

## AMERICAN DREAMS AND CREATIONS

“Please imagine that the drum method of speech is so exquisite that Africans can, without recourse to words, recite proverbs, record history, and send long messages. The drum is to West African society what the book is to literate society.”

Shanghai Blues,  
william zinsser

I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

I Have a Dream,  
martin luther king, jr.

If it’s true that a woman didn’t design Barbie, you don’t know how much saner that makes me feel. Of course, that doesn’t ameliorate the damage. There are millions of women who are subliminally sure that a thirty-nine-inch bust and a twenty-three-inch waist are the epitome of lovability. Could this account for the popularity of breast implant surgery?

Our Barbies, Ourselves,  
emily prager

One of the best ways to understand a people is to know what makes them laugh. Laughter encompasses the limits of the soul. In humor, life is redefined and accepted. Irony and satire provide much keener insights into a group’s collective psyche and values than do years of research.

It has always been a great disappointment to Indian people that the humorous side of Indian life has not been mentioned by professed experts on Indian Affairs. Rather the image of the granite-faced grunting redskin has been perpetuated by American mythology.

Indian Humor,  
vine deloria, jr.

WILLIAM ZINSSER

## Shanghai Blues

Born in New York in 1922 and educated at Princeton University, William Zinsser worked for the New York Herald Tribune *from 1947 to 1959 as a features editor, drama editor, film critic, and editorialist. From 1971 to 1979, Zinsser taught at Yale University. Drawing on both his teaching and writing experiences, he has written, among other books, On Writing Well and Writing with a Word Processor. Currently a freelance writer, Zinsser contributes regularly to numerous publications.*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Most of us have at least one area in which we have talent (or would very much like to have talent). Imagine that you have become a world-renowned celebrity in the art of your choice. Write a mini-autobiography of yourself, concentrating on how you became so

accomplished in this area. What factors influenced and motivated you? Did you ever get discouraged? Did anyone serve as your inspiration? What advice do you have for others who may want to follow in your footsteps?

2.

What internal qualities does a person need in order to be outstanding at something? What external factors contribute to a person's success? Use specific examples to accompany your explanation.

3.

If you could have dinner with three famous artists (from the field or fields of your choice), whom would you invite and why? What might you learn from each of these people?

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Jazz came to China for the first time on the afternoon of June 2nd, when the American bassist and French-horn player Willie Ruff introduced himself and his partner, the pianist Dwiki Mitchell, to several hundred students and professors who were crowded into a large room at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. The professors and the students were all expectant, without knowing quite what to expect. They knew only that they were about to hear the first American jazz concert ever presented to the Chinese. Probably they were not surprised to find that the two musicians were black, though black Americans are a rarity in the People's Republic. What they undoubtedly didn't expect was that Ruff would talk to them in Chinese, and when he began they murmured with delight.

Ruff is a lithe, dapper man of fifty who takes visible pleasure in sharing his enthusiasms, and it was obvious that there was no place he would rather have been than in China's oldest conservatory, bringing the music of his people to still another country deprived of that commodity. In 1959, he and Mitchell—who have played together as the Mitchell-Ruff Duo for twenty-six years—introduced jazz to the Soviet Union, and for that occasion Ruff taught himself Russian, his seventh language. In 1979, he hit on the idea of making a similar trip to China, and he began taking intensive courses in Chinese at Yale, where he is a professor of both music and Afro-American studies. By last winter, he felt he was fluent enough in Mandarin to make the trip.

Now Ruff stood at the front of the room, holding several sheets of paper on which he had written, in Chinese characters, what he wanted to tell his listeners about the origins of jazz. He looked somewhat like an Oriental sage himself. "In the last three hundred and fifty years, black people in America have created a music that is a rich contribution to Western culture," he began. "Of course, three hundred and fifty years, compared to the long and distinguished history of Chinese music seems like only a moment. But please remember that the music of American black people is an amalgam whose roots are deep in African history, and that it has also taken many characteristics from the music of Europe." Ruff has an amiable voice, and as he spoke the men and women in the room were attentive but relaxed—not an audience straining to decipher a foreigner's accent. "In Africa, the drum is the most important musical instrument," Ruff went on. "But to me the fascinating thing is that the people also use their drums to talk. Please imagine that the drum method of speech is so exquisite that Africans can, without recourse to words, recite proverbs, record history, and send long messages. The drum is to West African society what the book is to literate society."

I wondered what the audience would make of that. Not only was China the oldest of literate societies; we were in the one Asian city that was encrusted with Western thought as transmitted in books, in journals, and in musical notation. Even the architecture of Shanghai was a patchwork of Western shapes—a residue of the days when the city had a huge foreign population and was divided into districts that were controlled by different European countries. At the conservatory, we were in the former French concession, and its main building was in a red brick French Provincial style, with a sloping red tile roof and a porte cochère. Another French-style building housed the conservatory's library of a hundred thousand books about music. Newer buildings served as classrooms and practice rooms, and the music that eddied out of the windows was the dreary fare of Western academic rigor: vocal scales endlessly rising, piano arpeggios repeated until they were mastered, chamber groups starting and stopping and starting again. We could have been in Vienna of the nineties or Paris of the twenties. In any case, we were a long way from Africa. And we were farther still from music created spontaneously.

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“In the seventeenth century, when West Africans were captured and brought to America as slaves, they brought their drums with them,” Ruff continued. “But the slave-owners were afraid of the drum because it was so potent; it could be used to incite the slaves to revolt. So they outlawed the drum. This very shrewd law had a tremendous effect on the development of black people's music. Our ancestors had to develop a variety of drum substitutes. One of them, for example, was tap dancing—I'm sure you've all heard of that. Now I'd like to show you another drum substitute that you probably don't know about—one that uses the hands and the body to make rhythm. It's called hambone.” There was no translating “hambone” into Mandarin, but Ruff quickly had an intricate rhythm going to demonstrate, slapping him-self with the palms of his hands and smacking his open mouth to create a series of resonating pops. Applause greeted this proof that the body could be its own drum.

“By the time jazz started to develop, all African instruments in America had disappeared,” Ruff went on. “So jazz borrowed the instruments of Western music, like the ones that we're playing here today.” He went over to his bass and showed how he used it as a percussion instrument by picking the strings with his fingers instead of playing them with a bow. “Only this morning,” he said, “I gave a lesson to your distinguished professor of bass, and he is already *very good*.”

Moving on from rhythm to terrain more familiar to his listeners, Ruff pointed out that jazz took its structural elements from European harmony. “Mr. Mitchell will now give you an example of the music that American slaves found in the Christian churches—Protestant hymns that had been brought from Europe,” he said. “Slaves were encouraged to embrace Christianity and to use its music. Please listen.” Mitchell played an old Protestant hymn. “The slaves adopted these harmonized melodies and transformed them into their own, very emotional spirituals,” Ruff said when Mitchell had finished. “Mr. Mitchell and I will sing you a famous Negro spiritual from the days of slavery. It's called ‘My Lord, What a Morning.’” With Mitchell playing a joyful accompaniment, the two men sang five or six choruses of the lovely old song, Mitchell carrying the melody in his deep voice, Ruff taking the higher, second part. The moment, musically beautiful, had an edge of faraway sadness. I couldn't help thinking of another alien culture onto which the

Protestant hymns of Europe had once been strenuously grafted. It was just beyond the conservatory gates.

“Mr. Mitchell will now show you how the piano can be used as a substitute for the instruments of the orchestra,” Ruff said. “Please notice that he uses his left hand to play the bass and also to make his rhythm section. Later, he will use his right hand to play the main melody and to fill in the harmony. This style is called ragtime.” Mitchell struck up a jaunty rag. The students perked up at the playful pattern of notes. Ruff looked out at his class and beamed. The teacher in him was beginning to slip away; the musician in him was telling him to start the concert.

Mitchell and Ruff met in 1947, when they were servicemen at Lockbourne Air Force Base, outside Columbus, Ohio. Mitchell, then seventeen and a pianist in the unit band, needed an accompanist, and he gave the newly arrived Ruff, a sixteen-year-old French-horn player, a crash course in playing the bass. Thus the duo was unofficially born. When they were discharged, they followed separate paths and lost contact. Mitchell went to the Philadelphia Musical Academy. Ruff went to the Yale School of Music, where he studied with Paul Hindemith. Venturing out with his master’s degree in 1954, he was told that no American symphony orchestra would hire a black musician, and he accepted an offer to join the Tel Aviv Symphony as first French horn. Shortly before he was to leave, he happened to turn his television set on to “The Ed Sullivan Show.” Lionel Hampton’s orchestra was playing, and as the camera panned over to the piano Ruff saw a familiar figure at the keyboard. Mitchell, it turned out, had been Hampton’s pianist for the past two years. Ruff telephoned him backstage at the CBS studio. Mitchell hinted of imminent vacancies in the brass section. A few days later, Israel lost—and Hampton got—a superb French horn.

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The Mitchell-Ruff Duo—“the oldest continuous group in jazz without personnel changes,” Ruff says—was formed in 1955, when the two men left Hampton and struck out on their own. They were booked regularly by the major night clubs as the second act with the great bands of the day: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis. “They were our mentors,” Ruff recalls. “They’d play a set and then we’d play a set and they’d hang around and tell us what we could be doing better. We learned everything from those men. Count Basie’s band raised us. In 1956, they were the hottest band in the country—they were the most expensive band and we were the cheapest—and we sold out Birdland every night. One evening, Miles Davis brought Billie Holiday in to hear us, and we just about fell through the floor. We were still just kids.”

Meanwhile, they caught the attention of another set of patrons—a group of older women in New York who had formed an organization called Young Audiences to introduce elementary- and high-school students to chamber music. For teachers, the women chose young professionals who could communicate with words as well as with music, and Mitchell and Ruff were the first people they selected to teach jazz. Ruff recalls, “It was done under the supervision of the founders—Mrs. Lionello Perera, a great patron of music, and Mrs. Edgar Leventritt, who started the Leventritt Competition—and Nina Collier and several other ladies who sat on the board. They taught us definite techniques, such as how to catch the attention of children, and they also gave us lessons in grooming and enunciation and conduct. They were very stern and really quite unpleasant, but instructive. Everything they told us turned out to be true.”

Armed with these graces, Mitchell and Ruff hit the road for Young Audiences, often giving seven or eight performances a day, going from school to school, first in New York and later in Boston, Baltimore, and San Francisco. They did a tour of Indian schools in New Mexico. The duo alternated these forays with its stands in Manhattan clubs. Then, in 1959, it went to Russia. Ruff himself arranged the trip with Soviet officials after the State Department, which had been trying for two years to get Louis Armstrong into the Soviet Union, declined to help. In Russia, the two Americans found a thirst for jazz that surprised even them; when they left Moscow, nine hundred people came to the station to see them off. Mitchell, in turn, still remembers being moved by Russian songs that resembled spirituals he had heard in the black churches of his boyhood. Whether a scholar could find any such link doesn't matter to him; in music, he operates on an emotional level that has no need for evidence. "I felt a mysterious bond between their people and my people," he says. "I think I connected with their suffering." Not long after that trip, the house of jazz began to crumble. Television was the new medium and rock the new musical message. "Night clubs started closing in the very early sixties," Ruff recalls. "The number of jazz performers who quit, died, or just disappeared was astounding. Many of them moved to Europe. Three of the greatest rhythm players—Oscar Pettiford, Bud Powell, and Kenny Clarke—had been living in Paris and playing for peanuts because they couldn't find any work in the United States. How devastating it was for us to play in Europe—as we did quite a bit then—and see so many of these great men so reduced!"

Mitchell and Ruff survived because of their teaching bent. They caught the attention of two venerable booking agencies, Pryor-Menz and Alkahest, that wanted a young act to give concerts for college audiences and also explain the music, and thereby found the format—sixty or seventy concerts a year, mainly at colleges—that has been their principal source of income to this day.

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A new tool came their way in 1967, when CBS Television sent them to Brazil to make a one-hour film tracing the African roots of Brazilian music. Ruff recognized the value of film as a teaching device, went back to college to study film, and has since visited Bali, Senegal, and the pygmies of the Central African Republic to make films about the drum music and language of those societies. He always came back to Yale (where he and I lived in the same college) elated by new rhythmical affinities that he had found among diverse cultures and among seemingly unrelated forms of life. His seminars on rhythm began to make startling connections as he brought Yale professors into them from such disciplines as neurology, limnology, geology, art, English, astronomy, physiology, and physics. The professors, in fact, became almost as elated as Ruff. We flew to Shanghai on a Chinese 747—Ruff walked up and down the aisles trying out his Chinese on the passengers—and the next day we called on Professor Tan Shu-chen, deputy director of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, who was, so far, our only contact. Two years ago, Ruff had sought the sponsorship of the Center for United States–China Arts Exchange, the group that has been sending American musicians to China, but he got no response. Ruff felt that no matter how many great American artists went to China—Isaac Stern, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Roberta Peters—the music that they played and sang would be European music. The indigenous music of America was jazz, and the Chinese had never heard it in a live performance. (When Ruff asked a Chinese man on the plane

whether his people were familiar with jazz, he said, “Oh, yes, we know Stephen Foster very well.”) Lacking official support, Ruff decided to go anyway. He booked himself and Mitchell on a two-week tour to Shanghai and Peking, the two cities that had major conservatories, and then went looking for money. He got a grant from Coca-Cola that would cover their expenses and the costs of filming their visit.

To have Professor Tan as our host was all that we could have asked. He had come to New York last winter in connection with the film “From Mao to Mozart—Isaac Stern in China,” in which he describes his imprisonment during China’s Cultural Revolution. Ruff invited him to visit the Yale School of Music, in the long-range hope of fostering some kind of collaboration that would help both institutions—an exchange of teachers or students or manuscripts between Yale and the Shanghai Conservatory, for instance. While Professor Tan was at Yale, he attended a class in which Ruff and Mitchell were playing, and he invited them, in turn, to give a concert at the conservatory. That was all that a born improviser needed to hear. Now we were at the conservatory, and Professor Tan was showing us around. He had arranged the jazz concert for the next afternoon. The Shanghai Conservatory of Music, which was founded in 1927, and which prides itself on being part of the cultural conscience of China, has six hundred and fifty students—the youngest are eight years old—and three hundred teachers. Most of the students live on the campus. Quite a few are from Shanghai, but a large number are recruited from all over China by faculty members, who hold regional auditions. The conservatory has five departments of instruction—piano; voice; strings and winds; composing and conducting; and traditional Chinese instruments—and two of musicology. One of these is a musical-research institute. The other, devoted to Chinese traditional and folk music, was recently formed to broaden the conservatory’s involvement with the heritage of its own country. But the tilt is definitely Westward. Most of the conservatory’s original teachers were Europeans, and many of its graduates have lived in the West and won recognition there. The curriculum, from what I could hear of it, was rooted in Europe: Bach, Scarlatti, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Chopin, Verdi. The biggest class that we saw consisted of a forty-piece student orchestra, led by a student conductor, playing Dvořák’s Cello Concerto.

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Professor Tan was a product of this tradition—and was one of its first casualties when the Cultural Revolution struck. He was born in 1907, and as a boy he studied violin privately with Dutch and Italian teachers who were living in China. When he joined the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, in 1927, he was its first Chinese member. He recalls the conductor, an Italian named Mario Paci, as a man of such fierce temper that he constantly broke his baton. Thus he learned at an early age that one of the liveliest currents running through Western music is high emotion among its practitioners.

Professor Tan turned to teaching in 1929—at one point, he was teaching violin at six different colleges in Shanghai—and rejoined the symphony in 1937. By that time, it had four Chinese members; obviously, Shanghai was still a creature of the West. But that era would soon come to an end. During the Second World War, the Japanese occupied Shanghai, foreigners were interned in concentration camps, and the colonizing grip of the West was finally broken.

It was no time or place for a musician to make a living—“One month’s salary would buy one shoe,” Professor Tan recalled—and, seeking a more practical trade, he went to

architecture school and earned his degree. He returned to music after the war, however, joining the Shanghai Conservatory in 1947, and becoming its deputy director in 1949, when the Communists came to power in China. The school then began its biggest era of growth. The student body and the faculty were greatly expanded, and European music regained its hold. But the older students were also required to go away and work for three months every year on farms and in factories. “The peasants and workers disliked Western music because it belonged to the rich people,” Professor Tan recalled. “And our students couldn’t practice much, because they met so much criticism. At the conservatory, we never knew where we stood. Periods of criticism would alternate with periods of relaxation. It was an uneasy time. In fact, just before the Cultural Revolution I was thinking of retiring from teaching. I had a sense of a coming storm. We are like animals—we can feel that.”

The storm broke on June 5, 1966. The first winds of the Cultural Revolution hit the conservatory from within. “On the first day, posters were put up and meetings were held denouncing the director, Professor Ho Lu-ting,” Professor Tan said. “The next day, the attack was aimed at me. I was accused of poisoning the minds of the students. My crime was that I was teaching Mozart. I happen to be a blind admirer of European and American people and music and culture, so everything I had been teaching was poison. Bach and Beethoven were poison. And Brahms. And Paganini.

“At first, it was only posters and meetings. Then the conservatory was closed, and much of our music was destroyed. We were beaten every day by students and by young people who came in from outside. Boys of ten or eleven would throw stones at us. They really believed we were bad people—especially any professor who was over forty. The older you were, the worse you were. For a year, more than a hundred of us older teachers were beaten and forced to spend every day shut up together in a closed shed. Then there was a year when we had to do hard labor. Ten professors died from the strain; one of them had a heart attack when a young guard made him run after him for a mile. He just dropped dead at the end. Then came the solitary confinement. Our director was kept in prison, in chains, for five years. I was put in the worst room they could find here—a very small room in the basement, hardly any bigger than my bed. It had no light and no windows, and it was smelly because it was next to a septic tank, and there was nothing to do to pass the time. I was kept there for fourteen months.”

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In 1971, Professor Tan was allowed to go home to live with his family pending the verdict on his “crimes,” but he still had to do physical labor at the conservatory during the day. Needless to say, no Western music was played there. Finally, in 1976, the Gang of Four was overthrown, the professors were declared innocent, and the conservatory was reopened. Professor Tan told me that among the students he readmitted were some who had beaten and tormented him. I said that I could hardly imagine such forbearance. “I didn’t think about that,” he said. “The past is the past.”

Professor Tan is a small, gentle man with white hair and a modest manner. He dresses in the informal work clothes that everybody wears in Shanghai; nobody would take him for one of the city’s cultural eminences. He moves somewhat slowly and wears fairly strong glasses—marks, perhaps, of his long captivity. “The students have made astonishing progress since 1976, because now they can play wholeheartedly,” he told me. “I love being able to teach the violin again. It’s such an enjoyment to hear people who are truly

talented. Yesterday, a girl played the ‘Scottish Fantasy’ of Max Bruch, and although I was supposed to be teaching her, I only sat and listened and never said a word. It was just right.” He was equally pleased by the thought of bringing jazz to his students. “I’ve never seen any jazz musicians in China,” he said. “Nobody here knows anything about jazz. When I heard Mr. Ruff and Mr. Mitchell play at Yale, I realized that it was very important music. I wanted my teachers and my students to hear it. I wanted them to know what real American jazz is like.”

When Mitchell finished his ragtime tune, the audience clapped—apparently glad to hear some of the converging elements that Ruff had talked about earlier. “Now we’re going to give you an example of blues,” Ruff said. “Blues” was another word that didn’t lend itself to Mandarin, and it sounded unusually strung out: “bloooooze.” Ruff continued, “One of the fundamental principles of jazz is form, and blues are a perfect illustration. Blues almost always have a twelve-bar form. This twelve-bar form never changes. It wouldn’t change even if we stayed here and played it all night.” He paused to let this sink in. “But you don’t have to worry—we aren’t going to play it that long.” It was his first joke in Chinese, and it went over well. Mitchell then played an easygoing blues—a classic sample of what came up the river from New Orleans, with a strong left hand ornamented by graceful runs in the right hand. Ruff joined in on bass, and they played several twelve-bar choruses.

After that number, Ruff brought up the matter of improvisation, which he called “the lifeblood of jazz.” He said that when he was young he had worried because his people hadn’t developed from their experience in America a written tradition of opera, like Chinese opera, that chronicled great or romantic events. “But later I stopped worrying, because I saw that the master performers of our musical story—Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and so many others—have enriched our culture with the beauty of what they created spontaneously. Now please listen one more time to the blues form, and count the measures along with me.” He wanted his listeners to count, he said, because the rules of jazz require the improviser, however wild his melodic journeys, to repeat the harmonic changes that went into the first statement of the theme. “After you count with me a few times through, Mr. Mitchell will begin one of his famous improvisations,” Ruff said. Mitchell played a simple blues theme, emphasizing the chord changes, and Ruff counted the twelve bars aloud in English. Mitchell then restated the theme, embroidering it slightly, and this time Ruff counted in Chinese: “*Yi, cr, san, si, wu, liu, qi, ba . . .*” This so delighted the students that they forgot to join him. “I can’t hear you,” Ruff said, teacher-fashion, but they kept quiet and enjoyed his climb up the numerical ladder. Afterward, Mitchell embarked on a series of dazzling improvisations, some constructed of runs like those played by Art Tatum, some built on strong chord progressions (he can move immense chord clusters up and down the keyboard with incredible speed); next, Ruff took a chorus on the bass; then they alternated their improvised flights, moving in twelve-bar segments to an ending that seemed inevitable—as if they had played it a hundred times before.

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Changing the mood, Ruff announced that Mitchell would play “Yesterdays.” Jerome Kern’s plaintive melody is hardly the stuff of traditional jazz, nor was Mitchell’s rendition of it—a treatment of classical intricacy, closer to Rachmaninoff (one of his heroes) than to any jazz pianist. The students applauded with fervor. Staying in a



relatively classical vein, Ruff switched to the French horn, and the two men played Billy Strayhorn's "Lush Life" in a vein that was slow and lyrical, almost like a German lied, and that perhaps surprised the students with its lack of an obvious rhythm.

The next number was one that I didn't recognize. It moved at a bright tempo and had several engaging themes that were brought back by the piano or the French horn—the usual jazzmen's game of statement and response. Twice, Mitchell briefly introduced a contrapuntal motif that was a deliberate imitation of Bach, and each time it drew a ripple of amusement from the professors and the students. It was the first time they had heard a kind of music that they recognized from their own studies.

"That number is called 'Shanghai Blues,'" Ruff said at the end. "We just made it up."

The audience buzzed with amazement and pleasure.

I had been watching the professors and the students closely during the concert. Their faces had the look of people watching the slow approach of some great natural force—a tornado or a tidal wave. They had been listening to music that their experience had not prepared them to understand. Two black men were playing long stretches of music without resorting to any printed notes. Yet they obviously hadn't memorized what they were playing; their music took unexpected turns, seemingly at the whim of the musicians, straying all over the keyboard and all over the landscape of Western tonality.

Nevertheless, there was order. Themes that had been abandoned came back in different clothes. If the key changed, as it frequently did, the two men were always in the same key. Often there was a playfulness between the two instruments, and always there was rapport. But if the two players were exchanging any signals, the message was too quick for the untrained eye.

I could tell that the music was holding the Chinese listeners in a strong grip. Their minds seemed to be fully engaged. Their bodies, however, were not. Only three pairs of feet in the whole room were tapping—Ruff's, Mitchell's, and mine. Perhaps this was a Chinese characteristic, this stillness of listening. Moreover, the music wasn't easy. It never again approached the overt syncopation of the ragtime that Mitchell had played early in the program; that was where the essential gaiety of jazz had been most accessible. Nor did it have the flat-out gusto that an earlier generation of black musicians might have brought to China—the thumping rhythms and simpler harmonies of a James P. Johnson or a Fats Waller. It was not that Mitchell and Ruff were playing jazz that was pedantic or sedate. On the contrary, I have seldom heard Mitchell play with more exuberant shifts of energy and mood. But the music was full of subtleties; even a Westerner accustomed to jazz would have been charmed by its intelligence and wit. I had to remind myself that the Chinese had heard no Western music of any kind from 1966 to 1976. A twenty-one-year-old student in the audience, for instance, would have begun to listen to composers like Mozart and Brahms only within the past five years. The jazz that he was hearing now was not so different as to be a whole new branch of music. Mitchell was clearly grounded in Bach and Chopin; Ruff's French horn had echoes of all the classical works—Debussy's "Rêverie," Ravel's "Pavane"—in which that instrument has such uncanny power to move us.

