unfit to defend southern white honour (48). The demonization and feminization of supposed threats shaped southern white men's resistance to integration.

*I Am a Man!* also turns to the analysis of the function of Black manhood as a social force. Central to Estes's analysis is that the nexus of race and manhood produced an impetus for political transformation and solidarity within the Black freedom movements. For instance, the Black participants of the Mississippi freedom movement, as well as white male and female volunteers, helped create what he calls the "militant new models of manhood" that "avoided many of the

traditional trappings of manhood that rested on power and domination” (62). This model of manhood transformed the gender identities of men and women across the colour line, as they navigated the volatile politics of race and sex and struggled with the presence of male chauvinism within the movement’s culture. Estes also explores how the militant models of Black manhood enabled the space of Black resistance to become productive for a nationalist politics. Both Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X, for instance, embraced traditional gender roles to restore patriarchy and reclaim Black manhood as a basis of the Nation of Islam’s struggle for racial solidarity and separation. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense also operated with the militant model of manhood informed by heterosexual and patriarchal values. At times, such a politics narrowed the scope of their localized projects of self-determination and community control; some openly displayed their repulsion toward homosexuality and denigrated femininity as a hindrance to Black liberation. The Panthers, however, performed militant masculinity through Survival Programs, such as free breakfast programs, free health care clinics, and free transportation services for prisoners’ families.

Although the militant model of Black manhood functioned in contradictory ways, Estes contends that it also produced “new possibilities for working-class black men, black youth, and others to define their own identities” (132). Such was the case during the Memphis sanitation workers’ strike. What is most notable in his analysis is the role of the Black youth group called the Invaders. Convinced that the non-violent revolution led by Dr. King lacked necessary virility to materialize Black freedom, young Black men called for the Black revolution. They saw a willingness to fight the white power structure as an ultimate proof of manhood and the only path toward human liberation. The dynamics of race and gender opened up a political space through which the young and old, as well as the middle-class and poor within the Memphis Black community debated what it meant to be men and citizens.

However, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black manhood had come to be placed on trial as representative of urban problems. The strong influence of Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (1965) in American political culture reveals another side of the connection between race and manhood in the civil rights movement. In the wake of working-class Black people’s revolt against institutional violence and structural inequality in cities across the United States, policymakers and social scientists began developing strategies to solve what they defined as the crisis of urban Black America. According to these critics, if Black men assumed their proper role as patriarchs, the problems in inner-city Black communities, such as poverty, joblessness among Black men, welfare dependency among Black women, and the high rate of illegitimate births, would be mitigated. Estes’s analysis demonstrates that the Moynihan report did cement the ideological foundation of

white backlash that led to cutbacks in federal funding for social welfare programs, health care, and education during the Reagan/Bush era.

Estes carries his analysis to the Million Man March, the Promise Keepers, and one of the most important cultural and artistic developments within the Black community, Hip Hop, to show the shaping power and limitations of Black manhood in contemporary society. However ambitious this book is, *I Am a Man!* fails to explain the gender dynamics in times of racial crisis and transformation. Missing from his analysis is a conceptual framework. Nowhere does one find a rigorous theoretical and methodological treatment of gender, especially as it relates to the question of power. Estes never theorizes gender as a process that is not only flexible and historically contingent but also capable of producing possibilities for a new politics and cultural formation within the Black freedom struggle. He also does not clarify gender as a relational category, although his analysis throughout reveals not only how men and women on both sides of the colour line related to each other but also how the gender identities of Black men and women were defined across class and generational differences within Black communities.

These theoretical and methodological concerns do matter since this book's objective is ostensibly to recast the familiar story of the struggle for Black freedom in a new way. Instead, Estes seems to be more concerned with establishing the movement's narrative in a seamless fashion in order to show how the interplay of race and manhood shaped the course of historical and political developments during the civil rights movement era. To this end, he relies on the traditional chronology of the civil rights movement, making sure that the transition from one chapter to another follows this timeline. The result, however, is that the manner in which the story is told is contrived and ultimately underplays the complexities of gender identity formations. If Estes had shown theoretical persistence and established methodological orientations, the book would not read like a typical textbook full of the familiar events, images, and dramas.

Yuichiro Onishi—Borough of Manhattan Community College, The City University of New York

**Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis; 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).**

Matt Houlbrook begins his history of male homosexual life in mid-century London with the story of Cyril. Cyril moved to London in 1932 and quickly found his way around town, frequenting clubs like the Caravan, in a basement of Endell Street, where he made friends and embarked on a series of sexual affairs. Known as 'The Countess,' he was dancing in the Caravan when it was