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After "Shanghai Blues," Ruff asked for questions.

"Where do people go to study jazz in America?" a student wanted to know. "What kind of courses do they take?"

Ruff explained that jazz courses, where they existed at all, would be part of a broad college curriculum that included, say, languages and history and physics. “But, really, jazz isn’t learned in universities or conservatories,” he said. “It’s music that is passed on by older musicians to those of us who are younger.”

It was not a helpful answer. What kind of subject didn’t have its own academy? A shyness settled over the room, though the students seemed full of curiosity. Professor Tan got up and stood next to Ruff. “I urge you to ask questions,” he said. “I can assure you that jazz has many principles that apply to your studies here. In fact, I have many questions myself.”

An old professor stood up and asked, “When you created the ‘Shanghai Blues’ just now, did you have a form for it, or a logical plan?”

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“I just started tapping my foot,” Ruff replied, tapping his foot to reconstruct the moment. “And then I started to play the first thought that came into my mind with the horn. And Mitchell heard it. And he answered. And after that we heard and answered, heard and answered, heard and answered.”

The old professor said, “But how can you ever play it again?”

“We never can,” Ruff replied.

“That is beyond our imagination,” the professor said. “Our students here play a piece a hundred times, or two hundred times, to get it exactly right. You play something once—something very beautiful—and then you just throw it away.”

Now the questions tumbled out. What was most on the students’ minds quickly became clear: it was the mystery of improvisation. (The Chinese don’t even have a word for improvisation of this kind; Ruff translated it as “something created during the process of delivery.”) All the questions poked at this central riddle—“Could a Chinese person improvise?” and “Could two strangers improvise together?” and “How can you compose at such speed?”—and during this period Ruff took one question and turned it into a moment that stood us all on our ear.

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Was it really possible, a student wanted to know, to improvise on any tune at all—even one that the musicians had never heard before?

Ruff’s reply was casual. “I would like to invite one of the pianists here to play a short traditional Chinese melody that I’m sure we would not know, and we will make a new piece based on that,” he said.

The room erupted in oohs and cheers. I caught a look on Mitchell’s face that said, “This time you’ve gone too far.” The students began to call the name of the young man they wanted to have play. When they found him in the crowd, he was so diffident that he got down on the floor to keep from being dragged out. But his friends dragged him out anyway, and, regaining his aplomb, he walked to the piano and sat down with the formality of a concert artist. He was about twenty-two. Mitchell stood to one side, looking grave.

The young man played his melody beautifully and with great feeling. It seemed to be his own composition, unknown to the other people. It began with four chords of distinctively Chinese structure, moved down the scale in a stately progression, paused, turned itself around with a transitional figure of lighter weight, and then started back up, never repeating itself and finally resolving the theme with a suspended chord that was

satisfying because it was so unexpected. It was a perfect small piece, about fourteen bars long. The student walked back to his seat, and Mitchell went back to the piano. The room grew quiet.

Mitchell's huge hands hovered briefly over the keys, and then the young man's melody came back to him. It was in the same key; it had the same chords, slightly embellished near the end; and, best of all, it had the same mood. Having stated the theme, Mitchell broadened it the second time, giving it a certain majesty, coloring the student's chords with dissonances that were entirely apt. He gave the Chinese chords a jazz texture but still preserved their mood. Then Ruff joined him on his bass, and they took the melody through a number of variations, Mitchell giving it a whole series of new lives but never losing its integrity. I listened to his feat with growing excitement. For me, it was the climax of years of marvelling at his ear and at his sensitivity to the material at hand. The students were equally elated and astonished. For them, it was the ultimate proof—because it touched their own heritage—that for a jazz improviser no point of departure is alien.

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After that number, a few more questions were asked, and Mitchell and Ruff concluded with a Gershwin medley from "Porgy and Bess" and a genial rendition of "My Old Flame." Professor Tan thanked the two men and formally ended the concert. Then he went over to Mitchell and took his hands in his own. "You are an artist," he said. Later, I told Mitchell that I thought Ruff had given him an unduly nervous moment when he invited the students to supply a melody.

"Well, naturally I was nervous, because I didn't have any idea what to expect," he said. "But, you know, that boy phrased his piece *perfectly*. The minute he started to play, I got his emotions. I understood exactly what he was feeling, and the rest was easy. The notes and the chords just fell into place."

#### *Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Reread Ruff's opening speech to his Chinese audience (paragraph 3). What do you learn that you never knew before? If you were a member of the audience, would you want Ruff to continue on? Why or why not?

2.

Ruff explains that in America, so powerful was the drum believed to be that its use was actually banned by whites who feared their slaves' responses to the drumbeat. What did masters fear from the drum? In your opinion, were their fears justified? Can music inspire people to act in ways they would not act if the music were absent? Explain.

3.

Zinsser gives a solid explanation of how Mitchell and Ruff learned jazz. Who were their teachers, and what influences were instrumental in their success as artists?

4.

Zinsser also explains that besides being gifted musicians, both Ruff and Mitchell were excellent teachers of music. What do you think—should a teacher in a certain discipline also be an accomplished practitioner in that field?

5.  
Why does Ruff decide to go to Shanghai in the first place? What does this reveal about his character? When Tan decides to invite the jazz musicians to the conservatory, what does this action reveal about him?
6.  
Examine Professor Tan's education and his subsequent experience as a teacher and a musician. Can you see any similarities between any of his experiences and those of Mitchell and Ruff? Explain.
7.  
Argue that the Chinese practice of sending students to farms and factories for three months out of the year is either beneficial or detrimental to an educational experience. Do you think a similar program would work here in the United States? Explain.
8.  
Since the Chinese students had been denied Western music of any kind from 1966 to 1976, what types of music and what musicians had they never heard? How might this omission have contributed to the "stillness of listening" on the part of the audience?
9.  
Work on your own definition of *improvisation*. As you develop this definition, explain how Mitchell can invent a song based on the Chinese student's original composition, which he has heard only moments before.
10.  
Compare the traditional ways of learning a musical composition with the jazz improvisational method. Can a person be a true artist while only mastering one of these ways of learning? Explain your answer, relying on the essay and your own experience.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.  
Research one of the great jazz artists who influenced Mitchell and Ruff: Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis. In addition to reading several sources about your artist, listen and respond to several of his works.
2.  
Research traditional Chinese music in order to discover its traditional musical instruments, its composers, and its philosophies.

ELAINE HEDGES

### Quilts and Women's Culture

Elaine Hedges has supported herself as a student and writer by working in post offices, restaurants, libraries, and offices. She earned a doctorate in the history of American civilization from Harvard University and has taught at Harvard, Wellesley, San Francisco State University, and the University of California, Berkeley. Currently, she is professor of English and director of women's studies at Towson State University, Baltimore. Her

publications include *Women Writing and Teaching*, *Land and Imagination: The American Rural Dream*, and *In Her Own Image: Women Working in the Arts*, from which this essay is taken.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

In the nineteenth century, quilting was a common activity that brought many women together. Today, what activity do women participate in together? What equivalent activity do men today participate in together? From your answers, can you draw any conclusions about male and female group interactions?

2.

Most cultures have a tradition of passing items down from generation to generation. If you could have just one item from your grandparents' past (or your parents'), what one item would you choose and why?

3.

If you were living in nineteenth-century America, what do you think your life would be like? Describe one day, from morning until night. What do you like most about living in this time period? What do you miss most about the twentieth century?

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Women's needlework has been a universal form of activity, uniting women of different classes, races, and nations. Until the era of manufactured textiles—very recent, in the long span of history—it has always been necessary for women to sew, to provide the clothing, linens and blankets for their families. And wherever and whenever extra time and energy have allowed, sewing has become “esthetic,” has been an outlet for creativity. Often this has been a creativity which a patriarchal society has officially stifled. Where women have been denied literacy, let alone access to higher education and the professions, their creative aspiration and need might find expression, as it often did for Black women in the pre-Civil War South, for instance, in the making of gardens, or blues songs, or quilts. Alice Walker has eloquently discussed these creative energies and frustrations of Black women in her article “In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,” and she comments on a quilt made one hundred years ago by an anonymous Black woman in Alabama and now hanging in the Smithsonian Museum in Washington. Its maker, as she says, was “an artist who left her mark in the only materials she could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed her to use.”

The origins of quilting are ancient: both the Egyptians and the Chinese quilted, as did the Persians, from whom it was introduced into Europe by the Crusaders. In the United States, from the colonial period through the nineteenth century, quilt making or what is known as “patchwork,” became a highly developed art, a unique female art, and *the* major creative outlet for women. Patchwork, like so much of women's original art, arose out of necessity: in this case the necessity for warmth, in clothing (which was sometimes quilted) and in bed covers, the form the quilt most commonly took. And it arose out of scarcity: there was little cloth in the American colonies in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; what was imported from England and the continent was expensive; and so all scraps and fragments were saved, salvaged from worn-out items, and reused. The activity of quilting consisted of two main stages: designing and sewing the quilt top, which would be exposed on the bed; and doing the actual “quilting,” which consisted of

binding or stitching this finished top layer to a plain bottom layer, with filling or wadding in between. It was this triple thickness which gave warmth.

From the beginning, however, women expended time and care on the making of quilts beyond their utilitarian purpose. Artistry was possible, and was pursued in two areas. First, the quilt top offered nearly limitless possibilities of design and color as one pieced and sewed together small, straightedged bits of fabric to create an overall patterned top known as a “pieced” quilt; or as one “appliquéd,” that is, sewed small pieces or patches of fabric according to some design on to a larger ground fabric. These were the two main kinds of “patchwork.” Second, in the quilting or stitching together of the three layers, fine sewing could be practiced. Small stitches and different, highly complex kinds of stitches were employed, often to create intricate designs of scrolls, flowers or feathers. In Emily Dickinson’s words (Poem 617), “I’ll do seams—a Queen’s endeavor/Would not blush to own.”

The results, as one looks at hundreds and hundreds of quilts, are varied and dazzling—truly a visual feast. There is an esthetic indigenous to quilts, and the more one knows about the craft and the techniques—the possibilities and limitations of various fabrics and ways of cutting them, the geometric intricacies of various designs, the various stitch patterns and color combinations—the more one can appreciate and even marvel at the skill, the sophistication, the inventiveness, the visual daring that quilts display. That women responded to the technical challenge implicit in quilt making, just as a painter might set and solve a technical problem of shading or perspective or design, is apparent when one learns, for instance, of a pieced quilt that contains 30,000 pieces, each inch by inch in size.

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The quilt involved both individual and collective artistry. Usually, an individual woman designed and executed the top layer. The work of quilting together the three layers, however, was a large collective effort. To the “quilting bee” would be invited the best sewers from the community. Quilting bees were usually festive occasions, opportunities to renew and cement friendships, to reestablish social bonds among women otherwise isolated, especially on the western frontier, to exchange news and ideas and to express feelings. Under the stimulus of friendly competition, women vied to do their best sewing, creating art within a context that had a broadly nourishing social function. Where men had the tavern or saloon, the marketplace or the courthouse square for bonding together, women had the quilting bee.

The origins of many quilt stitches and patterns go far back in time, and as an art form, therefore, much of it remains anonymous. It is, in its overall distinguishing features, more representative of a culture or a society than of an individual or any series of individuals. As such, it asserted and conveyed values of continuity, stability and tradition—all useful values in a country of immigrants and of geographic mobility.

Within its broad traditionalism and anonymity, however, variations and distinctions developed. There were regional variations, ethnic or religious variations, and finally, individual variations, in the works of specific quilt makers whose names are known to us. Regional variations would include, for example, what is known as the Baltimore quilt, an appliquéd Friendship quilt of the early nineteenth century with distinctive, recognizable designs, which reached an extremely high level of skill. Ethnic or religious variations would include the quilts of the Amish and of the Moravians; similar to and yet

distinguishable from each other in their color ranges and patterns, these quilts are significantly different from those of other groups. Regionally, too, distinctions were introduced into quilt making through the interesting process of renaming. Ordinarily quilts were given names, usually the name of the basic pattern chosen for the top layer. In the course of time, and with geographical movement within the United States, name changes and small design variations were introduced in response to local needs and to both sectional and national events. Thus, during the Civil War a traditional rose pattern (of which there were many) was modified by the addition of a black patch at its center and renamed the *Radical Rose*, in recognition of the slavery controversy. A chain or loop pattern originally called *Job's Tears*—one of many early pattern names taken from the Bible—was renamed the *Slave Chain* in the early 1820s; by 1840 the same pattern was being called *Texas Tears* in response to new political developments; and after the Civil War it was used to describe *The Rocky Road to Kansas*. Indeed, quilt names provide a capsule version of much nineteenth-century American history, not least the hardships of the western journey. A pattern made of rectangles inside diagonal bands, and known in pre-Revolutionary New England as *Jacob's Ladder*, from the Bible, became in western Kentucky *The Underground Railroad*, and in Mississippi and the prairie states *Wagon Tracks* or the *Trail of the Covered Wagon*. With equal inventiveness women renamed traditional patterns to accommodate them to the local landscape. Thus a pattern called *Duck's Foot in the Mud* on Long Island became *Bear's Paw* in western Pennsylvania and Ohio. Quilt names, indeed, give us insight into many aspects of the lives of the women who made them and their families. There are names of occupations, from farming to carpentry and mechanics, names (although fewer) of recreations and amusements, and names expressing moral beliefs and hopes and dreams. *Hens and Chickens* to *Trip around the World* encompass the polarities, real and ideal, of many women's lives. Whereas it has been estimated that the total of distinctively different quilt patterns is probably not more than three hundred, the names run into the thousands.

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Finally, out of such regional and other variations come individual, signed achievements. Many women did sign their quilts: their skill was recognized; they responded with pride and aspiration; they aimed to create a work of art for posterity.

Quilts, then, were an outlet for creative energy, a source and emblem of sisterhood and solidarity, and a graphic response to historical and political change. The quilt could also serve as inspiration and imaginative stimulus. At the beginning of her semiautobiographical novel, *Daughter of Earth*, Agnes Smedley describes her impoverished childhood:

I recall a crazy-quilt my mother once had. She made it from the remnants of gay and beautiful cotton materials. . . . [The] crazy-quilt held me for hours. It was an adventure.

It was also, of course, what Smedley and other working-class women had instead of books and paintings.

Finally, quilts, or women's sewing in general, can be seen as sometimes providing opportunities for political discussion and statement. Susan B. Anthony's first talk on equal rights for women was at a quilting bee, and she and Elizabeth Cady Stanton frequently used such gatherings to advocate political action and change. Earlier, Sarah

Grimké advised women to embroider anti-slavery slogans and images on domestic artifacts, urging “May the point of our needles prick the slave-owner’s conscience.” And there is the delightful story of the subversive wife who had her husband sleep under a quilt that bore, unknown to him, a pattern named after the political party he opposed. But such freedoms or assertions must be ultimately interpreted in the larger context of women’s work and oppression within a patriarchal society—an oppression of which needlework was not only symbol but actuality. Before the days of machine-made clothing and blankets, little girls were forced to learn to sew; and learning to sew often took precedence over, or was the female substitute for, learning to read and write. Sewing is thus used by Emily Dickinson in one of her poems (Number 508) as a symbol of the childhood and female bondage she rejects as she arrives at her own achieved status of poet. Sewing, for instance, of samplers with moral messages, was intended to inculcate in little girls their class or gender virtues of neatness, submissiveness, docility and patience. One learned quilting by working on one small square, sewing it, ripping out the stitching, sewing it again, over and over and over, until proficiency had been achieved. Many women learned to hate the work. In other countries, various kinds of needlework have amounted and still amount to sheer exploitation of girls and women: young girls painstakingly tying the innumerable fine knots in Persian rugs because their fingers are small enough to do the work; young girls seated in rows in convents in Belgium, making lace for hours on end, not allowed to raise their eyes from their work; Italian women going blind after a lifetime of lace making.

To return to this country, one must ask to what extent needlework had to substitute, for women, for what might have been more freely chosen work, or for various forms of political activism. *Does* one respond with admiration, or dismay, to that quilt of 30,000 pieces? One may admire the dexterity of Pennsylvania Dutch women, who challenged themselves with the sewing of convex and concave, rather than merely straight, edges. Their quilts show a higher degree of exacting sewing than do the quilts of New England women, and may therefore receive higher accolades as art. But one realizes it was an art born of oppression: the Pennsylvania Dutch women were among the most severely confined, almost never allowed to learn to read, rarely venturing beyond the home.

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In the Victorian era, when middle-class women lost the productive role they had held in an earlier agricultural economy, quilts became more and more decorative, more and more examples of conspicuous waste in their use of expensive fabrics such as satin, lace, brocade and velvet. They became an inadvertently ironic sign of women as consumer rather than producer, and of her confinement to a narrowed and less functional domestic sphere. They became a badge of her oppression and even an unfortunate safety valve that could delay rebellion by diverting energy.

Our response to quilts as an art form rooted both in meaningful work and in cultural oppression will therefore inevitably be complex: a combination of admiration and awe at limitations overcome and of sorrow and anger at limitations imposed.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Hedges argues that when a patriarchal society stifles women’s outlets for creativity, women will find ways of making everyday activities creative—for instance, “in the making of gardens, or blues songs, or quilts.” Do you see any ways in which the



twentieth century is still stifling for women? As you respond, consider the ways women creatively express themselves, and compare these creative avenues with those followed by men. Explain the significance you see in the similarities and differences.

2.

What social factors contributed to quilt making as a creative art form? What changes occurred so that quilt making, for the most part, moved from a necessity to a hobby?

3.

In paragraph 5, Hedges describes quilting bees and saloons or the marketplace as places that provided social functions for women and for men. Comparing the two types of social outlets, what conclusions can you draw about relationships between women and relationships between men in the nineteenth century? Have these relationships changed today? Explain.

4.

Quilts, Hedges writes, were more distinguishing of the culture than of any one individual. What visual art today is most distinguishing of twentieth-century American culture?

Explain your answer.

5.

Not only were quilts visually pleasing, but the patterns were also indicative of the social problems of the times. Analyze the titles that Hedges provides in paragraphs 8–9, and explain whether—and why—you believe these titles reflect such social concerns.

6.

Because quilting was an activity undertaken solely by women, sometimes under inhumane conditions (paragraph 13), Hedges raises the question: “Does one respond with admiration, or dismay, to that quilt of 30,000 pieces?” Respond to her question and give justification for your response.

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research*

1.

Research another craft from nineteenth-century America. As Hedges does, look to the roots of this craft and the subsequent reflection of this craft in the culture.

2.

Choose one specific section of the United States and research in detail the quilts from this location (the Amish region of Pennsylvania, the Appalachians, pre-Revolution New England, for example).

3.

A possible collaborative project: Each class member will design and decorate one patch, which may become part of a larger quilt. Keep a process notebook on each step of your own participation in this activity. How did you come up with the design? What changes did you make? How did you choose colors? Materials? When did you work on this patch? How long did it take you? Did you enjoy it, or did you find it tedious? As you were working on this one patch, were you thinking what others would think of your work? How does your response to your own work change as you view it combined with the work of other class members?

BILL MOYERS, Interviewer

Dreaming Big Dreams: An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee

Bharati Mukherjee grew up in India and later emigrated first to Canada and then to the United States, where she has written and published several books, including *The Middleman*, a collection of short stories focusing on the experiences of Asian immigrants who settled in America. *The Middleman* won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1988. Mukherjee's 1989 novel, *Jasmine*, follows the travels of a young Punjabi woman who, like the author, moves from India to America and then migrates throughout the United States. Mukherjee now teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, where she is a writer in residence.

Bill Moyers is a highly respected television journalist who is well known for his insightful reporting at both PBS and CBS news. He has written several books and articles, many based on the perceptive interviews he has conducted in his work as a reporter. His books include *The Power of Myth*, which was inspired by his conversations with educator and mythologist Joseph Campbell.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

If you were being interviewed, how would you respond to this question: "Where is your home?" Would it be the place you now live? Why or why not? What is it that makes the place you name "home" for you?

2.

Have you ever been in a situation where you suddenly became acutely aware of differences between yourself and others because of the class you see yourself as belonging to? If so, describe that situation and your reactions. If not, comment on whether or not you see class as a significant issue in the culture of the United States. Use examples from your own experiences to support and explain your observations.

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Moyers:

You once said that your life has been a long process of searching for a home. Have you found it yet?

Mukherjee:

Oh yes, absolutely. I feel very American. I've lived in many different countries, and I make many trips outside the United States for lectures or readings, but I'm always eager to come back here.

Moyers:

To what? What is it that makes you feel as if finally, after all of these wanderings, you belong somewhere?

Mukherjee:

I knew the moment I landed as a student in 1961, at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Iowa, that this is where I belonged. It was an instant kind of love, a feeling of being at one.

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You see for me, America is an idea. It is a stage for transformation. I felt when I came to Iowa City from Calcutta that suddenly I could be a new person I didn't have to be the

daughter of a very upper-class patriarch, a daughter who was guarded every moment of her life by bodyguards and so on.

Moyers:

So home is not a place. Home is an ideal, a state of mind, an attitude.

Mukherjee:

Home is a state of mind. And that's a big change from what I was brought up to believe. In Bengali, the word for home is *desh*, which means "region." As a child, when I was asked, "Where is your home?" I would have to cite the name of the village, Faridpur, now in Bangladesh, where my father was born, even though I hadn't ever been there. So making the change from thinking of home as a place, to thinking of it as an idea, was a radical metamorphosis for me.

Moyers:

What does America mean to you as an idea?

Mukherjee:

What America offers me is romanticism and hope. I came out of a continent of cynicism and irony and despair. A traditional society where you are what you are, according to the family that you were born into, the caste, the class, the gender. Suddenly, I found myself in a country where—theoretically, anyway—merit counts, where I could choose to discard that part of my history that I want, and invent a whole new history for myself.

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Moyers:

That's what Americans have been doing for two hundred years, isn't it? Inventing, often romantically, an identity, a sense of themselves.

Mukherjee:

Well, America as romanticism is what appeals to me. It's that capacity to dream and then try to pull it off, if you can. I think that the traditional societies in which people like me were born really do not allow the individual to dream. To dream big.

Moyers:

That's what America is to Jasmine, the character in your new novel. She has big dreams. She leaves Florida, comes to New York, leaves New York, goes to Iowa, then leaves for California, dreaming big dreams, "greedy with dreams," I think the phrase is, and "reckless with hope."

Mukherjee:

What's also exciting for me about America is that my soul is always at risk here. The immigrant's soul is always at risk. There are no comforting stereotypes to fit into. I have to make up the rules as I go along. No one has really experienced what the nonwhite, non-European immigrants are going through in the States. We can't count on the wisdom

and experience of the past of the old country; and we can't quite fit into the traditional Euro-centric experiences of Americans.

Many of my characters in fact are like Joseph Conrad's in their ambiguous morality, and their need for risky adventures. They have some call from the unconscious that forces them to undertake these journeys outside their circumscribed little, petty villages, and it gets them off and in trouble. It certainly gets Jasmine in trouble. But there's a morality and a purification involved in that. If Conrad had the "Heart of Darkness," I'm exploring the heart of light, if you like, through Jasmine.

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Moyers:

And the light is—

Mukherjee:

Where the Conradian character might say, "The horror, the horror," I am saying, "The wonder, the wonder." And light is tricky, too. Light can daze, light can blind. But it's coming in from the outside into the lighted interior, and one has to open one's eyes wide.

Moyers:

You have said a new American epic was washing up on our shores in the eighties.

Mukherjee:

I meant new epic themes. We are going through lives that are larger than real in many ways, we new immigrants. And we're coming with such a hunger to find new meanings. We're coming with so much energy and curiosity in order to make new lives for ourselves, that to me, those are big stories to tell, very dense lives to chronicle. In a way, I am disappointed with the kind of fiction in magazines like *The New Yorker* or *The Atlantic*, which constantly records neat, miniaturized, suburban lives, and small crises, as opposed to the raw, raucous, messy lives that we nonwhites are leading during the same decade. It's as though some of the fiction editors don't want to acknowledge the rawness and messiness out there in America.

I think of it sometimes as fiction of fear. Of panic reaction to the changes that are going on in the country. Minimalist writing, with its codes, with its shorthand, with its very white suburban emphasis, is, I feel, an ostrich-with-head-in-the-sand kind of fiction.

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Moyers:

So many of these editors have their roots in Central Europe, Poland, Italy, Germany—that part of the world that is itself white. Their parents and grandparents came here, and went through that raucous transformation that you and other Asians are now experiencing. How's this old-guard immigrant group reacting to the newcomer?

Mukherjee:

In many ways, the Asian immigrant identifies with some significant aspects of the European immigration. We too believe in family-centeredness, and in education, and

working very hard to improve oneself. But we're very different too because of race and religion.

Also, a lot of the South Asians, Pakistanis, and Indians have come in jets, rather than steerage. We've come with sophisticated degrees. We've come with the confidence to succeed in one generation, rather than wait for our children and our grandchildren to slowly cash in on America's promise. So in significant ways we have to deal with racism. If I have a message to deliver to America, it is a message of inclusiveness. That instead of thinking of the new Americans as new, or "we" versus "they," we should be thinking of all of us as a new kind of American.

Moyers:

Well, I hear that. But I don't see any evidence that the newcomers are integrating into the mainstream. I mean Pakistanis live here, and Indians live there, and Russians live there, and Thais live here, and Vietnamese live there, and El Salvadorans live there. They live to themselves. I don't see this integration taking place.

Mukherjee:

I think psychologically, emotionally, it is occurring with the children who came when they were two years old, let's say, or who were born over here. They want to be American. But I sometimes think that liberal whites, out of their need to appease guilt of some sort, want the non-European to preserve her or his original culture. Multiculturalism, in a sense, is well intentioned; but it ends up marginalizing the person. And what I'm witnessing through my travels, and in the enormous amount of mail I get from immigrants, is that the parents quite often, out of either arrogance about their native culture or fear of American culture, will try to retreat back into an unreal, frozen image of the old world. Whereas the children want to be very American.

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Moyers:

They want to become something new.

Mukherjee:

A new being. Which is not to say that they want to be Anglo-Saxons, but yes, part of the new world. So I'm talking about psychological changes. Something has to be done at every level about marginalizing people into ghettos.

Moyers:

Have you experienced any racism here?

Mukherjee:

Not in the United States, not personally, but I did in Canada. My husband, Clark Blaise, is also a writer, and his parents were Canadian. So when Clark and I were looking for our first jobs, after our degrees from the University of Iowa, we looked only in Montreal, and we went there in 1966. In the beginning, Montreal was a perfect city for a bi-racial, bi-cultural, multilingual couple like us. But by the early seventies, racism reared its

ferocious head. And by 1980, I felt that not only was racism institutional there, but had gotten physically virulent.

Moyers:

Did you experience it physically?

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Mukherjee:

Yes, absolutely. I was spat on, and thrown to the back of the bus, and ejected from the lobby of a fancy hotel, and called a whore. These were not just my personal experiences, but they were every South Asian Canadian's experience during the seventies. I blame some of that on the mosaic theory of absorbing immigrants.

Moyers:

You mean the theory that culture is a variety of pieces placed side by side. They don't blend, or fuse into each other. It's just a mosaic.

Mukherjee:

A mosaic, exactly, where the government and the national mythology encourage the newcomer to hang onto old-world cultures, old-world psyches. The intention was good. But if, in a multicultural system, unequal value is put on the various cultures, then I'm afraid that marginalization tends to work against the nonwhite immigrant. I wrote an essay called "An Invisible Woman" that was my good-bye to Canada. I said that the American system, in which everyone is encouraged to think of himself or herself as an American first, and then something else, works to the advantage of people like me, newcomers.

Moyers:

How did Canadians respond?

Mukherjee:

This was the very first time that a writer of credibility was calling Canadians on racism, so initially there was shock and outrage among the mainstream Canadians. In the seventies the Canadians tended to believe that all racism occurred south of the border, in the United States, and that they were humane in their treatment of foreigners. But I got enormous amounts of mail on that essay, which showed that others too, German war-brides and so on, had also felt otherized, marginalized. On the last trip that I made to Toronto, which was just October of last year, I saw that letters to the editor and newspaper editorials are now agreeing with the ideas I had tried to bring into the consciousness of people in 1981.

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Moyers:

Have you thought about why you would experience racism more in Canada than here?

Mukherjee:

Yes. I think that we nonwhite new immigrants have profited in the United States from the long history of black-white racial conflict. The civil rights laws are already in place in the United States. I want for all of us to remember what it was like when there was no such equality, so that we don't relapse into racism again. In Canada, there hadn't been open conflict until the 1970s because, I think, the minorities hadn't challenged the mainstream. So there was a kind of smugness. And there was no constitution guaranteeing us rights. Canada depended in those days on good will, rather than law.

Moyers:

Your characters certainly experience some racism. Jasmine recognizes in America an infinite possibility for evil. Small wonder, since no sooner has she arrived than she's involved in a rape and in a murder. Even so, she manages never to feel like a victim.

Mukherjee:

All American writers, even those who are offering messages of hope and possibility, must be very clear-eyed about the potential for evil. I hope that the stories in *The Middleman and Other Stories* or *Jasmine* present a full picture, a complicated picture of America. But I like to think that I, as well as my characters, constantly fight evil. We don't retreat from battle. And we don't like to be flattened altogether.

Moyers:

She fights back. Sometimes with an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. I don't sense that *you've* done that, except through your stories.

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Mukherjee:

Have I murdered someone, have I blackmailed, did I come as an illegal alien? No, I didn't. But we, the new pioneers, who are still thinking of America as frontier country, do have a kind of ambiguous morality. We are improvising morality as we go along. And so Jasmine, who does murder, who does blackmail, is nonetheless true to herself, and keeps her integrity in the course of her adventures.

I want to think that my work has a moral center, that there is a very deep sense of right and wrong located inside the novel. But it does not necessarily have to be conventional Judaeo-Christian morality. Not all my characters are virtuous. Pioneering does not necessarily equate with virtue. I think that the original American pioneers had to have been in many ways hustlers, and capable of a great deal of violence, in order to wrest the country from the original inhabitants and to make a new life and a new country for themselves. So I like to think my characters have that vigor of possessing the land.

Moyers:

What has it taken for a Third World woman to survive in this culture?

Mukherjee:

A lot of discipline, a lot of strength, a lot of optimism.

Moyers:

Weren't you brought up in India, like most Indian women, to please?

Mukherjee:

Yes. To be very adaptable. Not to look a man straight in the eye. To sit right. And to be elegant and decorative. But I guess I was into subversion.

Moyers:

How did that happen? Who planted the seeds of subversion?

Mukherjee:

I went outside India for the first time when I was eight years old. I went with my family to a school in England and Switzerland for three years. Suddenly, being removed from a very predictable world in which every second of my life was programmed, into a world in which I had some independence and just seeing the world out there was very exciting. I knew right then and there that I wanted more than what my family, my father, my privileged life could afford in Calcutta. I wanted psychological freedom.

Moyers:

Why did you leave to come to this country in the first place in 1961? What were you looking for?

Mukherjee:

I thought, when I came as a student to Iowa, that I was coming simply to get a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing at the Writer's Workshop in the heartland. But now, thinking back on it, I realize that I was looking for more out of life; that I never really intended to go back to that very circumscribed, safe life that my parents had promised. While I was a student living in a dorm in Iowa City, Iowa, my parents did find for me the perfect Bengali groom for an arranged marriage. I didn't know the first name of this man. He had seen my photograph, and he'd said, "Terrific, I'll take her." I was expected, certainly, to do what girls of my class normally did—be happy in an arranged marriage; be content, anyway, in an arranged marriage. But deep down, I must have rejected that safe, circumscribed life. So fate sometimes is full of happy accidents, and I fell in love with a fellow student, Clark Blaise. After a two-week whirlwind courtship, we got married during lunchtime. And therefore, I made my life in this country.

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Moyers:

What did you mean when you said some people, like your character Jasmine, like yourself, although born oceans away, are born American at heart?

Mukherjee:

It's that capacity for dreaming. The desire for change, for seizing the good life; meaning not a bigger house and bigger car, but freedom from fate, from a predetermined life. The desire to discard the traditional world, and sink or swim in a new world, without rules.

Moyers:



Jasmine wants to reposition the stars. Is that what you wanted to do?

Mukherjee:

I didn't know it when I actually left India, but yes. I want to reposition the stars. I want to conquer. I want to love and possess this country. I don't want to be simply an expatriate who always has her bags packed and is looking for greener pastures elsewhere.

Moyers:

What's the difference between an expatriate and an immigrant?

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Mukherjee:

An expatriate is someone who is nourished by the old world, whose psychic life is still totally attached to the discarded world thousands of miles away. An immigrant is someone who in psychological, social, psychic ways, has made herself or himself over in the new world. Who's accepting the new world as her own.

Moyers:

How do you become an American? How do you let go of the past and invent the future when you're up against a culture of which you have only the dimmest, if not crudest, understanding?

Mukherjee:

I think you invent an America for yourself. America is a total and wondrous invention. Letting go of the old culture, allowing the roots to wither is natural; change is natural. But the unnatural thing is to hang on, to retain the old world. What is the point of hanging on to a culture that's thousands of miles away, and that probably not you, not your children, not your grandchildren, will ever see? Why not adjust and accommodate to the world around you?

Moyers:

It's hard. When I travel to foreign cultures, I've been hostage to nostalgia, to homesickness.

Mukherjee:

I think nostalgia is a reaction of fear. It's a very understandable reaction, but it's one of panic or fear. Or it also can be in the case of, say, non-European immigrants, cultural arrogance. They feel that everything American is somehow inferior culturally to what they've left behind. I think if you've made the decision to come to America, to be American, you must be prepared to really, emotionally, become American and put down roots. Make that emotional commitment.

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Moyers:

Roots are more than geographical implants.

Mukherjee:

Absolutely. In doing that, we very painfully, sometimes violently, murder our old selves. That's an unfortunate, perhaps, but inevitable process. I want to think that it's a freeing process. In spite of the pain, in spite of the violence, in spite of the bruising of the old self, to have that freedom to make mistakes, to choose a whole new history for oneself, is exciting.

Moyers:

Even though you have not yourself experienced racism in the United States, I'm sure that you know that many Asians have. I can give you chapter and verse from South Texas to Chicago.

Mukherjee:

There's going to be an increase in interminority violence in the nineties, I'm afraid. There's been a kind of disinvestment in America in the eighties that may continue in the nineties. People have not invested in the country. Instead they've been asking, "What part of the pie is for me?" They're privatizing, instead of saying, what kind of an America do we want? What kind of an America can we build?

As a result, I think that we are seeing large numbers of disenchanting minority groups who watch new immigrants from Asia come in, work hard, and in their perception, do rather well. They hold down jobs, move into good homes, buy big cars. There's a real resentment against the Asians. They're misperceived as the model minority.

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I was standing by a newspaper kiosk which is staffed by an Indian-American, and a homeless Afro-American came up and said, "Why is it that all the foreigners are taking over our jobs, and doing so well, while we are nowhere?" There's that kind of climate of scapegoating. We must do whatever is necessary, as a nation, as a whole country, to try and prevent that scapegoating. The Asians must make a commitment to America. If they've chosen to be Americans, then I think that they must really invest in their neighborhoods, invest in projects that help the homeless, or help solve problems for other minorities.

Moyers:

What have you learned since you've been here about the American language? Your novels and short stories are so precise in their slang, in their understanding of American pop culture. You seem to have a gift for listening.

Mukherjee:

I can't help it. I find myself mimicking every person that I listen to for more than fifteen minutes. It's also a hunger to know America. My love for the country translates itself into a kind of hunger to absorb it whole. I'm married to a fellow writer who's very American, who has dragged me to endless baseball games, and I have to thank him for giving me access to American trivia. I usually say that I'm a four-hundred-year-old lady, because I've lived through colonial and post-colonial history in India, and then have ingested wholesale two-hundred-odd years of American history.

Moyers:

One of the most fascinating chapters in our story is coming now in the nineties, as the face of America is being changed by people who bring new ideas and are changed by the ideas that are here. Our story is changing even as we sit here.

Mukherjee:

Yes. I think that we are creating American culture, daily. It is not something static. But through our art, and through the dangerous, improvised lives that we have to lead, we are creating a new American culture.

Moyers:

Dangerous lives?

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Mukherjee:

Well, there are no comforts, no old mythologies to cling to. We have to invent new American mythologies.

Moyers:

So tell me, your basic Protestant white male with Anglo-Saxon roots, what to expect from this new epic that is washing up on our shores.

Mukherjee:

Vigor and energy and passion, and the hunger to belong to whatever mythology or dream this country can still offer. Maybe for the white, Anglo-Saxon males, the country is become depressing or no longer a dream. But the rest of us are coming with an eagerness to refashion ourselves. Letting go of the old notions of what America was shouldn't be seen as a loss. I hope that as we all mongrelize we will build a better and more hopeful nation.

Moyers:

You write of Americans that we're overalert but underinformed, suspicious but ignorant, coddled like babies by our politicians, and rattled by the media drum beat. Have you figured out this country, what makes it tick?

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Mukherjee:

No. I hope I haven't figured it out. Part of the excitement is constantly retooling and refashioning, trying to discover. My subject is not nostalgia for a known world, or chronicling of a real world—it's a continual discovery. I don't think of myself as a realistic writer, even though I hope that all the details ring true, whether it's about Iowa farmers going crazy, or Iowa bankers with their midlife crises shacking up with eighteen-year-old undocumented Punjabi girls like Jasmine.

But really, I'm writing a fable for the times. I'm trying to create a mythology that we can live by as we negotiate our daily lives. A mythology, a fable that can help us retain our integrity.

Moyers:

Do you think America has a soul?

Mukherjee:

Oh yes. That's why I'm here. I would have left if I didn't believe that America has a soul. Whenever I come back from trips outside, I heave a sigh of relief when I come into this country. I know it's unfashionable to believe so wholeheartedly, but I do.

Moyers:

What is it you believe in?

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Mukherjee:

The visionariness of the Founding Fathers. The American Constitution, whether it is practiced every day or not, absolutely entrances me. The protection of human rights, at least in theory. I'm seeing the world through very fresh eyes, whereas I felt jaded, even though I was a very young person when I lived in India. I felt I was a jaded child, looking through large jaded, bulging eyes at the world. Irony was my natural form of expression. Here, I'm not afraid to be impassioned. I'm not afraid to make mistakes. And I certainly have made many.

Moyers:

We think of the immigrants in literature and in movies as sometimes pathetic figures. Whimpering, frightened creatures. You're painting a different portrait of the immigrant in America today.

Mukherjee:

Yes. I'm not a pathetic creature, and my heroines are not pathetic creatures, because they don't think of themselves as victims. On the contrary, they think of themselves as conquerors. We have come not to passively accommodate ourselves to someone else's dream of what we should be. We've come to America, in a way, to take over. To help build a new culture. So we're pioneers, with the same guts and energy and feistiness that the original American Pilgrims had.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Early in the interview, Moyers notes that Jasmine, one of Mukherjee's fictional characters, moves around the United States pursuing her dreams. As you read the interview, what dreams does Mukherjee, herself, seem to be pursuing? How would you compare her dreams with your own? Describe an incident from your own life that shows how your hopes and goals are similar to or different from Mukherjee's.

2.

From your own observations and experiences, respond to Mukherjee's contention that immigrants who strive to preserve their own culture—and those citizens who encourage them to preserve their own culture—are actually doing the immigrants harm and “marginalizing” them.

3.

Explain the contrasts Mukherjee sees between American and Canadian society. How does she use the analogy of the “mosaic theory” to support her contentions? Develop another analogy to describe the process Mukherjee seems to be recommending as most likely to serve both new immigrants and their new culture best.

4.

Mukherjee characterizes American pioneers as “in many ways hustlers, and capable of a great deal of violence, in order to wrest the country from the original inhabitants and to make a new life and a new country for themselves.” Further, she contends that “pioneering does not necessarily equate with virtue.” What is your response to these observations? Is your first inclination to see her statements as an attack on American pioneers? If so, would you be inclined to defend them or to agree with her? If you do not see her views as necessarily negative, explain why.

5.

In what ways do you see Mukherjee as rebelling against the culture in which she grew up? In what ways do you see her as affirming her cultural roots? Explain your response to the values implied both by her acts of rebellion and by her acts of affirmation.

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research*

1.

Mukherjee says that she sees the fiction in magazines like the *New Yorker* and the *Atlantic* as disappointing, because it “constantly records neat, miniaturized, suburban lives, and small crises, as opposed to the raw, raucous, messy lives that we nonwhites are leading.” Read several stories from recent issues of these magazines, and then write your own response explaining whether you agree or disagree with Mukherjee’s observation.

2.

Do research on racial discrimination in Canada. In addition to seeking materials from the library, try to interview people who have lived in Canada for at least a year during the past decade. Then compare your findings with Mukherjee’s observations.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

I Have a Dream

Born in 1929, Martin Luther King, Jr., gained great acclaim and admiration for his tireless advocacy of civil rights during the years from 1958 until he was assassinated in 1968. Although he earned his Ph.D. in theology from Boston University, he worked primarily in the South and was particularly active in challenging the “Jim Crow” laws that allowed segregation as well as in promoting the registration of black voters. King read widely in the works of the Indian leader Mohandas Gandhi and of Henry David Thoreau and followed their path of nonviolent resistance. In 1963, standing at the base of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., he delivered to a crowd of 250,000 civil rights protestors his powerful “I Have a Dream” speech.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Freewrite about the most recent injustice you’ve witnessed, either in your own life, in a current event, or in a current trend.

2.

From your standpoint, what does the Declaration of Independence mean when it says we should all have the right to pursue happiness?

3.

How free are black Americans today?

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I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation.

Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of their captivity. But one hundred years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still anguished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so we have come here today to dramatize a shameful condition.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men—yes, black men as well as white men—would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation; and so we have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice.

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We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of *now*. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. *Now* is the time to make real the promises of democracy. *Now* is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. *Now* is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. *Now* is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

It would be fatal for the nation to overlook the urgency of the moment. This sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent will not pass until there is an invigorating autumn of freedom and equality. Nineteen sixty-three is not an end, but a beginning. And those who hope that the Negro needed to blow off steam and will now be content will have a rude awakening if the nation returns to business as usual. There will be neither rest nor tranquility in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights. The whirlwinds of revolt will continue to shake the foundations of our nation until the bright day of justice emerges.

But there is something that I must say to my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice. In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by

drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force. And the marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people; for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny, and they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

We cannot walk alone. And as we walk we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, "When will you be satisfied?" We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality. We can never be satisfied as long as our bodies, heavy with the fatigue of travel, cannot gain lodging in the motels of the highways and the hotels of the cities. We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro's basic mobility is from a smaller ghetto to a larger one. We can never be satisfied as long as our children are stripped of their selfhood and robbed of their dignity by signs stating "For Whites Only." We cannot be satisfied as long as the Negro in Mississippi cannot vote and a Negro in New York believes he has nothing for which to vote. No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

I am not unmindful that some of you have come here out of great trials and tribulations. Some of you have come fresh from narrow jail cells. Some of you have come from areas where your quest for freedom left you battered by the storms of persecution and staggered by the winds of police brutality. You have been the veterans of creative suffering. Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.

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Go back to Mississippi, and go back to Alabama. Go back to South Carolina. Go back to Georgia. Go back to Louisiana. Go back to the slums and ghettos of our Northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed. Let us not wallow in the valley of despair.

I say to you today, my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day, on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day down in Alabama—with its vicious racists, with its governor's lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification—one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.

I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain and the crooked

places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith that I go back to the South with. And with this faith we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. With this faith we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. With this faith we will be able to work together, to play together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

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And this will be the day—this will be the day when all of God’s children will be able to sing with new meaning.

*My country, 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,*

Of thee I sing;  
Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the Pilgrims’ pride,  
From every mountainside  
Let freedom ring.

And if America is to be a great nation, this must become true.

And so let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

But not only that. Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. “From every mountainside let freedom ring.”

And when this happens—when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city—we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: “Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty. We are free at last!”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Choose any one of the metaphors King employs in this speech, and explore all the meanings and connotations of this one metaphor.

2.

What do you imagine was King’s main motive in writing this speech? Back up your response with evidence from the text.

3.

What reasons might King have had for employing so much repetition in this speech? (See paragraphs 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11.) What effect might this technique have had on King’s live audience? What effect did it have on you as a reader?

4.



Why do you think King deliberately uses a traditional white anthem (“My Country, ’Tis of Thee”) instead of a traditional black spiritual?

5.

How would you characterize this essay in general: as a speech, a sermon, a persuasive argument, or something else? Explain your choice.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.

Read this essay over one more time, taking careful notice of how it affects you. After doing this, write about your reading “process”—what you discovered, how you felt, what moved you, what you skimmed, your general impression. Then watch a video of Martin Luther King, Jr., giving his “I Have a Dream” speech. After seeing this video, write down your

immediate reactions: what you noticed, what moved you, how you felt, what you were thinking. Then write an essay in which you compare or contrast the effects that reading this essay and seeing the speech had on you.

2.

In a small group, research the events and values that shaped 1963 by looking at the media of the times: newspapers, magazines, television shows, movies, best-sellers, newspapers. Individually, write an essay that explains your impression of this year in American history.

3.

Find a speech given by a recent politician or world leader and compare it to Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

EMILY PRAGER

Our Barbies, Ourselves

Born in 1952, Emily Prager grew up during the same era as the Barbie doll about which she writes in this essay. Prager is a journalist and fiction writer whose novels include *Eve’s Tattoo (1991)* and *Clea and Zeus Divorce (1987)*. *In addition, she has published an anthology of humorous essays and a young adult fictional work, World War II Resistance Stories. She has contributed articles to many nationally recognized publications, including Penthouse, the Village Voice, and the National Lampoon.*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Freewrite about what you think are the best toys for children. Also comment on your own experiences with toys as well on toys that you may not have had but that were popular when you were growing up.

2.

What do you think? Will the popular Barbie doll still be popular 100 years from now? Explain your answer.

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I read an astounding obituary in the *New York Times* not too long ago. It concerned the death of one Jack Ryan. A former husband of Zsa Zsa Gabor, it said, Mr. Ryan had been an inventor and designer during his lifetime. A man of eclectic creativity, he designed

Sparrow and Hawk missiles when he worked for the Raytheon Company, and, the notice said, when he consulted for Mattel he designed Barbie.

If Barbie was designed by a man, suddenly a lot of things made sense to me, things I'd wondered about for years. I used to look at Barbie and wonder, What's wrong with this picture? What kind of woman designed this doll? Let's be honest: Barbie looks like someone who got her start at the Playboy Mansion. She could be a regular guest on *The Howard Stern Show*. It is a fact of Barbie's design that her breasts are so out of proportion to the rest of her body that if she were a human woman, she'd fall flat on her face.

If it's true that a woman didn't design Barbie, you don't know how much saner that makes me feel. Of course, that doesn't ameliorate the damage. There are millions of women who are subliminally sure that a thirty-nine-inch bust and a twenty-three-inch waist are the epitome of lovability. Could this account for the popularity of breast implant surgery?

I don't mean to step on anyone's toes here. I loved my Barbie. Secretly, I still believe that neon pink and turquoise blue are the only colors in which to decorate a duplex condo. And like many others of my generation, I've never married, simply because I cannot find a man who looks as good in clam diggers as Ken.

5

The question that comes to mind is, of course, Did Mr. Ryan design Barbie as a weapon? Because it *is* odd that Barbie appeared about the same time in my consciousness as the feminist movement—a time when women sought equality and small breasts were king. Or is Barbie the dream date of weapons designers? Or perhaps it's simpler than that: Perhaps Barbie is Zsa Zsa if she were eleven inches tall. No matter what, my discovery of Jack Ryan confirms what I have always felt: There is something indescribably masculine about Barbie—dare I say it, phallic. For all her giant breasts and high-heeled feet, she lacks a certain softness. If you asked a little girl what kind of doll she wanted for Christmas, I just don't think she'd reply, "Please, Santa, I want a hard-body."

On the other hand, you could say that Barbie, in feminist terms, is definitely her own person. With her condos and fashion plazas and pools and beauty salons, she is definitely a liberated woman, a gal on the move. And she has always been sexual, even totemic. Before Barbie, American dolls were flat-footed and breastless, and ineffably dignified. They were created in the image of little girls or babies. Madame Alexander was the queen of doll makers in the fifties, and her dollies looked like Elizabeth Taylor in *National Velvet*. They represented the kind of girls who looked perfect in jodhpurs, whose hair was never out of place, who grew up to be Jackie Kennedy—before she married Onassis. Her dolls' boyfriends were figments of the imagination, figments with large portfolios and three-piece suits and presidential aspirations, figments who could keep dolly in the style to which little girls of the fifties were programmed to become accustomed, a style that spasmed with the sixties and the appearance of Barbie. And perhaps what accounts for Barbie's vast popularity is that she was also a sixties woman: into free love and fun colors, anticclass, and possessed of real, molded boyfriend, Ken, with whom she could chant a mantra.

But there were problems with Ken. I always felt weird about him. He had no genitals, and, even at age ten, I found that ominous. I mean, here was Barbie with these humongous breasts, and that was OK with the toy company. And then, there was Ken

with that truncated, unidentifiable lump at his groin. I sensed injustice at work. Why, I wondered, was Barbie designed with such obvious sexual equipment and Ken not? Why was his treated as if it were more mysterious than hers? Did the fact that it was treated as such indicate that somehow his equipment, his essential maleness, was considered more powerful than hers, more worthy of the dignity of concealment? And if the issue in the mind of the toy company was obscenity and its possible damage to children, I still object. How do they think I felt, knowing that no matter how many water beds they slept in, or hot tubs they romped in, or swimming pools they lounged by under the stars, Barbie and Ken could never make love? No matter how much sexuality Barbie possessed, she would never turn Ken on. He would be forever withholding, forever detached. There was a loneliness about Barbie's situation that was always disturbing. And twenty-five years later, movies and videos are still filled with topless women and covered men. As if we're all trapped in Barbie's world and can never escape.

God, it certainly has cheered me up to think that Barbie was designed by Jack Ryan. . . .

#### *Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What's your overall reaction to this piece? Did you enjoy it? Find it entertaining? Were you bored by it? What about this piece elicited your reaction?

2.

By reflecting on Mr. Ryan's work experience as well as his personal life, what connections can you find to explain the obvious differences between the various products he designed?

3.

Look at the language that this author employs. How effective do you find it, and is it appropriate for the theme and subject matter at hand? Explain.

4.

Prager raises the question as to why Barbie was designed with "obvious sexual equipment" and yet her counterpart, Ken, was not. What's your answer to her question?

5.

Comment on the last line. Why do you think Prager brings Ryan in again at the end?

#### *Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research*

1.

Find out the exact year and month when Barbie came on the American toy scene. Then explore various magazines and newspapers to get an idea of the values and events that were a part of this time in history. Come to some conclusion concerning what Barbie forecasts, reflects, or symbolizes about the American cultural scene at this time.

2.

Analyze a toy popular today and write about its significance as a part of the current American cultural scene.

VINE DELORIA, JR.

#### **Indian Humor**

Born in 1933 in South Dakota, Vine Deloria, Jr., grew up with his family as a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation community. His essay "Indian Humor," which was first published in *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto (1969)*, demonstrates Deloria's ability to view and write about Native American issues in complex and often

*unexpected ways. Knowledgeable in the fields of law and theology, he has long been a supporter of Native American civil rights, explaining his views in such works as We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf (1970) and Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence (1974).*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Freewrite about the things that are most likely to make you laugh, and try to figure out where your sense of humor came from.

2.

Freewrite about the kinds of things Americans, in general, find funny. Think, perhaps, in terms of comic strips and popular sitcoms today.

3.

Write about the funniest person you ever knew or met.

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One of the best ways to understand a people is to know what makes them laugh. Laughter encompasses the limits of the soul. In humor, life is redefined and accepted. Irony and satire provide much keener insights into a group's collective psyche and values than do years of research.

It has always been a great disappointment to Indian people that the humorous side of Indian life has not been mentioned by professed experts on Indian Affairs. Rather the image of the granite-faced grunting redskin has been perpetuated by American mythology.

People have little sympathy with stolid groups. Dick Gregory did much more than is believed when he introduced humor into the Civil Rights struggle. He enabled non-blacks to enter into the thought world of the black community and experience the hurt it suffered. When all people shared the humorous but ironic situation of the black, the urgency and morality of Civil Rights was communicated.

The Indian people are exactly opposite of the popular stereotype. I sometimes wonder how anything is accomplished by Indians because of the apparent overemphasis on humor within the Indian world. Indians have found a humorous side of nearly every problem and the experiences of life have generally been so well defined through jokes and stories that they have become a thing in themselves.

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For centuries before the white invasion, teasing was a method of control of social situations by Indian people. Rather than embarrass members of the tribe publicly, people used to tease individuals they considered out of step with the consensus of tribal opinion. In this way egos were preserved and disputes within the tribe of a personal nature were held to a minimum.

Gradually people learned to anticipate teasing and began to tease themselves as a means of showing humility and at the same time advocating a course of action they deeply believed in. Men would depreciate their feats to show they were not trying to run roughshod over tribal desires. This method of behavior served to highlight their true virtues and gain them a place of influence in tribal policy-making circles.

Humor has come to occupy such a prominent place in national Indian affairs that any kind of movement is impossible without it. Tribes are being brought together by sharing

humor of the past. Columbus jokes gain great sympathy among all tribes, yet there are no tribes extant who had anything to do with Columbus. But the fact of white invasion from which all tribes have suffered has created a common bond in relation to Columbus jokes that gives a solid feeling of unity and purpose to the tribes.

The more desperate the problem, the more humor is directed to describe it. Satirical remarks often circumscribe problems so that possible solutions are drawn from the circumstances that would not make sense if presented in other than a humorous form. Often people are awakened and brought to a militant edge through funny remarks. I often counseled people to run for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in case of an earthquake because nothing could shake the BIA. And I would watch as younger Indians set their jaws, determined that they, if nobody else, would shake it. We also had a saying that in case of fire call the BIA and they would handle it because they put a wet blanket on everything. This also got a warm reception from people.

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Columbus and Custer jokes are the best for penetration into the heart of the matter, however. Rumor has it that Columbus began his journey with four ships. But one went over the edge so he arrived in the new world with only three. Another version states that Columbus didn't know where he was going, didn't know where he had been, and did it all on someone else's money. And the white man has been following Columbus ever since.

It is said that when Columbus landed, one Indian turned to another and said, "Well, there goes the neighborhood." Another version has two Indians watching Columbus and one saying to the other, "Maybe if we leave them alone they will go away." A favorite cartoon in Indian country a few years back showed a flying saucer landing while an Indian watched. The caption was "Oh, no, not again."

The most popular and enduring subject of Indian humor is, of course, General Custer. There are probably more jokes about Custer and the Indians than there were participants in the battle. All tribes, even those thousands of miles from Montana, feel a sense of accomplishment when thinking of Custer. Custer binds together implacable foes because he represented the Ugly American of the last century and he got what was coming to him. Some years ago we put out a bumper sticker which read "Custer Died for Your Sins." It was originally meant as a dig at the National Council of Churches. But as it spread around the nation it took on additional meaning until everyone claimed to understand it and each interpretation was different. Originally, the Custer bumper sticker referred to the Sioux Treaty of 1868 signed at Fort Laramie in which the United States pledged to give free and undisturbed use of the lands claimed by Red Cloud in return for peace. Under the covenants of the Old Testament, breaking a covenant called for a blood sacrifice for atonement. Custer was the blood sacrifice for the United States breaking the Sioux treaty. That, at least originally, was the meaning of the slogan.

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Custer jokes, however, can barely be categorized, let alone sloganized. Indians say that Custer was well-dressed for the occasion. When the Sioux found his body after the battle, he had on an Arrow shirt.

Many stories are derived from the details of the battle itself. Custer is said to have boasted that he could ride through the entire Sioux nation with his Seventh Cavalry and he was half right. He got half-way through.

One story concerns the period immediately after Custer's contingent had been wiped out and the Sioux and Cheyennes were zeroing in on Major Reno and his troops several miles to the south of the Custer battlefield.

The Indians had Reno's troopers surrounded on a bluff. Water was scarce, ammunition was nearly exhausted, and it looked like the next attack would mean certain extinction. One of the white soldiers quickly analyzed the situation and shed his clothes. He covered himself with mud, painted his face like an Indian, and began to creep toward the Indian lines.

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A Cheyenne heard some rustling in the grass and was just about to shoot.

"Hey, chief," the soldier whispered, "don't shoot, I'm coming over to join you. I'm going to be on your side."

The warrior looked puzzled and asked the soldier why he wanted to change sides.

"Well," he replied, "better red than dead."

Custer's Last Words occupy a revered place in Indian humor. One source states that as he was falling mortally wounded he cried, "Take no prisoners!" Other versions, most of them off color, concentrate on where those \*\*\*\*\* Indians are coming from. My favorite last saying pictures Custer on top of the hill looking at a multitude of warriors charging up the slope at him. He turns resignedly to his aide and says, "Well, it's better than going back to North Dakota."

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Since the battle it has been a favorite technique to boost the numbers on the Indian side and reduce the numbers on the white side so that Custer stands out as a man fighting against insurmountable odds. One question no pseudo-historian has attempted to answer, when changing the odds to make the little boy in blue more heroic, is how what they say were twenty thousand Indians could be fed when gathered into one camp. What a tremendous pony herd must have been gathered there, what a fantastic herd of buffalo must have been nearby to feed that amount of Indians, what an incredible source of drinking water must have been available for fifty thousand animals and some twenty thousand Indians!

Just figuring water-needs to keep that many people and animals alive for a number of days must have been incredible. If you have estimated correctly, you will see that the Little Big Horn was the last great *naval* engagement of the Indian wars.

The Sioux tease other tribes a great deal for not having been at the Little Big Horn. The Crows, traditional enemies of the Sioux, explain their role as Custer's scouts as one of bringing Custer where the Sioux could get at him! Arapahos and Cheyennes, allies of the Sioux in that battle, refer to the time they "bailed the Sioux out" when they got in trouble with the cavalry.

Even today variations of the Custer legend are bywords in Indian country. When an Indian gets too old and becomes inactive, people say he is "too old to muss the Custer anymore." . . .

One-line retorts are common in Indian country. Popovi Da, the great Pueblo artist, was quizzed one day on why the Indians were the first ones on this continent. "We had reservations," was his reply. Another time, when questioned by an anthropologist on what the Indians called America before the white man came, an Indian said simply,

“*Ours.*” A young Indian was asked one day at a conference what a peace treaty was. He replied, “That’s when the white man wants a piece of your land.”

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The best example of Indian humor and militancy I have ever heard was given by Clyde Warrior one day. He was talking with a group of people about the National Indian Youth Council, of which he was then president, and its program for a revitalization of Indian life. Several in the crowd were skeptical about the idea of rebuilding Indian communities along traditional Indian lines.

“Do you realize,” he said, “that when the United States was founded, it was only 5 percent urban and 95 percent rural and now it is 70 percent urban and 30 percent rural?” His listeners nodded solemnly but didn’t seem to understand what he was driving at. “Don’t you realize what this means?” he rapidly continued. “It means we are pushing them into the cities. Soon we will have the country back again.”

Whether Indian jokes will eventually come to have more significance than that, I cannot speculate. Humor, all Indians will agree, is the cement by which the coming Indian movement is held together. When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

After reading this essay through once, go back and locate what you consider to be the funniest Indian joke here. What was it about this joke that appealed to you?

2.

What, if anything, did you learn about Native Americans from reading this essay? What questions did you raise as a result of this reading?

3.

How does Indian humor compare or contrast to your own sense of humor? (Look back to your journal response.)

4.

Analyze the first and last paragraphs in this piece in terms of their effectiveness. How well do they structure and tie in with the rest of the essay? What effect do they have on you? Can you think of other ways to begin or end this piece that would have been equally or more effective? Explain.

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research*

1.

Research other cultural jokes (about blondes, lawyers, Italians, and so on) and analyze the purpose and effectiveness of these jokes compared to the purpose and effectiveness of Indian humor as shown in this essay.

2.

Using several current articles, research the power and purpose of humor in today’s culture.

3.

Watch a popular comedian’s comedy routine and write an essay in which you critique the humor this person employs, the audience he or she is addressing, and the overall effectiveness of the performance.

ALICE WALKER

## Everyday Use

### *For Your Grandmama*

The youngest of eight children born in Eatonton, Georgia, in 1944 to sharecroppers Minnie and Willie Lee Walker, Alice Walker's early life was shaped by a number of contradictory forces. On the one hand, she suffered from economic deprivation and the hardships imposed by segregation. On the other hand, she grew strong within her closely knit family and the extended black church congregation and community. She began her college education at Spelman in Atlanta but transferred to Sarah Lawrence in New York. Her first publications came shortly after her graduation in 1965. She is best known for her novel *The Color Purple*, which was awarded both the Pulitzer Prize and the American Book Award in 1983 and was later made into a highly acclaimed film.

### *Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

In what ways are members of your family like one another? In what ways is each member's personality unique? Give a short description of the main characteristics of each family member.

2.

If you could have just one item from your family's heritage, what would you choose and why?

3.

As people mature and move out into the world, do you believe most of them become quite different from their old "family selves"? Or do most stay more or less the same, with only minor, unimportant changes? Use specific examples from your own experiences and observations to explain your beliefs.

I will wait for her in the yard that Maggie and I made so clean and wavy yesterday afternoon. A yard like this is more comfortable than most people know. It is not just a yard. It is like an extended living room. When the hard clay is swept clean as a floor and the fine sand around the edges lined with tiny, irregular grooves anyone can come and sit and look up into the elm tree and wait for the breezes that never come inside the house. Maggie will be nervous until after her sister goes: she will stand hopelessly in corners homely and ashamed of the burn scars down her arms and legs, eyeing her sister with a mixture of envy and awe. She thinks her sister has held life always in the palm of one hand, that "no" is a word the world never learned to say to her.

You've no doubt seen those TV shows where the child who has "made it" is confronted, as a surprise, by her own mother and father, tottering in weakly from backstage. (A pleasant surprise, of course: What would they do if parent and child came on the show only to curse out and insult each other?) On TV mother and child embrace and smile into each other's faces. Sometimes the mother and father weep, the child wraps them in her arms and leans across the table to tell how she would not have made it without their help. I have seen these programs.

Sometimes I dream a dream in which Dee and I are suddenly brought together on a TV program of this sort. Out of a dark and soft-seated limousine I am ushered into a bright room filled with many people. There I meet a smiling, gray, sporty man like Johnny Carson who shakes my hand and tells me what a fine girl I have. Then we are on the



stage and Dee is embracing me with tears in her eyes. She pins on my dress a large orchid, even though she has told me once that she thinks orchids are tacky flowers.

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In real life I am a large, big-boned woman with rough, man-working hands. In the winter I wear flannel nightgowns to bed and overalls during the day. I can kill and clean a hog as mercilessly as a man. My fat keeps me hot in zero weather. I can work outside all day, breaking ice to get water for washing; I can eat pork liver cooked over the open fire minutes after it comes steaming from the hog. One winter I knocked a bull calf straight in the brain between the eyes with a sledge hammer and had the meat hung up to chill before nightfall. But of course all this does not show on television. I am the way my daughter would want me to be: a hundred pounds lighter, my skin like an uncooked barley pancake. My hair glistens in the hot bright lights. Johnny Carson has much to do to keep up with my quick and witty tongue.

But that is a mistake. I know even before I wake up. Who ever knew a Johnson with a quick tongue? Who can even imagine me looking a strange white man in the eye? It seems to me I have talked to them always with one foot raised in flight, with my head turned in whichever way is farthest from them. Dee, though. She would always look anyone in the eye. Hesitation was no part of her nature.

“How do I look, Mama?” Maggie says, showing just enough of her thin body enveloped in pink skirt and red blouse for me to know she’s there, almost hidden by the door.

“Come out into the yard,” I say.

Have you ever seen a lame animal, perhaps a dog run over by some careless person rich enough to own a car, sidle up to someone who is ignorant enough to be kind to him? That is the way my Maggie walks. She has been like this, chin on chest, eyes on ground, feet in shuffle, ever since the fire that burned the other house to the ground.

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Dee is lighter than Maggie, with nicer hair and a fuller figure. She’s a woman now, though sometimes I forget. How long ago was it that the other house burned? Ten, twelve years? Sometimes I can still hear the flames and feel Maggie’s arms sticking to me, her hair smoking and her dress falling off her in little black papery flakes. Her eyes seemed stretched open, blazed open by the flames reflected in them. And Dee. I see her standing off under the sweet gum tree she used to dig gum out of; a look of concentration on her face as she watched the last dingy gray board of the house fall in toward the red-hot brick chimney. Why don’t you do a dance around the ashes? I’d wanted to ask her. She had hated the house that much.

I used to think she hated Maggie, too. But that was before we raised the money, the church and me, to send her to Augusta to school. She used to read to us without pity; forcing words, lies, other folks’ habits, whole lives upon us two, sitting trapped and ignorant underneath her voice. She washed us in a river of make-believe, burned us with a lot of knowledge we didn’t necessarily need to know. Pressed us to her with the serious way she read, to shove us away at just the moment, like dimwits, we seemed about to understand.

Dee wanted nice things. A yellow organdy dress to wear to her graduation from high school; black pumps to match a green suit she’d made from an old suit somebody gave me. She was determined to stare down any disaster in her efforts. Her eyelids would not

flicker for minutes at a time. Often I fought off the temptation to shake her. At sixteen she had a style of her own: and knew what style was.

I never had an education myself. After second grade the school was closed down. Don't ask me why: in 1927 colored asked fewer questions than they do now. Sometimes Maggie reads to me. She stumbles along good-naturedly but can't see well. She knows she is not bright. Like good looks and money, quickness passed her by. She will marry John Thomas (who has mossy teeth in an earnest face) and then I'll be free to sit here and I guess just sing church songs to myself. Although I never was a good singer. Never could carry a tune. I was always better at a man's job. I used to love to milk till I was hooked in the side in '49. Cows are soothing and slow and don't bother you, unless you try to milk them the wrong way.

I have deliberately turned my back on the house. It is three rooms, just like the one that burned, except the roof is tin; they don't make shingle roofs any more. There are no real windows, just some holes cut in the sides, like the portholes in a ship, but not round and not square, with rawhide holding the shutters up on the outside. This house is in a pasture, too, like the other one. No doubt when Dee sees it she will want to tear it down. She wrote me once that no matter where we "choose" to live, she will manage to come see us. But she will never bring her friends. Maggie and I thought about this and Maggie asked me, "Mama, when did Dee ever *have* any friends?"

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She had a few. Furtive boys in pink shirts hanging about on washday after school. Nervous girls who never laughed. Impressed with her they worshiped the well-turned phrase, the cute shape, the scalding humor that erupted like bubbles in lye. She read to them.

When she was courting Jimmy T she didn't have much time to pay to us, but turned all her faultfinding power on him. He *flew* to marry a cheap gal from a family of ignorant flashy people. She hardly had time to recompose herself.

When she comes I will meet—but there they are!

Maggie attempts to make a dash for the house, in her shuffling way, but I stay her with my hand. "Come back here," I say. And she stops and tries to dig a well in the sand with her toe.

It is hard to see them clearly through the strong sun. But even the first glimpse of leg out of the car tells me it is Dee. Her feet were always neat-looking, as if God himself had shaped them with a certain style. From the other side of the car comes a short, stocky man. Hair is all over his head a foot long and hanging from his chin like a kinky mule tail. I hear Maggie suck in her breath. "Uhhnnh," is what it sounds like. Like when you see the wriggling end of a snake just in front of your foot on the road. "Uhhnnh."

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Dee next. A dress down to the ground, in this hot weather. A dress so loud it hurts my eyes. There are yellows and oranges enough to throw back the light of the sun. I feel my whole face warming from the heat waves it throws out. Earrings gold, too, and hanging down to her shoulders. Bracelets dangling and making noises when she moves her arm up to shake the folds of the dress out of her armpits. The dress is loose and flows, and as she walks closer, I like it. I hear Maggie go "Uhhnnh" again. It is her sister's hair. It stands

straight up like the wool on a sheep. It is black as night and around the edges are two long pigtailed that rope about like small lizards disappearing behind her ears.

“Wa-su-zo-Tean-o!” she says, coming on in that gliding way the dress makes her move. The short stocky fellow with the hair to his navel is all grinning and he follows up with “Asalamalakim, my mother and sister!” He moves to hug Maggie but she falls back, right up against the back of my chair. I feel her trembling there and when I look up I see the perspiration falling off her chin.

“Don’t get up,” says Dee. Since I am stout it takes something of a push. You can see me trying to move a second or two before I make it. She turns, showing white heels through her sandals, and goes back to the car. Out she peeks next with a Polaroid. She stoops down quickly and lines up picture after picture of me sitting there in front of the house with Maggie cowering behind me. She never takes a shot without making sure the house is included. When a cow comes nibbling around the edge of the yard she snaps it and me and Maggie *and* the house. Then she puts the Polaroid in the back seat of the car, and comes up and kisses me on the forehead.

Meanwhile Asalamalakim is going through the motions with Maggie’s hand. Maggie’s hand is as limp as a fish, and probably as cold, despite the sweat, and she keeps trying to pull it back. It looks like Asalamalakim wants to shake hands but wants to do it fancy. Or maybe he don’t know how people shake hands. Anyhow, he soon gives up on Maggie.

“Well,” I say. “Dee.”

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“No, Mama,” she says. “Not ‘Dee,’ Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo!”

“What happened to ‘Dee’?” I wanted to know.

“She’s dead,” Wangero said. “I couldn’t bear it any longer being named after the people who oppress me.”

“You know as well as me you was named after your aunt Dicie,” I said. Dicie is my sister. She named Dee. We called her “Big Dee” after Dee was born.

“But who was *she* named after?” asked Wangero.

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“I guess after Grandma Dee,” I said.

“And who was she named after?” asked Wangero.

“Her mother,” I said, and saw Wangero was getting tired. “That’s about as far back as I can trace it,” I said. Though, in fact, I probably could have carried it back beyond the Civil War through the branches.

“Well,” said Asalamalakim, “there you are.”

“Uhhnh,” I heard Maggie say.

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“There I was not,” I said, “before ‘Dicie’ cropped up in our family, so why should I try to trace it that far back?”

He just stood there grinning, looking down on me like somebody inspecting a Model A car. Every once in a while he and Wangero sent eye signals over my head.

“How do you pronounce this name?” I asked.

“You don’t have to call me by it if you don’t want to,” said Wangero.

“Why shouldn’t I?” I asked. “If that’s what you want us to call you, we’ll call you.”

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“I know it might sound awkward at first,” said Wangero.

"I'll get used to it," I said. "Ream it out again."

Well, soon we got the name out of the way. Asalamalakim had a name twice as long and three times as hard. After I tripped over it two or three times he told me to just call him Hakim-a-barber. I wanted to ask him was he a barber, but I didn't really think he was, so I didn't ask.

"You must belong to those beef-cattle peoples down the road," I said. They said "Asalamalakim" when they met you, too, but they didn't shake hands. Always too busy: feeding the cattle, fixing the fences, putting up salt-lick shelters, throwing down hay. When the white folks poisoned some of the herd the men stayed up all night with rifles in their hands. I walked a mile and a half just to see the sight.

Hakim-a-barber said, "I accept some of their doctrines, but farming and raising cattle is not my style." (They didn't tell me, and I didn't ask, whether Wangero [Dee] had really gone and married him.)

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We sat down to eat and right away he said he didn't eat collards and pork was unclean. Wangero, though, went on through the chitlins and corn bread, the greens and everything else. She talked a blue streak over the sweet potatoes. Everything delighted her. Even the fact that we still used the benches her daddy made for the table when we couldn't afford to buy chairs.

"Oh, Mama!" she cried. Then turned to Hakim-a-barber. "I never knew how lovely these benches are. You can feel the rump prints," she said, running her hands underneath her and along the bench. Then she gave a sigh and her hand closed over Grandma Dee's butter dish. "That's it!" she said. "I knew there was something I wanted to ask you if I could have." She jumped up from the table and went over in the corner where the churn stood, the milk in it clabber by now. She looked at the churn and looked at it.

"This churn top is what I need," she said. "Didn't Uncle Buddy whittle it out of a tree you all used to have?"

"Yes," I said.

"Uh huh," she said happily. "And I want the dasher, too."

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"Uncle Buddy whittle that, too?" asked the barber.

Dee (Wangero) looked up at me.

"Aunt Dee's first husband whittled the dash," said Maggie so low you almost couldn't hear her. "His name was Henry, but they called him Stash." "Maggie's brain is like an elephant's," Wangero said, laughing. "I can use the churn top as a centerpiece for the alcove table," she said, sliding a plate over the churn, "and I'll think of something artistic to do with the dasher." When she finished wrapping the dasher the handle stuck out. I took it for a moment in my hands. You didn't even have to look close to see where hands pushing the dasher up and down to make butter had left a kind of sink in the wood. In fact, there were a lot of small sinks; you could see where thumbs and fingers had sunk into the wood. It was beautiful light yellow wood, from a tree that grew in the yard where Big Dee and Stash had lived.

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After dinner Dee (Wangero) went to the trunk at the foot of my bed and started rifling through it. Maggie hung back in the kitchen over the dishpan. Out came Wangero with two quilts. They had been pieced by Grandma Dee and then Big Dee and me had hung

them on the quilt frames on the front porch and quilted them. One was in the Lone Star pattern. The other was Walk Around the Mountain. In both of them were scraps of dresses Grandma Dee had worn fifty and more years ago. Bits and pieces of Grandpa Jarrell's paisley shirts. And one teeny faded blue piece, about the size of a penny matchbox, that was from Great Grandpa Ezra's uniform that he wore in the Civil War.

"Mama," Wangero said sweet as a bird. "Can I have these old quilts?" I heard something fall in the kitchen, and a minute later the kitchen door slammed.

"Why don't you take one or two of the others?" I asked. "These old things was just done by me and Big Dee from some tops your grandma pieced before she died."

"No," said Wangero. "I don't want those. They are stitched around the borders by machine."

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"That'll make them last better," I said.  
"That's not the point," said Wangero. "These are all pieces of dresses Grandma used to wear. She did all this stitching by hand. Imagine!" She held the quilts securely in her arms, stroking them.

"Some of the pieces, like those lavender ones, come from old clothes her mother handed down to her," I said, moving up to touch the quilts. Dee (Wangero) moved back just enough so that I couldn't reach the quilts. They already belonged to her.

"Imagine!" she breathed again, clutching them closely to her bosom.

"The truth is," I said, "I promised to give them quilts to Maggie, for when she marries John Thomas."

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She gasped like a bee had stung her.

"Maggie can't appreciate these quilts!" she said. "She'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use."

"I reckon she would," I said. "God knows I been saving 'em for long enough with nobody using 'em. I hope she will!" I didn't want to bring up how I had offered Dee (Wangero) a quilt when she went away to college. Then she had told me they were old-fashioned, out of style.

"But they're *priceless!*" she was saying now, furiously; for she has a temper. "Maggie would put them on the bed and in five years they'd be in rags. Less than that!"

"She can always make some more," I said. "Maggie knows how to quilt."

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Dee (Wangero) looked at me with hatred. "You just will not understand. The point is these quilts, *these* quilts!"

"Well," I said, stumped. "What would *you* do with them?"

"Hang them," she said. As if that was the only thing you *could* do with quilts.

Maggie by now was standing in the door. I could almost hear the sound her feet made as they scraped over each other.

"She can have them, Mama," she said, like somebody used to never winning anything, or having anything reserved for her. "I can 'member Grandma Dee without the quilts."

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I looked at her hard. She had filled her bottom lip with checkerberry snuff and it gave her face a kind of dopey, hangdog look. It was Grandma Dee and Big Dee who taught her how to quilt herself. She stood there with her scarred hands hidden in the folds of her

skirt. She looked at her sister with something like fear but she wasn't mad at her. This was Maggie's portion. This was the way she knew God to work. When I looked at her like that something hit me in the top of my head and ran down to the soles of my feet. Just like when I'm in church and the spirit of God touches me and I get happy and shout. I did something I never had done before: hugged Maggie to me, then dragged her on into the room, snatched the quilts out of Miss Wangero's hands and dumped them into Maggie's lap. Maggie just sat there on my bed with her mouth open. "Take one or two of the others," I said to Dee. But she turned without a word and went out to Hakim-a-barber. "You just don't understand," she said, as Maggie and I came out to the car.

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"What don't I understand?" I wanted to know. "Your heritage," she said. And then she turned to Maggie, kissed her, and said, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's really a new day for us. But from the way you and Mama still live you'd never know it." She put on some sunglasses that hid everything above the tip of her nose and her chin. Maggie smiled; maybe at the sunglasses. But a real smile, not scared. After we watched the car dust settle I asked Maggie to bring me a dip of snuff. And then the two of us sat there just enjoying, until it was time to go in the house and go to bed.

#### *Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Describe the main personality and character traits of the three women in this story. Do they share any qualities or are they entirely different? Explain, with specific references to details, examples, and conversations in "Everyday Use."

2.

One theme in this story deals with appearance versus reality. Find several examples that demonstrate this theme. What main idea or ideas does this theme suggest?

3.

How does education—or lack of education—contribute to the relationships in this story? Consider how education unites characters or separates them from each other.

4.

Speculate on Dee's (Wangero's) motives for coming home with her friend when she'd told her mother that she would never bring friends to her family's house. What is it that she now values about her past? Why, for example, does she want the churn top and the quilts? What is it that Maggie and her mother value about their past and the objects that reflect that past?

5.

Evaluate the changes (or lack of change) you see in these characters. In your opinion, does anyone change for the better? For the worse? Explain.

6.

Analyze the implications of the title. For example, consider Dee's statement that if Maggie got the quilts, "she'd probably be backward enough to put them to everyday use." If you were asked to arbitrate this disagreement, whose side would you be on? Should the quilts be put to "everyday use"? Why or why not?

#### *Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research*

1.

Read several other short stories or novels by Alice Walker, and then write a paper evaluating the characters she presents. Note which characters she presents as admirable and which she portrays as pompous, mean-spirited, or even evil. Then describe and explain the values she most supports and admires.

2.

Imagine that each character in this story is to be represented as a piece of the same patchwork quilt. Describe the fabrics, patterns, colors, and images you would choose for each character's patch. How would you place these patches in relation to each other?

Explain your reasons.

VICTOR HERNÁNDEZ-CRUZ

Today Is a Day of Great Joy

Victor Hernández-Cruz was born in 1949 in Aguas Buenas, a small town in Puerto Rico. When he was five, he and his family moved to New York, where he attended Benjamin Franklin High School and was associated with The Gut Theater. He has published four collections of poetry and, since the early 1970s, has lived in San Francisco, where he continues to write and give readings. Combining English and Spanish in his poetry, Hernández-Cruz sees Hispanic culture as it is defined in the United States through three main images: visual, musical, and lingual.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Poetry: What's your general reaction to this word, and what are some of the reasons for your reaction?

2.

"Today is a day of great joy." What would have to happen in your life for this saying to be true?

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when they stop poems  
in the mail & clap  
their hands & dance to  
them

5

when women become pregnant  
by the side of poems  
the strongest sounds making  
the river go along

it is a great day

10

as poems fall down to

movie crowds in restaurants  
in bars

when poems start to  
knock down walls to  
15  
choke politicians  
when poems scream &  
begin to break the air

that is the time of  
true poets that is  
20  
the time of greatness

a true poet aiming  
poems & watching things  
fall to the ground

it is a great day.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Read this poem to yourself and then write down your immediate reaction to it. How did it make you feel? What do you think it was about? What parts were confusing to you?

2.

In a small group, compare your responses to the poem itself. Share the parts you understood and offer possible insights into any confusing areas.

3.

As a large group now, have one person volunteer to read this poem out loud as passionately and dramatically as possible. Immediately after hearing the poem this time, write down another quick response. What did you think? How did it make you feel?

4.

What reasons might the author have for writing “it is a great day” instead of the expected “it will be a great day”?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research*

1.

Grab an anthology of collected poems and scan them until you find a favorite. Stop here and analyze what it is about this poem that caught your attention. Then write an essay in which you try to convince someone who does not like poetry that this poem is worthwhile.

2.

Ask three or four of your friends and acquaintances to read this poem by Hernández-Cruz. Then record their insights and reactions to it. Prompt them in spots if necessary. After your interviews are complete, come to some conclusion about the ways in which this poem affected the readers you surveyed. Did the way other readers interpreted the poem provide you with any new insights about it? How do you interpret the poem now?

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TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS:  
AMERICAN DREAMS AND CREATIONS



Draw on as many sources in this chapter as you need and also rely on your own experiences in order to write responses to the following topics regarding the definition of a culture's dreams and creations.

1.  
Analyze the various ways in which art can be conceived, delivered, and nourished within any given culture.
2.  
In "I Have a Dream," Martin Luther King, Jr., says that his dream is "deeply rooted in the American dream." What does he mean by "the American dream"? To what extent are the visions of other writers in this section embraced by or excluded from "the American dream" as you define it?
3.  
In what ways might an artist's culture affect his or her approach to art?
4.  
All of the selections in this chapter relate in some way to the images and dreams people have of others and of themselves. In what ways do you see yourself as a reflection of the dreams and creations of a culture to which you belong? In what ways do you see yourself as resisting the dreams and creations of a culture to which you belong?
5.  
Can art instruct? Should art instruct? Respond by referring to several selections in this chapter as well as to your own observations and experiences.
6.  
Where do artists and dreamers get their ideas? Analyze several of the essays in this chapter to identify several possibilities for the beginnings of creative ideas.
7.  
Can a quilt be considered art? What about the humor of a culture? And the popular artifacts such as Barbie dolls? As you respond, consider your definition of art.
8.  
Compare and contrast the values and beliefs inherent in three different cultures that are represented in this chapter.
9.  
Argue that someone born outside a culture can or cannot come to a deeper understanding of the values and beliefs within a certain culture just by observing its valued works of art.
- 10.

Considering selections in this chapter as well as your own observations, which do you believe is greater—culture’s influences on art and the artist or the artist’s influence on culture?

By Emily Prager. Originally published in **INTERVIEW, Brant Publications, Inc., December 1991.**

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PAULA GUNN ALLEN

*Where I Come from Is Like This*

*Paula Gunn Allen was born in Cubero, New Mexico, in 1939. Her roots include both the Laguna Pueblo and Sioux cultures as well as Maronite Lebanese and Celtic Scotch. After earning a Ph.D. in American Studies with an emphasis on Native American Studies at the University of New Mexico, she taught at Fort Lewis College, San Francisco State University, the University of New Mexico, and the University of California–Berkeley; she is now professor emeritus of Native American literature at the University of California–Los Angeles. Allen's essays, anthologies, poetry, and fiction explore Native American cultures from a female-centered perspective. This selection comes from her collection of nonfiction essays *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), which has been described as “a commentary on the perceptions and priorities of contemporary Native American women” (Quannah Karvar, Los Angeles Times Book Review). Allen's most recent book, *Off the Reservation: Reflections on Boundary-Busting, Border-Crossing Loose Cannons* (1998), is a collection of political*

*essays, literary criticism, and personal reflections focusing on the boundary where Native American cultures and Western civilization meet.*  
*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

In your journal, freewrite for twenty minutes by completing the following statement:  
“Where I come from is like. . . .”

2.

Set a timer for three minutes; then look at yourself in a mirror until the timer rings. Next, sit down and describe who you saw in that mirror and what you thought about as you studied your physical image.

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I

Modern American Indian women, like their non-Indian sisters, are deeply engaged in the struggle to redefine themselves. In their struggle they must reconcile traditional tribal definitions of women with industrial and postindustrial non-Indian definitions. Yet while these definitions seem to be more or less mutually exclusive, Indian women must somehow harmonize and integrate both in their own lives.

An American Indian woman is primarily defined by her tribal identity. In her eyes, her destiny is necessarily that of her people, and her sense of herself as a woman is first and foremost prescribed by her tribe. The definitions of woman's roles are as diverse as tribal cultures in the Americas. In some she is devalued; in others she wields considerable power. In some she is a familial/clan adjunct; in some she is as close to autonomous as her economic circumstances and psychological traits permit. But in no tribal definitions is she perceived in the same way as are women in western industrial and postindustrial cultures.

In the west, few images of women form part of the cultural mythos, and these are largely sexually charged. Among Christians, the madonna is the female prototype, and she is portrayed as essentially passive: her contribution is simply that of birthing. Little else is attributed to her and she certainly possesses few of the characteristics that are attributed to mythic figures among Indian tribes. This image is countered (rather than balanced) by the witch-goddess/whore characteristics designed to reinforce cultural beliefs about women, as well as western adversarial and dualistic perceptions of reality.

The tribes see women variously, but they do not question the power of femininity. Sometimes they see women as fearful, sometimes peaceful, sometimes omnipotent and omniscient, but they never portray women as mindless, helpless, simple, or oppressed. And while the women in a given tribe, clan, or band may be all these things, the individual woman is provided with a variety of images of women from the interconnected supernatural, natural, and social worlds she lives in.

5

As a half-breed American Indian woman, I cast about in my mind for negative images of Indian women, and I find none that are directed to Indian women alone. The negative images I do have are of Indians in general and in fact are more often of males than of females. All these images come to me from non-Indian sources, and they are always balanced by a positive image. My ideas of womanhood, passed on largely by my mother and grandmothers, Laguna Pueblo women, are about practicality, strength,

reasonableness, intelligence, wit, and competence. I also remember vividly the women who came to my father's store, the women who held me and sang to me, the women at Feast Day, at Grab Days, the women in the kitchen of my Cubero home, the women I grew up with; none of them appeared weak or helpless, none of them presented herself tentatively. I remember a certain reserve on those lovely brown faces; I remember the direct gaze of eyes framed by bright-colored shawls draped over their heads and cascading down their backs. I remember the clean cotton dresses and carefully pressed hand-embroidered aprons they always wore; I remember laughter and good food, especially the sweet bread and the oven bread they gave us. Nowhere in my mind is there a foolish woman, a dumb woman, a vain woman, or a plastic woman, though the Indian women I have known have shown a wide range of personal style and demeanor. My memory includes the Navajo woman who was badly beaten by her Sioux husband; but I also remember that my grandmother abandoned her Sioux husband long ago. I recall the stories about the Laguna woman beaten regularly by her husband in the presence of her children so that the children would not believe in the strength and power of femininity. And I remember the women who drank, who got into fights with other women and with the men, and who often won those battles. I have memories of tired women, partying women, stubborn women, sullen women, amicable women, selfish women, shy women, and aggressive women. Most of all I remember the women who laugh and scold and sit uncomplaining in the long sun on feast days and who cook wonderful food on wood stoves, in beehive mud ovens, and over open fires outdoors. Among the images of women that come to me from various tribes as well as my own are White Buffalo Woman, who came to the Lakota long ago and brought them the religion of the Sacred Pipe, which they still practice; Tinotzin the goddess, who came to Juan Diego to remind him that she still walked the hills of her people and sent him with her message, her demand and her proof to the Catholic bishop in the city nearby. And from Laguna I take the images of Yellow Woman, Coyote Woman, Grandmother Spider (Spider Old Woman), who brought the light, who gave us weaving and medicine, who gave us life. Among the Keres she is known as Thought Woman, who created us all and who keeps us in creation even now. I remember Iyatiku, Earth Woman, Corn Woman, who guides and counsels the people to peace and who welcomes us home when we cast off this coil of flesh as huskers cast off the leaves that wrap the corn. I remember Iyatiku's sister, Sun Woman, who held metals and cattle, pigs and sheep, highways and engines and so many things in her bundle, who went away to the east saying that one day she would return.

## II

Since the coming of the Anglo-Europeans beginning in the fifteenth century, the fragile web of identity that long held tribal people secure has gradually been weakened and torn. But the oral tradition has prevented the complete destruction of the web, the ultimate disruption of tribal ways. The oral tradition is vital; it heals itself and the tribal web by adapting to the flow of the present while never relinquishing its connection to the past. Its adaptability has always been required, as many generations have experienced. Certainly the modern American Indian woman bears slight resemblance to her forebears—at least on superficial examination—but she is still a tribal woman in her deepest being. Her tribal sense of relationship to all that is continues to flourish. And though she is at times beset by her knowledge of the enormous gap between the life she lives and the life she

was raised to live, and while she adapts her mind and being to the circumstances of her present life, she does so in tribal ways, mending the tears in the web of being from which she takes her existence as she goes.

My mother told me stories all the time, though I often did not recognize them as that. My mother told me stories about cooking and childbearing; she told me stories about menstruation and pregnancy; she told me stories about gods and heroes, about fairies and elves, about goddesses and spirits; she told me stories about the land and the sky, about cats and dogs, about snakes and spiders; she told me stories about climbing trees and exploring the mesas; she told me stories about going to dances and getting married; she told me stories about dressing and undressing, about sleeping and waking; she told me stories about herself, about her mother, about her grandmother. She told me stories about grieving and laughing, about thinking and doing; she told me stories about school and about people; about darning and mending; she told me stories about turquoise and about gold; she told me European stories and Laguna stories; she told me Catholic stories and Presbyterian stories; she told me city stories and country stories; she told me political stories and religious stories. She told me stories about living and stories about dying. And in all of those stories she told me who I was, who I was supposed to be, whom I came from, and who would follow me. In this way she taught me the meaning of the words she said, that all life is a circle and everything has a place within it. That's what she said and what she showed me in the things she did and the way she lives.

10

Of course, through my formal, white, Christian education, I discovered that other people had stories of their own—about women, about Indians, about fact, about reality—and I was amazed by a number of startling suppositions that others made about tribal customs and beliefs. According to the un-Indian, non-Indian view, for instance, Indians barred menstruating women from ceremonies and indeed segregated them from the rest of the people, consigning them to some space specially designed for them. This showed that Indians considered menstruating women unclean and not fit to enjoy the company of decent (nonmenstruating) people, that is, men. I was surprised and confused to hear this because my mother had taught me that white people had strange attitudes toward menstruation: they thought something was bad about it, that it meant you were sick, cursed, sinful, and weak and that you had to be very careful during that time. She taught me that menstruation was a normal occurrence, that I could go swimming or hiking or whatever else I wanted to do during my period. She actively scorned women who took to their beds, who were incapacitated by cramps, who “got the blues.”

As I struggled to reconcile these very contradictory interpretations of American Indians' traditional beliefs concerning menstruation, I realized that the menstrual taboos were about power, not about sin or filth. My conclusion was later borne out by some tribes' own explanations, which, as you may well imagine, came as quite a relief to me.

The truth of the matter as many Indians see it is that women who are at the peak of their fecundity are believed to possess power that throws male power totally out of kilter. They emit such force that, in their presence, any male-owned or -dominated ritual or sacred object cannot do its usual task. For instance, the Lakota say that a menstruating woman anywhere near a yuwipi man, who is a special sort of psychic, spirit-empowered healer, for a day or so before he is to do his ceremony will effectively disempower him.

Conversely, among many, if not most, tribes, important ceremonies cannot be held

without the presence of women. Sometimes the ritual woman who empowers the ceremony must be unmarried and virginal so that the power she channels is unalloyed, unweakened by sexual arousal and penetration by a male. Other ceremonies require tumescent women, others the presence of mature women who have borne children, and still others depend for empowerment on postmenopausal women. Women may be segregated from the company of the whole band or village on certain occasions, but on certain occasions men are also segregated. In short, each ritual depends on a certain balance of power, and the positions of women within the phases of womanhood are used by tribal people to empower certain rites. This does not derive from a male-dominant view; it is not a ritual observance imposed on women by men. It derives from a tribal view of reality that distinguishes tribal people from feudal and industrial people. Among the tribes, the occult power of women, inextricably bound to our hormonal life, is thought to be very great; many hold that we possess innately the blood-given power to kill—with a glance, with a step, or with a judicious mixing of menstrual blood into somebody's soup. Medicine women among the Pomo of California cannot practice until they are sufficiently mature; when they are immature, their power is diffuse and is likely to interfere with their practice until time and experience have it under control. So women of the tribes are not especially inclined to see themselves as poor helpless victims of male domination. Even in those tribes where something akin to male domination was present, women are perceived as powerful, socially, physically, and metaphysically. In times past, as in times present, women carried enormous burdens with aplomb. We were far indeed from the "weaker sex," the designation that white aristocratic sisters unhappily earned for us all.

I remember my mother moving furniture all over the house when she wanted it changed. She didn't wait for my father to come home and help—she just went ahead and moved the piano, a huge upright from the old days, the couch, the refrigerator. Nobody had told her she was too weak to do such things. In imitation of her, I would delight in loading trucks at my father's store with cases of pop or fifty-pound sacks of flour. Even when I was quite small I could do it, and it gave me a belief in my own physical strength that advancing middle age can't quite erase. My mother used to tell me about the Acoma Pueblo women she had seen as a child carrying huge ollas (water pots) on their heads as they wound their way up the tortuous stairwell carved into the face of the "Sky City" mesa, a feat I tried to imitate with books and tin buckets. ("Sky City" is the term used by the Chamber of Commerce for the mother village of Acoma, which is situated atop a high sandstone table mountain.) I was never very successful, but even the attempt reminded me that I was supposed to be strong and balanced to be a proper girl.

15

Of course, my mother's Laguna people are Keres Indian, reputed to be the last extreme mother-right people on earth. So it is no wonder that I got notably nonwhite notions about the natural strength and prowess of women. Indeed, it is only when I am trying to get non-Indian approval, recognition, or acknowledgment that my "weak sister" emotional and intellectual ploys get the better of my tribal woman's good sense. At such times I forget that I just moved the piano or just wrote a competent paper or just completed a financial transaction satisfactorily or have supported myself and my children for most of my adult life.

Nor is my contradictory behavior atypical. Most Indian women I know are in the same bicultural bind: we vacillate between being dependent and strong, self-reliant and powerless, strongly motivated and hopelessly insecure. We resolve the dilemma in various ways: some of us party all the time; some of us drink to excess; some of us travel and move around a lot; some of us land good jobs and then quit them; some of us engage in violent exchanges; some of us blow our brains out. We act in these destructive ways because we suffer from the societal conflicts caused by having to identify with two hopelessly opposed cultural definitions of women. Through this destructive dissonance we are unhappy prey to the self-disparagement common to, indeed demanded of, Indians living in the United States today. Our situation is caused by the exigencies of a history of invasion, conquest, and colonization whose searing marks are probably ineradicable. A popular bumper sticker on many Indian cars proclaims: "If You're Indian You're In," to which I always find myself adding under my breath, "Trouble."

### III

No Indian can grow to any age without being informed that her people were "savages" who interfered with the march of progress pursued by respectable, loving, civilized white people. We are the villains of the scenario when we are mentioned at all. We are absent from much of white history except when we are calmly, rationally, succinctly, and systematically dehumanized. On the few occasions we are noticed in any way other than as howling, bloodthirsty beings, we are acclaimed for our noble quaintness. In this definition, we are exotic curios. Our ancient arts and customs are used to draw tourist money to state coffers, into the pocketbooks and bank accounts of scholars, and into support of the American-in-Disneyland promoters' dream.

As a Roman Catholic child I was treated to bloody tales of how the savage Indians martyred the hapless priests and missionaries who went among them in an attempt to lead them to the one true path. By the time I was through high school I had the idea that Indians were people who had benefited mightily from the advanced knowledge and superior morality of the Anglo-Europeans. At least I had, perforce, that idea to lay beside the other one that derived from my daily experience of Indian life, an idea less dehumanizing and more accurate because it came from my mother and the other Indian people who raised me. That idea was that Indians are a people who don't tell lies, who care for their children and their old people. You never see an Indian orphan, they said. You always know when you're old that someone will take care of you—one of your children will. Then they'd list the old folks who were being taken care of by this child or that. No child is ever considered illegitimate among the Indians, they said. If a girl gets pregnant, the baby is still part of the family, and the mother is too. That's what they said, and they showed me real people who lived according to those principles.

Of course the ravages of colonization have taken their toll; there are orphans in Indian country now, and abandoned, brutalized old folks; there are even illegitimate children, though the very concept still strikes me as absurd. There are battered children and neglected children, and there are battered wives and women who have been raped by Indian men. Proximity to the "civilizing" effects of white Christians has not improved the moral quality of life in Indian country, though each group, Indian and white, explains the situation differently. Nor is there much yet in the oral tradition that can enable us to adapt to these inhuman changes. But a force is growing in that direction, and it is helping Indian women reclaim their lives. Their power, their sense of direction and of self will



soon be visible. It is the force of the women who speak and work and write, and it is formidable.

20

Through all the centuries of war and death and cultural and psychic destruction have endured the women who raise the children and tend the fires, who pass along the tales and the traditions, who weep and bury the dead, who are the dead, and who never forget. There are always the women, who make pots and weave baskets, who fashion clothes and cheer their children on at powwow, who make fry bread and piki bread, and corn soup and chili stew, who dance and sing and remember and hold within their hearts the dream of their ancient peoples—that one day the woman who thinks will speak to us again, and everywhere there will be peace. Meanwhile we tell the stories and write the books and trade tales of anger and woe and stories of fun and scandal and laugh over all manner of things that happen every day. We watch and we wait.

My great-grandmother told my mother: Never forget you are Indian. And my mother told me the same thing. This, then, is how I have gone about remembering, so that my children will remember too.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Allen believes that Indian women, like other women, must strive for harmony between traditional roles and those of modern-day society. What part of the traditional Indian role does Allen want to embrace? What new characteristics does she suggest the Indian women's role incorporate?

2.

In paragraph 5, Allen writes that she formed her ideas of womanhood from her female relatives. Although each woman was unique, Allen writes that they all had one thing in common: "none of them presented herself tentatively." What do you think Allen means by this phrase? Write a sentence that explains what your female or male relatives had in common. How does your phrase compare with Allen's? Use your phrase to develop an essay that explains male/female relationships "where you come from."

3.

Allen goes on to write that in her past, she remembers no woman who was "foolish," "dumb," "vain," or "plastic." Looking back on your own past, can you make the same claim? Can you make this claim about the men you know? Explain your responses.

4.

Throughout this piece, Allen uses personal as well as historical examples to support her ideas. Analyze the effects of this dual perspective on the reader, using your own responses to her explanations to show what you mean.

5.

Look closely at the topics that Allen's mother dealt with in her stories (paragraph 9). Categorize these various topics and then synthesize your findings to suggest the skills, knowledge, emotions, and values that are important to a Native American woman.

6.

According to Allen, how does a Native American woman view her "hormonal life," and how does this view differ from that of her white, middle-class counterpart? What cultural values does each view reflect?

7.

Allen writes that a Native American woman's goal in life is to become "strong and balanced." What two goals do you think the mothers in your own cultural community wish for their daughters today? What two goals do you think mothers in your own cultural community wish for their sons?

8.

Allen lists various ways in which Native American women deal with the conflicts inherent in womanhood (paragraph 16). Compare her list with the ways you believe women in your community deal with conflicts in their own lives. Do you see these coping strategies as different from those of the men in your community? Explain.

9.

Someone once wrote that you can tell the values of a culture by how it treats its young and its aged. How did the Native Americans care for these groups of people, and how do people in your community today care for these same groups? What conclusions can you draw about these two cultures on the basis of your answers?

10.

Allen's great-grandmother left the following advice as a legacy that eventually passed to Allen: "Never forget you are an Indian." Suppose that you had one last piece of advice to give to your children, and complete the following sentence: Never forget \_\_\_\_\_. Why would you choose this advice for your children?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Choose a popular television show or movie today in which women assume the key roles. What roles do these media characters portray, and in what ways does a woman's real-life role differ from the media's version?

2.

Research the roles of women in another American Indian tribe, such as Hopi, Sioux, Iroquois, or Algonquin. Compare the rituals, roles, and values of these Indian women with those of the Laguna Pueblo women.

3.

Are gender roles determined by nature or nurture? Use this essay and your own experience, as well as the findings from three modern-day sociologists or psychologists, to answer this question in an extended essay.

PETER FILENE

*Between a Rock and a Soft Place:*

A Century of American Manhood

Born in New York City in 1941, Peter Filene teaches history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Long interested in gender issues, Filene is the author of *Him/Her/Self* (1986) which traces gender identities in modern America from the end of the Victorian era to the children of the women's movement. "Between a Rock and a Soft Place" first appeared in *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Duke University Press, 1985). His most recent book is *In the Arms of Others: A Cultural History of the Right-to-Die in America* (1998).

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

From your experiences and observations, create a verbal portrait describing your image of the American male. What does he look like? How does he act? What's important to him? What does he need? What does he want? What does he believe? Reflecting on your "portrait," do you really know anyone who fits this image exactly?

2.

For women: Imagine you are a man, the same age and in the same circumstances that you are in now. What advantages do you have being a man? What disadvantages do you have?

For men: Imagine you are a woman, the same age and in the same circumstances that you are in now. What advantages do you have being a woman? What disadvantages do you have?

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In middle-class circles these days, one can hardly drop into a conversation or pick up a magazine or skim through a book without encountering sentences that begin: "The trouble with men is . . ." These are not exclusively women's sentences; this is not a sexual class war, with Amazonian feminists launching guerrilla raids upon men. More and more, the accusations also come from men themselves.

"We've been accused of everything from racism to sexism to warmaking to being generally responsible for trying to destroy the planet," a male freelance writer told readers of the *New York Times Magazine* in 1978. "Since the 50's, we've been forced to get to know ourselves a little better and some of us haven't liked what we've learned." Five years later, things had not improved. "I don't know what it's like on the East Coast," a thirty-seven-year-old California psychotherapist said, "but out here for the past twenty years, 'male' has been equivalent to 'negative.'" Back on the East Coast, meanwhile, arts commentator Lucy Lippard said it was like this: "While I'm only too glad to see men or anyone else 'working on themselves,' if I were completely honest I'd have to say it isn't working, or rather that there's something missing." Progressive-thinking men, she claimed, were trying to be "more like women . . . —in touch with themselves, fluid, emotional, vulnerable, and able to cry, as well as to fuck authentically with affectionate passion." But Lippard concluded sadly that so far, the heart of male-female relationships contained only numbness or even less than that, a void.<sup>1</sup>

These are hard times for men. Machismo is going out of style among the middle class, and any man who dares to play that role is likely to be snubbed, ridiculed, or karate-punched for his sexist foolishness. Hollywood heroes betray what's happening. To be sure, James Bond continues to juggle glossy weapons and breathless blondes, but John Wayne has died, Superman giggles and blushes, and E. T. wants to go home. Even *Playboy*, that manual of robust self-indulgence, is showing signs of exhaustion. After twenty years of popularity among prosperous young men, its circulation has slumped. A new generation, both male and female, is coming on the scene, to whom Hugh Hefner's ideals of huge tits and anonymous sex acts seem less appetizing. In one of *Playboy*'s own cartoons a few years ago, you could hear the future arriving. There are the familiar ninety-pound weakling and his girl and the bully on the beach. But this time the weakling (in sandals) is kicking the sand, saying, "Get lost, creep! There's a new man on the beach and your macho bullshit doesn't cut it anymore!" And the bully replies: "That man is the biggest nuisance on the beach! Why can't he learn that real men today are gentle and

sensitive and . . . ?” Meanwhile the girlfriend murmurs to herself: “This is getting a little weird . . .”<sup>2</sup>

Not only a little weird, but also a lot confusing. In the face of such outcries against men and among them, one is tempted to make either of two quick steps of diagnosis. The crisis of masculinity is new, one is tempted to think, and the women’s movement is responsible for it. Or the crisis is as old as Adam, and the women’s movement is finally calling it out into the open. Neither of these diagnoses contains the whole truth, however. Contrary to appearances, feminism is not entirely to blame for the trouble with men, nor are men themselves. The truth is more complex than villainy lying on one side of the war between the sexes. Even had there been no women’s movement, men would be struggling against the push and pull of their social roles. For the masculine dilemma has to do only partly with women. On the other hand, the fault lies not entirely in ourselves, that we are men, but also in our circumstances.

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Diagnosis becomes clearer if we take the long view—a century-long view. In this historical perspective we see that the trouble with American men has existed for more than a hundred years, but until our own century it was disguised or mitigated by three kinds of circumstances. As those circumstances gave way, the trouble emerged into the open and became unavoidable. As modernity developed around him, it became harder and harder for a boy to grow up into a man.

The first circumstance involves expectations. A middle-class boy grew up in Victorian America with much clearer prescriptions of how he was supposed to “be a man” than his modern-day grandson would be given. The ideal of “manly character” laid heavy demands upon the body, mind, and soul, but at least one knew what he was up against. When character dissolved into “self-fulfillment,” however, the strictly masculine commandments gave way and the trouble began.

Along with the shift in expectations came changes in the opportunities for men to test those expectations. Rural America turned urban, work involved brain more than brawn, individualism melted into corporate bureaucracy. While the content of ideal manhood was relaxing, the conditions of proving it were disintegrating. Ambiguity doubled. And it tripled when the roles of women began altering in drastic ways. As the domestic angel entered college and career, as the deferential lady demanded equal rights in politics and law and bed, the traditional gender arrangement fell apart. Men had depended upon women to perform one half of the division of labor, economic as well as emotional labor. Men had depended upon women’s dependency. So when women stepped out of their role, men were left flailing inside their own.

Men’s troubles are old troubles, at least a century old. But they have become so noticeable and bedeviling only as the supportive props of traditional manhood splintered. We look back to Victorian America, then, not to lament a golden age, but to explain how men have entered their recent dilemma and how they can get out of it.

Expectations

10

The words of Victorian fathers fell upon their sons like rain—cold, serious, and clear. To help nine-year-old Stanley “be a good man if God lets you grow up,” Granville Bascom Hall in 1853 laid down six rules of conduct: “In the first place then, ask the advice of

your parents. . . . 2nd, Hear all they have to say and remember it all. 3rd—Never reject their advice because *you cannot see* it to be wise. . . . 4th—Never . . .” But we need not read on through 4th and 5th and 6th, because they follow the same line of filial obedience in equally implacable words.<sup>3</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt, Senior, issued his asthmatic young son a manly prescription that was more varied but no less strict. “You have the mind but you have not the body, and without the help of the body the mind cannot go as far as it should. You must *make* your body.” Ten years later, as Teddy went off to Harvard with well-developed body and mind, his father offered further advice: “Take care of your morals first, your health next, and finally your studies.”<sup>4</sup>

Obedience, work, strength of body and mind, and then add to these ingredients a heavy dose of self-reliance and religion. In 1878 the Reverend Joseph Wilson wrote to “My Dearest Son” when Woodrow was a junior at Princeton:

It is not now my purpose to preach to you upon the subject of “ambition. . . .” To attain distinction is commendable. But, to *deserve* distinction is a far worthier aim than distinction itself. . . . You *have* talents—you have *character*—you have manly bearing. You have almost every advantage coupled I trust with genuine love for God. Do not allow yourself, then, to feed on dreams. . . . The roast beef of hard industry gives blood for climbing the hills of life. It is genius that usually gets to the highest tops—but, what is the secret heart of genius? the ability to work with painstaking self-denial.<sup>5</sup>

And when a son forgot these manly lessons, a father took pains to remind him. Twenty-six-year-old Lincoln Steffens landed in New York City, completing three carefree years of European study, and was handed an envelope containing one hundred dollars and a letter. “My dear son,” it began, and then went on to tell Lennie that his father was finally cutting the purse strings. “By now you must know about all there is to know of the theory of life, but there’s a practical side as well. It’s worth knowing. I suggest that you learn it, and the way to study it, I think, is to stay in New York and hustle.”<sup>6</sup>

Eugene Debs escaped this sort of reprimand by leaving home and school at age fifteen to work on the railroad. Self-reliance, he soon discovered, was a frightening business. “Sometimes I am all alone and I am so homesick, I hardly know what to do,” he confessed to his parents. Moreover, jobs were scarce in the depression of the 1870s, and poverty hovered menacingly around him. But he was determined “to prove that I can act manly when must be.”<sup>7</sup>

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One way or another, each boy grew up to be a man, a “true man.” They pursued different occupations: Hall was a psychologist, Roosevelt a writer, cowboy, soldier, and politician; Wilson a scholar and politician; Steffens a journalist; and Debs a trade unionist and socialist. But all climbed the hills of life dutifully, piously, industriously, self-reliantly, and self-denyingly, all hearing the same paternal adverbs tolling in their consciences as they proved their manly character. They waged furious ideological quarrels with one another: Hall denounced Rooseveltian imperialism in 1898 and praised the Wilsonian crusade in 1917; Wilson and Roosevelt competed against each other twice for the presidency; Wilson jailed Debs for antiwar activity; Steffens denounced Wilson’s peace treaty and embraced Lenin instead. Nevertheless, all five men acted out the same basic script of Victorian masculinity.

A century later, the style of that script seems as quaint as detachable collars and spats. But once you deflate the pompous pieties and straighten out the baroque syntax, the expectations heaped upon Victorian boys sound remarkably similar to the ones heaped upon modern boys. Be tough, be courageous, take risks; don't cry or show weakness; work, achieve, succeed; depend upon yourself.<sup>8</sup> Although twentieth-century middle-class fathers tended to be more affectionate and supportive than their own fathers had been, in their children's memory they still were the background parent. Mom played the leading role on childhood's stage, making meals, nursing hurt knees and feelings, saying yes or no. More to the point, when modern Dad did become involved, he tended to treat sons and daughters differently. On the would-be man he concentrated more directiveness, support, and strict discipline—an active posture; on the would-be woman he was content with affection and protection.<sup>9</sup>

Boys should learn not to be sissies, in other words, and girls not to be tomboys. When modern children left parental laps and went to school, they met up with the same teachings. In eighty percent of grade-school books of the 1960s, and almost as large a majority of books in the 1970s, boys outnumbered and “out-did” girls. Boys stood, climbed, and rode bikes, performed chemistry experiments and helped Dad build things, rescued people from cattle stampedes, and never cried. Girls sat and watched and daydreamed, cared for pets or siblings, helped Mom make cookies, rode as passengers on boys' bikes, and cried frequently.<sup>10</sup> If we advance the plot from childhood to adolescence, it was *Sports Illustrated* versus *Seventeen*.

Traditional stereotyping of the two sexes governs more strongly than we may have believed. That contrast should not blind us, however, to significant evolution within the masculine ideal. Brother Jack and sister Jill may be steered in very different directions, but Jack is not looking toward the same ideals as his grandfather. Instead of unquestioning obedience to his parents, a modern middle-class son expects to negotiate and reason because his parents (long before Dr. Spock, by the way) have prized a “democratic” family. Amid this new sort of domestic political system, self-reliance and rugged competition become obstreperous traits. Children of both sexes are encouraged to be more pliable citizens. Be true to yourself, think for yourself, but also be tolerant of others. Work hard, strive for success, but also get along with other people, be a good member of the team. In the course of a century, “character” has evolved into “personality.” As part of that transformed sense of self, the notion of masculinity has softened and expanded, still bearing many Victorian inheritances but also turning increasingly “feminine.”<sup>11</sup>

From one perspective, this broadened repertoire of expectations has made things easier for boys. Instead of the narrow identity permitted by all those “thou shalt not” commandments of nineteenth-century parents, boys are permitted a more spacious self. But there is a less happy perspective. If one sees this space as sheer vacancy, offering too few guidelines and asking too much self-direction, then spaciousness makes things harder. Is the identity bottle half-full or half-empty? A man's perspective ultimately depends on his temperament. But I suspect that the balance these days is tipping toward “empty”—toward hardship, toward “the trouble with men” that both sexes have been grumbling about. Even in the best of circumstances, ambiguity of expectations can be troubling. When the two other once-supportive circumstances of masculinity are no longer giving support, then ambiguity will be very troubling indeed. And that is what has

occurred. The prescriptions of masculinity may be wider, but the opportunities for proving it are narrower. And modern masculinity—like Victorian manliness—requires proof.

## Opportunities

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You must make your body, Theodore Roosevelt, Senior, insisted; you must make your mind. A hundred years later, manhood remains a matter of “making” rather than becoming. It is not a phase into which a boy inevitably graduates over time, but a status which he must achieve by struggle. A girl grows into womanhood, translating childhood nurturance into wifely and motherly nurturance. A boy, by contrast, must prove himself a man, earning mastery over his inner weaknesses and the outer challenges of the world.<sup>12</sup> When the world was rural, the challenges were harsh but at least they were tangible, and so the proof was just as tangible. At Harvard, Theodore Roosevelt showed manliness by diligent study and moral purity. But how much more emphatically he could show it in the Dakota Bad Lands! Hunting buffalo, elk, and bear, rounding up boat thieves and cattle, riding horseback for twelve or twenty-four hours through subzero weather, Theodore left no doubt in anyone’s mind that he was a “true man” and, eventually, the emblematic man of his era.<sup>13</sup> A smelly buffalo hide declared graduation from boyhood far better than any sheepskin diploma.

Coming from patrician New York City, Roosevelt never fully escaped the status of dude (which is perhaps why he tried so hard and boasted so much). His future friend Lincoln Steffens, by contrast, was a westerner by birth, galloping through his California youth as “the boy on horseback.” No asthma for Lennie, nor much early schooling except in the school of hard knocks. But not much conventional success either, and Steffens eventually went to New York to show his father and himself that he could succeed in some career or other. Business was his father’s recommendation, literary writing was his own hope. In the end, the job market settled the argument, and Steffens became a newspaper journalist covering the rough-and-tumble “beat” of the Lower East Side. “Will it make a man of me?” Steffens asked himself.<sup>14</sup> In a remarkably short time it did. As a muckraker fighting with his pen against urban outlaws, Steffens became nationally famous.

As his story suggests, however, the circumstances of success were changing at the turn of the century. In modernizing America, the message was “Go east, young man.” The prairies were being crisscrossed by railroad tracks and asphalt sidewalks. Buffalo Bill worked in Barnum and Bailey’s Circus. People were crowding into cities, businesses were growing into corporations and corporations into multimillion-dollar trusts, John Henry was losing to the inexhaustible machine. In 1870, two of three men were self-employed; in 1920, only one of three (and today only one of ten). By 1910, six of ten wage-earners in manufacturing were working for companies of more than 100 employees; by 1929, seven of ten. (Today, 30 percent of the entire nonagricultural labor force works for businesses with more than five hundred employees.) Amid such “progress,” men yearned desperately for tangible proofs of manly character.<sup>15</sup>

In 1917, Harvard senior John Dos Passos complained to a friend: “I think we are all of us a pretty milky lot,—don’t you?—with our tea-table convictions and our radicalism that keeps so consistently within the bounds of decorum. . . . And what are we fit for when they turn us out of Harvard? We’re too intelligent to be successful businessmen and we

haven't the sand or the energy to be anything else."<sup>16</sup> Thirty years earlier, Roosevelt had set out for the Bad Lands. But twenty-four years earlier, historian Frederick Jackson Turner had declared the frontier was gone. As the open land closed, where was an aspiring youth to test his manliness?

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Well, there was still the battlefield. War offered a more genuine red badge of courage than any fight against corruption or monopolies. When William James's father refused to let him fight in the Civil War, but younger brother Wilky managed to enlist and be wounded, nineteen-year-old William felt "one of the very lightest of featherweights," lacking "the grip and energy" of other men. When Stanley Hall's father secured him an army exemption rather than let him wage war against the Confederacy, he inflicted on his son "the very sorest of all memories." Dos Passos was luckier. In 1917 he went to France, crouched beneath the blood-red explosions of a German bombardment, and exclaimed: But gosh I want to be able to express, later, all of this, all the tragedy and hideous excitement of it . . . the grey crooked fingers of the dead, the dark look of dirty mangled bodies . . . , the vast tomtom of the guns, the ripping tear shells make when they explode. . . . When one shell comes I want another, nearer, nearer. . . . I want to throw the dice at every turn with the old roisterer Death . . . and through it all I feel more alive than ever before.<sup>17</sup>

Wars served as crucibles of manhood, but they interrupted rather than reversed the inexorable socioeconomic trends. The heroic world was vanishing. War itself was fought by tanks and then planes and then missiles as much as by men. After 1865 the wilderness steadily retreated before cities and highways, until the only frontier hung in the transatlantic air for Lindbergh and other pioneers to fly and then—higher yet, beyond gravity and the reach of anyone but a few astronauts—the frontier became outer space. Meanwhile the occupational world was modernizing. Middle-class work became segmented by specialization, depersonalized by bureaucracies, abstracted by computers, muffled by fringe benefits and pension plans.

In this setting, what place is there for "the roast beef of hard industry"? Old-fashioned ambition continues in new-fashioned modes. Up-and-coming professional men of the twentieth century work as many hours as they would have worked in the nineteenth: more than fifty-five hours per week for one fourth of them, more than sixty hours for one sixth. They live the strenuous life of the court room, the operating room, or the corporate board room. For more physical proof of themselves they turn, not to battlefields, but to the racquet ball court, the jogging track, or the Nautilus-equipped gym in their office building. Like their sons hunched for hours in front of Star War video games, repelling Darth Vader armies with their thumbs, their fathers enjoy the recreational equivalent of war.

In short, middle-class men have adapted their behavior to modern circumstances. They have sublimated, displaced, replaced—call it what you will, they have in any case learned how to update traditional manly activity. But the satisfaction is not what it once was. "I work hard and take a full briefcase home most nights," says Chuck Powell, a forty-one-year-old comptroller with a Big Board company. "My life in the past five years has . . . become frenetic. . . . I feel a lot of pressure and I get more tired than I'm willing to admit, even to myself." His biggest dissatisfaction, he says, comes from lack of recognition by his employers. But the dilemma embraces more than the part of himself he



brings to the office. “I guess I’ve got a puritanical streak in me that says profit and all that jazz aren’t the be-all and end-all of my life. At sixty what am I going to tell my kids I did with my life? . . . I guess my personal and business values just don’t click at times. And that’s really frustrating.”<sup>18</sup>

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There are many Chuck Powells out there in the skyscraper heights of the corporate economy. According to repeated surveys by the University of Michigan in 1969, 1973, and 1977, job satisfaction has declined significantly, most of all among college graduates. Men’s discontent is directed not at inadequate pay or hours, but inadequate meaning. They want to be able to say: “My work is important and gives me a feeling of accomplishment.”

The issue is not simply work, however, but work as a part of the rest of their lives. According to those same surveys, one third of married workers feel that their jobs interfere with family life “somewhat” or “a lot.” And family matters to them. “What are the important things to you?” a sociologist asked two hundred executives in a large company. Sixty percent said “family,” fewer than 20 percent said “career.” Even more troubled testimony emerges from an American Management Association poll in 1973, which reported that four of five businessmen placed their major aspirations not in the firms that employed them, but in their home life. Likewise, a Louis Harris poll in 1979 of men aged eighteen to fifty found that the vast majority rated health, love, peace of mind, and family as being personally “very important”; work came in a distant fifth. In other words, Superman wants more time off from fighting Lex Luther and stopping runaway express trains. He wants more opportunity to shed his blue tights and become good old Clark Kent playing at home with Lois Lane and Superbaby.<sup>19</sup>

So how do men resolve this conflict between the way they spend most of their waking hours (on the job) and the way they would like to spend some of them (with family and self)? One resolution is a midlife crisis. According to social psychologists like Daniel Levinson (*The Seasons of a Man’s Life*), our lives move through a cycle. The thirties are the time when a man settles down, works hard to make his niche, and enters the “BOOM” phase of “Becoming One’s Own Man.” Near the age of forty, however, a typical man enters midlife transition, a period of renewed questions and fresh tasks. Now that “the returns are in” from his youthful dreams of money, fame, and power, he must look at the options he chose against, the desires he postponed, the other voices in the other rooms of his self. In particular, a middle-aged man becomes aware of his inclination toward creativity and human attachment (what Erik Erikson calls “generativity”). He cultivates imagination, sensitivity to others’ needs, and loving friendships. It is time, at last, for the “feminine” side of his personality to be given life.<sup>20</sup> Modern social psychologists have popularized the concept of midlife transition, but it is not simply a modern story. Looking back a century, we see the same cycle among Victorian men. At first it is easy to overlook, because they rode into middle age without the label of “midlife crisis” and with less of a jolt. But we should not mistake what was happening. During their late thirties came the same troubled turn of life, although it made less trouble for them than for us because Victorian circumstances were more supportive of conventional manliness. Consider, for example, Lincoln Steffens at the age of thirty-six. When he was offered the chance to become managing editor of *McClure’s*, the most prestigious American magazine of the day, it should have been a jubilant moment. But not at all. “I am home—

sick today,” he told his father. “Some symptoms of nervous prostration. . . . All signs are pointing to a temporary retirement.” The months-long breakdown occurred because, on the verge of occupational triumph, Steffens realized—first subconsciously and later consciously—that he was failing in other realms. His novel was unwritten, his marriage was loveless and childless. In conventional public terms he was a successful man, but those terms did not cover the private man. He finally took the *McClure*’s job, crisscrossed the nation on research and speaking tours, winning extraordinary acclaim. But in the process he drifted further and further from his wife. He became a husband who slept alone in hotel rooms as he rode the circuit of celebrity. Only in his fifties, after his first wife died and he remarried, did Steffens fulfill “one of the deepest desires of my life”—fatherhood. Radiant fatherhood is what he called it. “The best rectification I have ever had is (my son) Pete, who lets me love him more and more and ever more.”<sup>21</sup>

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Eugene Debs suffered the same bittersweet blend of public celebrity and private regret. As the charismatic spokesman of socialism, he journeyed from crowd to ardent crowd, interview upon interview, one presidential candidacy after another. The personal price, however, was high. Like Steffens, Debs was evading a loveless, childless marriage, collapsing under periodic psychosomatic illnesses, and harboring an inner hollowness. He too fell in love with another woman. But here the two biographies part company. Katherine Debs had not died and Mabel Curry was married. During the last decade of his life, Debs slid into depression and despair, but it is hard to say whether his wartime sentence to the federal penitentiary or his prison of unrequited love was more responsible.<sup>22</sup>

“No man can be a good citizen who is not a good husband and a good father,” Theodore Roosevelt proclaimed.<sup>23</sup> Roosevelt himself, as you would expect, was better than good: an ardent husband to one wife and then, after she died, to a second wife, while also a devoted father of five children. Few Victorian men matched his overachievement. In fact, many seemed unaware of their domestic needs before entering middle age. They put up with indifferent marriages, or rationalized them, or turned their backs on them, investing their primary hopes in successful careers. Only during their forties did they stop, look homeward, and reckon the emotional gains and losses. Midlife crisis may be part of an innate sequence (a “season”) or it may be caused by external events. Social psychologists are arguing hotly about this issue, and it is too soon to say where the truth lies. Either way, it seems that men of a century ago and men of our own time have tended to go through a common pattern. Both groups have struggled to “live up to” the script of manliness, only to discover—in the second act of their lives—that they must struggle to rewrite the script along gentler, more vulnerable, less masculine lines. “*Plus ça change*,” one is tempted to say, wryly. Play it again, Sam, and yet again, this same old story, the quest for fame and glory, a case of do or die, as a century of time goes by.

But it is not quite the same old story. It has turned more difficult and more uncertain. For one thing, the modern manly script has been liberalized, permitting more interpretation by the actors, emphasizing personality more than character. At the same time the opportunities for proving one’s manliness have become less tangible and physical. Together these trends produce an unsettling vagueness. “What exactly does it mean to be a man, and how will I know that I have made myself into one?” Victorians provided answers that were rigid but also clear-cut, so that a man could measure how much he had

succeeded or failed. Modern men, by contrast, pursue the plastic goals of “growth” and “happiness.” And they pursue it in a plastic world of bureaucratic organizations that produce services or ideas rather than tangible goods. Little wonder, then, that modern men—at midlife or even earlier—seek gratification less in their careers than in their families. A sales account or a computer does not hug, kiss, and whisper “I love you.” But here enters the third and most troubling change of circumstance. Women no longer are acting out their old-fashioned script of domesticity and deference. While the modern male script resembles the Victorian version, the modern female script has been radically rewritten. As a result, the drama of the genders has turned chaotic. Actor and actress are talking past each other, singing a duet of different songs, as the director angrily shouts: “The trouble with men is . . .”

Women

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Until recently, marriage was presumed to be a woman’s career. In 1885, for example, Woodrow Wilson wrote to his fiancée, Ellen Axson, while she was taking art courses in New York City. He felt “guiltily selfish” in reminding her, he said, but “of course there’s that fact that marriage will take away almost all your chance to work” in art. “Ah, sweetheart, this thing has torn my heart more than once,” Wilson went on. “And yet that is what is involved in becoming a wife; we shall want to go to house-keeping as soon as possible.” How did Ellen respond to this selfish fact? She said yes, and yes, and yes. Ten years and three daughters later, she continued to say yes: “How I thank God for you my darling—noble man, perfect husband that you are—my own true love, so absolutely *all* that a woman could desire the man to be to whom she gives her heart and life.”<sup>24</sup>

It is hard for us today to take such gush at face value. We suspect Mrs. Wilson of self-delusion, brainwashing, or masochism to be so happily dedicating herself to husband and family. Where she sees love, we see exploitation; where she talks of giving, we mutter of giving away. Higher education for women, two feminist movements, and more relaxed attitudes toward religious duty and divorce have made the traditional division of labor seem obsolete. As a result, Woodrow Wilson’s grandson cannot depend on his fiancée today to respond the way Ellen did. Modern women give drastically different answers. In 1982 George Gallup asked a national sample of women: “Which one of the alternatives on this list do you feel would provide the most interesting and satisfying life for you personally?” Eight of ten told him that their ideal lifestyle is to be married with children, but half of these hopeful mothers wanted to combine motherhood with a full-time job (10 percent more than in 1975). Among younger women the choice was more emphatic; by a two-to-one margin they voted for “doing it all.”<sup>25</sup> Female equality of roles, rights, and power remains more an ideal than a reality, of course. Nevertheless, the egalitarian principle has decisively displaced nineteenth-century notions of a wife’s relationship to her husband. She will be neither the better half nor the subordinate half, only the other half.

A house divided cannot stand. As women revise their part of the division of economic and emotional labor, men have been left holding their own part in bewilderment. Knowingly or unknowingly, selfishly or generously, in weakness or strength, they had depended upon their wives for support in the symbiosis of marriage. “My own darling,” twenty-seven-year-old Woodrow Wilson wrote to Ellen shortly after she agreed to marry

him, "I suppose there never was a man more dependent than I on love and sympathy, more devoted to home and home life; and, my darling, my heart is overflowing with gratitude and gladness because of the assurance that it now has a new love to lean upon—a love which will some day be the centre of a new home and the joy of new home life. I shall not begin to live a complete life, my love, until you are my wife."<sup>26</sup>

He meant every word of it. During their thirty years of marriage Wilson's devotion flowed unwaveringly, unabashedly, in pages of purple prose when they were apart and presumably in oratory and whispers when they were together. Without a wife, his life was not complete—he was not complete. He meant it. When Ellen died of Bright's disease at the age of fifty-four, he remarried within a year and a half.

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If marriage was a Victorian woman's career, it was no less presumed by men for themselves. By a melancholy coincidence, Steffens, Roosevelt, and Hall each suffered the premature death of his first wife, and each remarried (Roosevelt within a year, Hall within nine years, and Steffens first living with one woman until, ten years later, he married another). All of them thus rejoined the ranks of the other 70 percent of their gender in 1900 who were married.<sup>27</sup> "Spinster" had derisory connotations, but "bachelor"—whatever gay-doggish image it carried—meant for most men what Wilson said it meant for him: less than a fully happy life.

Much has changed in middle-class marriages since 1900: the average number of children; attitudes toward the practice of sexuality, especially women's sexuality; the frequency and the acceptability of divorce; and wives' employment. But men continue to want—to need—to be married. The persistently high rates of marriage and remarriage testify to that. So does the rate of mental illness, physical illness, and suicide among unmarried men—a rate significantly higher than among married men and also among unmarried women.<sup>28</sup> *Playboy* may preach the swinging single life, and singles bars may welcome the playboys, and Andy Capp may complain on the comics page every morning about his henpecked fate. But the truth is that the happiest, healthiest men are husbands.

And the probability is that they have found health and happiness in a symbiotic relationship. Her softness complements his toughness, her attention to people complements his attention to things, her feeling complements his doing, and together they make him whole. This arrangement worked well so long as both partners played their parts. But as women have begun to step out of role, reclaiming the rest of their possibilities, the arrangement has collapsed. The men who are left behind in their half of the old symbiosis are left wanting, almost as incomplete as if they were unmarried.

Is it any surprise, then, that they have had trouble with the women's movement? At first they went through a stage of self-defense against feminists: (angrily) "How dare you accuse me, you bitch, after all I've done for you?" or (plaintively) "What have I done to deserve this, my darling?" As they learned that they would survive female independence, however, growing numbers of liberal middle-class males in the 1970s turned from defensiveness to support: "If you want a career and a baby, I'll help you, dear." When they did attack, they attacked themselves: "The trouble with men is . . ." And that seems to be as far as liberated men have come: between a rock and a soft place.

From Here On

What is the way out of this trap? One way is for men to stop reacting and to begin acting—in other words, to learn the lessons of their history and to take a hand in shaping

their future. Although the feminist movement has forced men to change their traditional attitudes and practices, their troubles did not begin with feminism nor will they end with men becoming feminists. Men sidestep the truth when they blame women for their dilemma. But they take only half a step forward when they placate or imitate women. At a time when injustices to women remain flagrant, they deserve to occupy center stage in the drama we call “sexual inequality.” But the gender problem will not end if women win equality of rights and opportunities. Even if that idealistic day should arrive, men would still be left with their century-old dilemma of trying to define their own roles in the face of drastically altered “manly” expectations and opportunities. Feminism has taught us that women deserve to be asked, in the words of Gallup’s pollsters, “Which one of the alternatives on this list do you feel would provide the most interesting and satisfying life for you personally?” The past century of history teaches us that the same question needs to be asked of men, too.

50

A few men have, in effect, been doing exactly that. Beyond supporting women and rejecting machoism, they have been widening the social space for both genders. That is what gay men have done, occupying a part of the sexual and emotional spectrum previously restricted to women. That is what straight men have done who are staying home as househusbands or taking custody of their children after divorce. But we need not resort to such exceptional cases to find examples of egalitarianism.

A survey asked a national sample of Americans in 1977 whether they preferred the idea of shared marriage roles or a traditional marriage. Among the general public, shared roles emerged the slight but surprising winner, 48 to 43 percent. Among persons aged eighteen to twenty-nine, however, that preference won by a resounding margin of three to one. For more exciting portents, listen to the 28,000 readers of *Psychology Today* who responded in 1977 to a lengthy questionnaire about masculinity. Most of the men wanted to be warmer, gentler, and more loving, and they disdained competition, aggressiveness, or sexual conquest (although they still had trouble asking for directions when they became lost while driving). Most of the women, in turn, shared these same ideals for men as well as for themselves.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, *Psychology Today* readers are younger, more educated, and more affluent than most Americans, but people like them usually point which way the cultural wind is blowing.

Opinions are one thing, but behavior is more convincing. Consider the behavior of those innumerable husbands who stand beside their wives under the hot lights of the operating room, coaching their wives breath by breath, push by pelvic push, toward the moment of birth.<sup>30</sup> These men of Lamaze are not extirpating some awful macho part of themselves, nor trying to be “like a woman.” They are becoming full partners in parenthood—no longer content with simply having planted that sperm nine months earlier and then sitting off-stage in the waiting room. By accompanying their wives throughout pregnancy, labor, and delivery, they have enhanced their own power without subtracting from women’s. One gender’s gain does not necessarily mean the other gender’s loss. On the contrary, beyond stereotypes lies more space for people to move about. Out there, beyond stereotypes, a man coaches his wife and also coaches his son’s (or daughter’s) Little League team.

Even the most forward-looking Americans have not arrived there, not by a long shot. In fact, we still are groping to find words for what is happening—“househusband,”

“parenting,” “dual-career families,” all clumsy efforts to articulate half-formed ideas. But slowness and clumsiness are hardly surprising, because we are talking about a profound cultural realignment. The winds of change blew for years before women won the vote, another half-century before the modern feminist movement began. They will have to blow far into the next century, no doubt, before men will have outgrown their troubles. In the meantime, we can nurture ourselves with images of a future when a man is free to weep and wear cowboy boots, to bathe his children and then watch the Pittsburgh Steelers, to bake bread on Thursday and play poker with the guys on Friday, to ask for a hug from a male friend or a female friend, whoever happens to be there when you need it.

Notes

1.  
Stephen Singular, “Moving On: Reaping the Rewards of the Women’s Movement,” *New York Times Magazine*, 30 April 1978, 18; John Skow, “In California: Roar, Lion, Roar,” *Time*, 7 November 1983, 17; Lucy Lippard, “Coming Soon: The Fall and Rise of the New Man,” *Village Voice*, 1 November 1983, 96.

2.  
*Playboy*, September 1974, 147. For background, see Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1979), 267–69.

3.  
“St. Nicholas” (G. B. Hall) to G. Stanley Hall, 1 January 1853, quoted in Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago, 1972), 5. Let me take a moment and a footnote to talk about methodology. I have chosen five middle-class men as the spokes by which the Victorian half of this essay evolves:

Birthplace

Occupation

Political  
Ideology

Father’s  
Occupation

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G. Stanley Hall  
(1844–1924)

Mass.

psychologist

?

farmer

Eugene V. Debs  
(1855–1926)

Ind.

unionist

socialist

merchant  
Woodrow Wilson  
(1856–1924)

Va.

teacher,  
politician

liberal  
Democrat

minister  
Theodore Roosevelt  
(1858–1919)

N.Y.

politician

liberal  
Republican

banker  
Lincoln Steffens  
(1886–1936)

Calif.

journalist

liberal,  
then radical

banker

They do not qualify as a social-scientific “sample.” But they are geographically, occupationally, and ideologically diverse, while concentric in time, class, and (as the

essay will show) attitudes toward masculinity. Therefore I claim them as representative men.

4.

Quoted in Edmund Morris, *The Rise of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York, 1979), 60; and quoted in Carleton Putnam, *Theodore Roosevelt: The Formative Years, 1858–1886* (New York, 1958), 1:141.

5.

Joseph Ruggles Wilson to Woodrow Wilson, 25 January 1878, in *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, ed. Arthur S. Link (Princeton, N.J., 1966), 1:345–46.

6.

Quoted in Lincoln Steffens, *Autobiography* (New York, 1931), 169.

7.

Debs to “Dear Parents,” 29 September 1874, and to Louise Debs, 3 and 8 October 1874, quoted in Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, Ill., 1982), 18–19.

8.

Deborah David and Robert Brannon, eds., *The Forty-nine Percent Majority: The Male Sex Role* (Reading, Mass., 1976), 11–36.

9.

Wanda C. Bronson, Edith S. Katten, and Norman Livson, “Patterns of Authority and Affection in Two Generations,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 58 (March 1959): 148–50; Leonard Benson, *Fatherhood: A Sociological Perspective* (New York, 1968), 192–95, 234–37; Melvin L. Kohn, *Class and Conformity: A Study in Values* (Homewood, Ill., 1969), 112–15, 123, 125; Robert A. Fein, “Research on Fathering: Social Policy and an Emergent Perspective,” in *Family in Transition: Rethinking Marriage, Child Rearing, and Family Organization*, ed. Arlene and Jerome H. Skolnick, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1980), 399.

10.

Elizabeth Fisher, “Children’s Books: the Second Sex, Junior Division,” in *And Jill Came Tumbling After: Sexism in American Education*, ed. Judith Stacey, Susan Bereaud, and Joan Daniels (New York, 1974), 116–22; Women on Words & Images, *Dick and Jane as Victims: Sex Stereotyping in Children’s Readers*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J., 1975), chs. 4, 7, and *passim*.

11.

On the family, see Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (New York, 1975), 162–66, 197–99. On character versus personality, I am indebted to Warren Susman’s lecture at the University of North Carolina in 1975. See also Daniel R. Miller and Guy E. Swanson, *The Changing American Parent: A Study in the Detroit Area* (New York, 1958), 52–54.

12.

Benson, *Fatherhood*, 188–92; Ruth E. Hartley, “Sex-Role Pressures in the Socialization of the Male Child,” *Psychological Reports* 5 (1959): 457–68, reprinted in *Men and Masculinity*, ed. Joseph Pleck and Jack Sawyer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1974).

13.

Morris, *Roosevelt*, chs. 8, 11, esp. pp. 285–95, 301–3, 322–31.

14.



Steffens to his father, 3 November 1893, Steffens Papers, Columbia University.

15.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York, 1977), 15–16; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1982–1983*.

16.

Dos Passos to Arthur K. McComb, 3 July 1917, quoted in Melvin Landsberg, *Dos Passos' Path to U.S.A.: A Political Biography, 1912–1936* (Boulder, Colo., 1972), 56.

17.

Jean Strouse, *Alice James: A Biography* (Boston, 1980), 70–72; Ross, *Hall*, 10; Dos Passos, “Notebook,” 26 August (1917), reprinted in introduction to Dos Passos, *One Man's Initiation: 1917* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1969), 22.

18.

Quoted in Barrie S. Greiff and Preston K. Munter, “Tradeoffs,” *Harvard Magazine*, May–June 1980, 48C. See also Peter M. Grath, “Faster than a Speeding Bullet . . .,” *The Washingtonian*, September 1981, 150–55. For an insightful general interpretation, based on national polls in 1957 and repeated in 1976, see Joseph Veroff, Elizabeth Douvan, and Richard Kulka, *The Inner American: A Self Portrait from 1957 to 1976* (New York, 1981), esp. 17–25, 292–97.

19.

*New Ways to Work Newsletter* (Palo Alto, Calif.), Spring 1979; U.S. Department of Commerce, *Social Indicators: 1976—Selected Data on Social Conditions and Trends in the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1976), 389; the executive poll is in Kanter, *Men and Women*, 105; the AMA poll is in *The New York Times*, 3 June 1973, 4:12; Louis Harris and Associates, “The Playboy Report on American Men: A Study of the Values, Attitudes, and Goals of U.S. Males 18–49 Years Old” (Chicago, 1979).

20.

Daniel J. Levinson et al., *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York, 1978), chs. 9, 13, 15, esp. 196–200 and 228–39; Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1963), 266–68.

21.

Steffens to his father, 4 May 1901, to Laura Suggett, 16 April 1924, and to Marie Howe, 8 February 1926, in *The Letters of Lincoln Steffens*, 2 vols., ed. Ella Winter and Granville Hicks (New York, 1938), 1:137, 2:64, and 2:734. Also Steffens, “Radiant Fatherhood: An Old Father's Confession of Superiority,” (1925), reprinted in *Lincoln Steffens Speaking* (New York, 1936), 5–6.

22.

Salvatore, *Debs*, 277–80, 288, 339–40, and ch. 10 passim.

23.

Quoted in *Theodore Roosevelt*, ed. Dewey Grantham (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), 41.

24.

Wilson to Ellen Axson, 27 March 1885, and Ellen to Woodrow Wilson, 6 February 1894, in *The Priceless Gift: The Love Letters of Woodrow Wilson and Ellen Axson Wilson*, ed. Eleanor Wilson McAdoo (New York, 1962), 126–27, 185.

25.

*The Gallup Report*, no. 203, August 1982, 27.

26.

Wilson to Axson, 2 October 1883, in *Priceless Gift*, ed. McAdoo, 19.

27.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*, Bicentennial Ed., pt. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1975), 21.

28.

Jessie Bernard, *The Future of Marriage* (New Haven, Conn., 1982), 17, 21, 31–32.

29.

*New York Times*, 27 November 1977, p. 75; Carol Tavris, “Men and Women Report Their Views on Masculinity,” *Psychology Today*, January 1977, 35–42, 87.

30.

“New Science of Birth,” *Newsweek*, 15 November 1976, 60; “A New Kind of Life with Father,” *ibid.*, 30 November 1981, 93.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

In a sentence, what is Filene’s main point in this piece? What specific sources does he rely on to support this point?

2.

Evaluate the various sources that Filene uses in this piece. Are these sources fair, unbiased, credible, representative of a total population of men, sufficient, and varied?

3.

What three circumstances, according to Filene, have made men’s roles so complicated today? What specifics for each circumstance does Filene mention?

4.

Compare fathers of today with fathers in the Victorian period as suggested by this essay. What characteristics do these two groups share? What characteristics are different?

5.

In what ways, according to Filene, has the husband/wife relationship changed from the days of early America to the present day? Do you agree or disagree with his contentions?

6.

In the end, what does Filene propose as a goal for American men today? What specifics does he propose as the means for reaching these goals? Can you provide any other specifics that might assist men in reaching this goal?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Complete the following title and write an essay that supports it: A Century of American Womanhood: Between a \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_ .

2.

Examine a specific gender role in your own culture during this past century from another country’s cultural viewpoint.

DAVID HALDANE

*Asian Girls: A Cultural Tug of War*

*Born in 1949, David Haldane studied psychology, political science, and creative writing at UCLA and Goddard College. Since his graduation from Goddard, he has worked as a*

*journalist and has been widely published in both alternative press publications such as the Berkeley Barb and mainstream magazines and newspapers such as the Los Angeles Times, where this essay first appeared in 1988.*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

In what ways does your value system differ from the value system of those a generation or two removed from you—your children or your parents or grandparents?

2.

Imagine that you must marry someone whom your parents chose for you. What are the positive and negative aspects to such an arrangement? Can you be happy in such an arrangement? Explain.

3.

Write about a topic on which you and your parents most likely would not see eye-to-eye. Try to figure out why there's such a gap here, and what might have to happen in order for this gap to close.

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In many respects Crystal Hul, 16, is more American than Cambodian. The daughter of a well-known leader in Southern California's Cambodian refugee community, she has been in the United States since the age of 4. She speaks fluent English, gets good grades, was recently nominated for sophomore princess by her classmates and hopes to pursue a career in political science.

Yet when Crystal walks through the front door of her Long Beach home, she enters a different world. Here she must never allow her head to rise above that of her father's. She must continually refill his rice bowl until he finishes dinner and signals that she may eat. She must never leave the house alone. She is not allowed to date, drive a car, enter a movie theater or attend any party not also attended by her brothers. And she fully expects her parents to eventually choose a husband for her—with whom she is unlikely to even speak before the wedding.

"The rules are different at home than at school," she said. "We respect our father and mother as gods. I could never find the heart to disobey them."

Meet an unusual group of immigrant Americans. They are young Asians deeply rooted in ancient cultures that consider women subservient. And for the girls especially, life in America can be one of stark contrasts, even two clashing existences: life at home and life outside.

5

"I trust my parents to make the right decisions for me," Crystal said. "I feel loved. But sometimes it's hard." So hard, according to psychologists and social workers, that increasing numbers are breaking under the strain. The story of these young women's struggle to balance two worlds has its beginnings in ancient history. Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Chinese philosopher Confucius, whose teachings form the basis for much of Asian society, preached the subservience of women and the suppression of individual needs in favor of those of the group.

"It's the sense that the family is more important than the individual," said Lucie Cheng, a professor of sociology at UCLA who is a Chinese-American and director of the university's Center for Pacific Rim Studies. "The idea that it's not individuals expressing

their individualism that is important, but how everyone can preserve the harmony within the family to keep it going and minimize conflicts.”

While similar values prevailed to some extent in early Western societies, experts say, the rapid technological development of the West tended to mitigate them while the lingering agricultural life styles of the East allowed them to flourish. Thus for generations, especially in East and Southeast Asian countries, women were taught to serve their husbands without question, a role they began preparing for almost from birth. And while their male siblings were also under pressure to respect and obey their elders, the girls in particular were raised as revered and protected beings who learned their proper roles at their mothers’ apron strings.

10

Recent years have seen some disruptions in that tradition. In mainland China, for instance, where the Communist government has long discouraged traditional views of femininity, young people have discovered the sexual revolution with the result that as many as 30% have experienced premarital sex, according to one recent estimate. Japan, strongly influenced by the West through economic and cultural ties, has also undergone some liberalization of its values regarding women. And during the 1960s and ’70s Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos came under Communist rule, with the result that traditional family ties and gender roles there were severely challenged. It is refugees from these Southeast Asian countries—about 340,000 of whom have settled in California since 1975—who tend to cling to their traditional values most strongly.

“They feel guilty about leaving their countries,” said Florentius Chan, a psychologist and director of the Asian Pacific Mental Health Center in Long Beach. Buffeted by media portrayals of what they perceive as an alien and dangerous American culture and wracked by uncertainties regarding their own future in it, the refugees in many cases are interpreting their own traditions more rigidly than they ever did at home. “The only thing they can control,” said Chan, who was born in Taiwan, “is their value system.”

For some families, the effort seems to be working. Crystal, for instance, says that despite occasional teasing from her friends, she is comfortable with the way she is being brought up, including the eventual selection of a mate by her parents, and intends to raise her own daughters the same way. “My husband will love me as a daughter, a little sister and a wife,” the teenager says. “I know that my mom and dad will make a good decision. It’s one less thing I have to worry about.”

15

For others, though, the attempt to live Asian lives in a Western culture can prove devastating. One 18-year-old Cambodian student, who did not want her name used, said she became so upset at her mother’s attempts at controlling her life that she ran away from home, spent several nights in a seedy hotel, got drunk and attempted suicide. “She tried to bring me up in the Cambodian way,” the young woman said, “but I just didn’t know how to act. I was young when we left Cambodia; it’s too difficult to act like that.” Eventually, the youngster received counseling and returned to her Long Beach home, where she says her mother is now somewhat less restrictive. Another girl, age 16, said she rebelled by moving into a Cambodian Buddhist Temple. Later she moved to a shelter, then to a foster home. “I didn’t like the way I was being treated,” said the girl, who

continues to live in the foster home, where she says she is freer to pursue her own interests.

These problems are often aggravated, experts say, because many immigrant parents expect their daughters to get good educations and pursue careers as well as behave in traditionally feminine ways. Thus, added to the pressures on Asian-American students of both genders to excel in their academic and professional pursuits is the demand that young women do so without sacrificing their traditional feminine passivity. The resulting tension has been well chronicled in the art and literature of Asian-Americans.

In 1976, Maxine Hong Kingston, a Chinese-American woman born and raised in Stockton, won the National Book Critics Circle Award for "Woman Warrior," a memoir of her girlhood based on stories her mother told her while working in the family laundry.

20  
In the book, Kingston, who now lives in Studio City, told of purposely acting stupid and clumsy in the presence of young Chinese men chosen by her parents as potential mates. The idea, she said, was to make herself undesirable enough to be left alone.

"I refused to cook," Kingston wrote. "When I had to wash the dishes, I would crack one or two. 'Bad girl!' my mother yelled, and sometimes that made me gloat rather than cry. Isn't a bad girl almost a boy?"

Jude Narita, a young Japanese-American, presented a one-woman play last year called "Coming Into Passion/Song for a Sansei." Working through a series of vignettes, the show, which recently closed at the Fountain Theater in Hollywood, explored the lives of several Asian-American women, including an American teen-ager of Japanese descent, a Filipina mail-order bride, a Vietnamese prostitute and a grown-up who had been detained at a World War II camp for Japanese-Americans.

"Education changes everything," Narita said. "The benefit of coming to America is unlimited opportunity, but one of the side effects is that you lose total control of your children. That's the natural progression: the older generation tries to hold it back, but it's like trying to hold back the wind." Experts say they have no overall statistics on how many Asian girls are running away, becoming involved with drugs and prostitution or attempting suicide as a result of these cultural pressures. Most, however, say such cases are on the rise.

Chan's experience in Long Beach, where his agency deals primarily with Cambodians, may be instructive. Of his 30 current cases, the psychologist said, two-thirds involve girls who are having serious problems adjusting to the expectations of two cultures. Based on his experience, Chan said, he estimates that as many as half of the area's Cambodian families are encountering similar difficulties, with the number of cases requiring professional help increasing by about 20% per year. Chan attributes the increase to the continuing influx of refugees, combined with the fact that more and more girls who were very young when they arrived in the United States are reaching the rebellious teen-age years.

25

"It's getting worse and worse," Chan said. "We have parents calling us crying—they just don't know what to do." Joselyn Yap, director of the child and youth division of the Asian Pacific Counseling and Treatment Center in Los Angeles, reports an alarming increase in child-abuse cases—the majority involving girls—among clients from the Philippines, Vietnam and China, where some segments of the population consider

corporal punishment acceptable. Of the 100 cases her agency sees each month, Yap said, about 20%—a twenty-fold increase since 1985—involve abused children.

Yap attributes the increase in reported incidents of abuse to the rising level of stress felt by immigrants dealing with the changing cultural values of their children, as well as enhanced professional awareness of the problem. One teacher was very surprised that when she said she had to discipline a child, the parents said that “that was OK as long as she didn’t break any of the child’s bones,” recalled Ben Marte, a behavioral science consultant with the agency.

And John Song, intervention program coordinator for Los Angeles’ Korean Youth Center, said that about 40% of his agency’s estimated 450 clients each year are girls having trouble adapting to their dual roles.

A smattering of academic studies have touched on various aspects of the problem. A 1980 paper done at Columbia University focused on Chinese women who had immigrated to the United States. Among its conclusions: that the earlier in their lives they emigrated, the less likely they were to suffer from serious emotional maladjustments. In 1984 a psychologist at UCLA published a paper documenting impaired motivation, increased conflict with children and a growing divorce rate among female Southeast Asian refugees.

One result of this attention has been a proliferation of special programs aimed at helping Asian parents and children. Yap’s agency, for instance, offers classes for parents designed to improve their child-rearing skills, as well as individual and group therapy sessions for teen-age boys and girls. At Song’s center, teen-agers are encouraged to discuss their culture’s double standard for males and females at special workshops. The Asian Pacific Family Center in Rosemead offers therapy designed to help ease the acculturation process.

30

“Our goal is to change the conflict model into more of an integration adjustment model,” said George Choi, the center’s clinical director. “One can adapt by recognizing the boundaries in either world, working comfortably within those boundaries and still being comfortable with one’s self. A lot of the time, [the girls] are not trying to abdicate either role as much as trying to integrate both.”

Indeed, many young Asian women seem to be doing so. Shung Kim, a 19-year-old Korean who has been in the country since age 3 and studies psychology at UCLA, said she has learned to accept the fact that her parents expect her home by 11:30 p.m., while her 17-year-old brother is permitted to stay out until 2 a.m.

“For a while I challenged them,” she said, “but it’s pretty much instilled in me now. I’m like a combination of Korean and American: right in the middle.”

Thuly Nguyen, 16, a Vietnamese high school student who lives in Wilmington, says she understands why her parents won’t let her date. “They’ve been over there longer than they’ve been over here,” she said. “I can’t expect them to change that much.”

And at 23, Vuthy Chek, a Cambodian refugee, has finally worked out an arrangement that she believes she can live with. A student at Cal State Long Beach with a full-time job, she still resides with her parents, is allowed to date only in groups and must be home by 11 p.m.

35

But when it comes time to marry, she said, her family will make a slight departure from tradition. “They would love to have an arranged marriage,” Chek said, “but they have compromised. I have the right to say no.”

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

Based on the approach, information, and language in this piece, what type of person might be the author’s intended audience?

2.

Choose any topic and write an introduction modeled after the first three paragraphs in this essay. What do you think of this introduction? Where do you think it might lead you next?

3.

In general, with whom do your sympathies lie in this piece? The parents? The obedient daughters? The rebellious daughters? Please explain.

4.

Regardless of nationality conflicts, in what ways can parents control their children’s value systems when the values in the home conflict with the values in the immediate American culture?

5.

What problems do the Asian daughters have in common with the majority of American teenage females? What problems are specific to the Asian daughters?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Take the role of one of the young women profiled in this article, and write a letter to her parents on her behalf, asking them to let her do something she’s not allowed to do. Aim for a respectful yet forceful tone.

2.

Using your own experience as your primary resource, write an essay explaining which has been more powerful in shaping your beliefs and values: your family or society.

Kathy Peiss

*Hope in a Jar*

*Kathy Peiss is a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, specializing in U.S. women’s history and cultural history. She has also written Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York (1985) and Men and Women: A History of Costume, Gender, and Power (1989). This selection comes from her latest book of social history, Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture (1998).*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Whether you are male or female, what’s your feeling about cosmetics—the makeup, the hair dyes, the skin lotions, the perfumes?

2.

Make a list of all the famous entrepreneurs you've ever heard of—inventors, business people, most popular companies, and so on.

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Cosmetics today seem quintessential products of a consumer culture dominated by large corporations, national advertising, and widely circulated images of ideal beauty. The origins of American beauty culture lie elsewhere, however, in a spider's web of businesses—beauty parlors, druggists, department stores, patent cosmetic companies, perfumers, mail-order houses, and women's magazines that thrived at the turn of the century and formed the nascent infrastructure of the beauty industry. Few of these enterprises used the kinds of systematic marketing and sales campaigns so familiar to contemporary Americans. Nonetheless, the proliferation of products, services, and information about cosmetics and beauty definitively recast nineteenth-century attitudes toward female appearance.

Women played a key role in these developments. Indeed, the beauty industry may be the only business, at least until recent decades, in which American women achieved the highest levels of success, wealth, and authority. Such well-known figures as Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden, the remarkable African-American entrepreneurs Madam C. J. Walker and Annie Turnbo Malone, and post-World War II businesswomen Estee Lauder and Mary Kay Ash mark an ongoing tradition of female leadership. Although exceptional businesswomen, they are only the most visible signs of a much larger phenomenon. As beauty parlor owners, cosmetics entrepreneurs, and “complexion specialists,” women charted a path to mass consumption outside the emergent system of national advertising and distribution. In so doing, they diminished Americans' suspicion of cosmetics by promoting beauty care as a set of practices at once physical, individual, social, and commercial. Their businesses transformed the personal *cultivation* of beauty—original meaning of the expression “beauty culture”—into a *culture* of shared meanings and rituals.

Before the Civil War, women dressed their own hair or, if affluent, bade their maids or slaves to do so. Professional hairdressers, often men who visited the homes of the wealthy, were relatively few in number. Commercial beautifying was generally considered a “vulgarizing calling,” a legacy of its ties to personal service and hands-on bodily care. This view changed as women's need for jobs grew more pressing in the late nineteenth century. Industry, immigration, and urban growth had transformed the American economy and society. Working-class women expected to support themselves or contribute to family income, but even middle-class women were thrown back on their own resources when their husbands died or failed in business. The vast majority of female wage earners toiled in factories, on farms, or in private homes as domestic workers, but growing numbers worked in clerical, retail, and service jobs. These included hairdressing, cosmetology, manicure, and cosmetic sales.

Although commercial beauty culture mainly offered women low-wage work, it became one of a handful of occupations—along with dressmaking and millinery—to sustain female entrepreneurship and ownership. Ironically, the feminine stereotypes that rendered women unfit for the world of commerce validated their endeavors in the beauty business. Promoters proclaimed that “no profession is more suitable for women, or more pleasant, than that of helping others to become beautiful and youthful in appearance.” Some, like Mary Williams, became salon proprietors. The daughter of slaves who had bought their



freedom, Williams learned the hair trade after the Civil War and opened a shop in Columbus, Ohio, in 1872. Serving both white and black residents, Williams eventually ran the “leading hair-dressing establishment in the city,” sold hair goods, and taught the trade to other African-American women.

5

Women also became inventors, manufacturers, and distributors of beauty products. The full extent of their business activity remains unknown. Still, the U.S. Patent Office recorded the efforts of many women bent on achieving success selling cosmetics. They patented improved complexion creams, combs to straighten or curl hair, and clever devices to carry powder or dispense rouge. Most often women sought trademark protection for their products. From 1890 to 1924, they registered at least 450 trademarks for beauty preparations, the bulk of them after 1920. These confident inventors and manufacturers probably represent only a fraction of all the women who peddled their own formulas to neighbors or sold them in local salons. Many filed papers with the Patent Office years after they had put their product into use; only when they perceived a market for it, or faced imitators, did they choose to register the trademark.

Beauty entrepreneurs came from all walks of life. Some of the more affluent had found themselves caught between women’s new educational opportunities and ongoing sex discrimination in employment, especially in the sciences. Anna D. Adams aspired to be a surgeon, Marie Mott Gage a chemist. Adams abandoned her career in surgery when faced with the prejudice of male physicians, became a professor of chemistry, and eventually founded a chain of beauty parlors. Gage, who grew up in a family of doctors, studied chemistry at Vassar, but by the 1890s was writing beauty manuals and manufacturing products for the “scientific cultivation of physical beauty.”

A few women from wealthy or middle-class families turned to beauty culture in desperation, when circumstances forced them to support themselves. Harriet Hubbard Ayer, one of the first women to establish a large cosmetics manufacturing operation, was born into a prosperous Chicago family in 1849 and married the son of a wealthy iron dealer at age sixteen. For a time she lived the life of a society matron, but growing marital conflicts and her husband’s business failure led Harriet to divorce him in 1886. As sole support of her children, she took a series of jobs, then moved to New York and began manufacturing a face cream named after Madame Recamier, a French beauty of the Napoleonic era. “Not a vulgar white wash” but “intended to replace the so-called blooms and enamels,” Recamier cream proved a success. “Within a month,” a contemporary account observed, “the house was filled from top to bottom with women trying to manufacture toiletries fast enough to meet the public demand.” Ayer traded upon her elite connections to elicit rare endorsements from prominent society women and gain display space in department stores.

Most women entrepreneurs, however, started out in less fortunate circumstances. They were farm daughters and domestic servants, immigrants and African Americans, ordinary, often poor women. They lived all over the country, in cities, small towns, and rural backwaters. From socially marginal origins, they risked little going into a business whose reputation remained dubious. Traces of their local or regional exploits exist only in old fliers, ads, and patent records. But even those who became most successful, who shaped the national development of the modern cosmetics industry, often started out poor and disadvantaged.

Florence Nightingale Graham was born around 1878, some time after her parents had emigrated from England to become tenant farmers in Canada. Little is known about her early life, except that Florence grew up in poverty and had a limited education. As a young woman, she took one low-paying job after another, in turn a dental assistant, cashier, and stenographer. Following her brother to New York City in 1908, Florence found work in Eleanor Adair's high-priced beauty salon, first as a receptionist and then as a "treatment girl" specializing in facials. To better serve the wealthy patrons, Graham taught herself to speak with proper diction and to project an image of upper-crust Protestant femininity. A year later, she joined cosmetologist Elizabeth Hubbard in opening a fifth Avenue salon. Their partnership quickly dissolved and Graham bought the shop, decorated it lavishly for an elite clientele, and, improving on Hubbard's formulas, developed her own Venetian line of beauty preparations. When she reopened the salon, she took the name Elizabeth Arden, one she considered romantic and high class.

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In contrast, Helena Rubinstein had already achieved considerable success by the time she arrived in the United States. The facts of her early life, like Arden's had been obscured in a haze of publicity notices. In the 1920s and 1930s, she claimed to have been born into a wealthy family of exporters, taken advanced scientific and medical training at prestigious European universities, and obtained her winning skin cream from the famed actress Modjeska. Her 1965 autobiography and other sources present a somewhat different picture. Born in 1871, Rubinstein came from a middling Jewish family, her father a wholesale food broker in Cracow. Helena's medical education ended after two years when her parents, apparently opposed to her fiancé, sent her to live with relatives in Australia. In the 1890s, she worked as a governess and perhaps a waitress. The cream used in her family had been made by a Hungarian chemist and relative, Jacob Lykusky, who taught her the simple beauty techniques she ultimately capitalized upon: cold cream to cleanse the face, astringent to close the pores, and vanishing cream to moisturize and protect the skin. Her friends clamored for the cream, and Rubinstein began to sell it. Finally she opened a beauty shop in 1900, using money lent her by a woman she had befriended on the passage to Australia.

Within two years Rubinstein had become a success. She moved to London in 1908, opened a salon in Paris in 1912, and when war erupted in Europe, relocated to New York and opened a salon off Fifth Avenue, not far from Elizabeth Arden. There the two rivals warred for leadership in the high-status beauty trade. Disdainfully referring to each other as "that woman," they refused to acknowledge how much they had in common—their troubled family life, economic insecurity, string of typical female jobs, their immigrant status, and not least, the acts of self-making they performed to become cosmetics entrepreneurs.

Annie Turnbo and Sarah Breedlove also found in the beauty trade an escape from poverty and marginalization, an outlet for entrepreneurial ambition. Born in 1869 and orphaned as a child, Annie Turnbo lived with her older siblings in Metropolis, Illinois, a small border town on the Ohio River. She received an education, taught Sunday school, and joined the temperance movement, but how she earned a living as a young woman is unknown. As a girl Turnbo learned plant lore by "gathering herbs with an old woman relative of mine . . . an herb doctor (whose) mixtures fascinated me." In the 1890s she began experimenting with preparations to help black women like herself care for their hair and scalp. Many of

them needed remedies for such common problems as hair loss, breakage, and tetter, a common skin ailment, but women also considered lush, well-groomed hair a sign of beauty. By 1900 Turnbo had produced a hair treatment containing sage and egg rinses, common substances in the folk cosmetic tradition. In that year she and her sister moved to Lovejoy, Illinois, a river town inhabited only by African Americans. They began to manufacture the product Turnbo called Wonderful Hair Grower and canvassed door to door. Facing a skeptical black community, she recalled, “I went around in the buggy and made speeches, demonstrated the shampoo on myself, and talked about cleanliness and hygiene, until they realized I was right.”

Demand quickly outstripped the two sisters’ ability to produce the hair grower, and Turnbo hired three young women as assistants. Urged by friends to expand the business, in 1902 she moved across the Mississippi to St. Louis, drawn by its vibrant black community, a robust drug and toiletries trade, and the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, then being planned. Once well established in St. Louis, Turnbo began to extend her market, first throughout the South, then nationally. In 1906, as competitors began to imitate her product, she proudly registered the trade name “Poro,” a Mende (West African) term for a devotional society. When she married Aaron Malone in 1914, Annie Turnbo Malone’s Poro was a thriving enterprise.

Sarah Breedlove, or Madam C. J. Walker as she became known, also entered the hair-care business in these years. Her early life bore some similarities to Malone’s, her chief rival. Born to former slaves in Delta, Louisiana, in 1867, she was orphaned as a child and moved in with her older sister. In 1882, at age fourteen, she married laborer Moses McWilliams. Over the next few years, she gave birth to her daughter, Lelia; then her husband died in an accident. Moving to St. Louis in 1888, Sarah did housework and laundering, raised her daughter, and joined the African Methodist Episcopal church and several charitable societies. She also briefly became a Poro agent.

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When her hair began to thin and fall out, Sarah experimented with formulas containing sulphur, capsicum, and other stimulants, and began to sell her own remedy. She too called her product Wonderful Hair Grower, which may have been one of the reasons Malone registered the Poro trade name. Although each woman claimed to have invented hair-care systems for African Americans, they probably modified existing formulas and improved heating combs already on the market, adjusting them for the condition and texture of black women’s hair. Their technique for pressing hair, using a light oil and wide-tooth steel comb heated on a stove, put much less strain on the scalp than earlier methods using round tongs or “pullers.” By straightening each strand, this “hot comb” process created the desired look of long, styled hair.

McWilliams moved to Denver in 1905 and began to sell in earnest. “I made house-to-house canvasses among people of my race,” she recalled, “and after a while I got going pretty well.” She married newspaperman Charles J. Walker, who helped her start an advertising campaign and mail-order business. Over the next few years, Madam Walker extended her business to the South and Midwest and in 1910 settled the company in Indianapolis, which she considered a favorable spot both for African Americans and for national distribution. Although she incorporated the company in 1911, the major decisions and the profits remained in her own hands.

In another period, Arden, Rubinstein, Malone, and Walker might have lived and labored in obscurity, a fate shared by most women. At the turn of the century, however, women's need for employment in a growing commercial and service economy joined with new cultural perceptions about appearance making and self-display, to foster women's enterprises in beauty culture. Finding ways to overcome the economic barriers and social impediments women faced, these four shrewdly took the measure of their times—and the market—to build business empires.

Elizabeth Arden and Helena Rubinstein fashioned contrasting public personalities on which to base their cosmetics marketing. Arden, as a 1938 *Fortune* profile correctly observed, as “an alias concealing many things”—a chain of salons, a manufacturer, a sales corps, and, not least, Florence Nightingale Graham herself as she curried favor with elite society. “Arden pink” was her signature, coloring her apparel, salon interiors, and cosmetics packages. Promotional letters under her name imitated her whispery, intimate speaking voice to create poetic pictures of youthful loveliness, considered models of “writing in woman's own language” in the advertising industry. Often described as a dithering, smiling figure, Arden undoubtedly exasperated the male executives around her. According to several reports, she was “fond of asking male advice on money and business, and almost invariably disregard(ed) it.” This criticism reflects less upon Arden's “unbusinesslike manner” than on the control she exerted over her image and the company. Pink femininity concealed Arden's acts as an exacting and tough manager who broke a threatened strike, fended off complaints from the Food and Drug Administration, and remained the sole stockholder of her company, despite several marriages and buyout offers.

Rubinstein also adopted a high-society image but invoked elements of the New Woman. In her view, the beauty specialist was a professional woman, “who is human in her sympathies, and will express these sympathies thru (sic) science.” Typically photographed in a lab coat or striking dress and jewelry, she presented a dramatic figure of modernity—exotic, urbane, and scientific. Reporters often commented that Rubinstein, a Polish Jew, was “not a talker”—her speech was heavily accented—but also stressed her worldliness and sophistication: “a woman without a country who is at home in any country.” Characteristically, she took an inclusive view of beauty culture, welcoming “stenographers, clerks, and even little office girls” into her salon and acknowledging the variety of skin types in a nation of immigrants. Unlike Arden, who only flirted with the suffrage movements when it was fashionable, Rubinstein became a long-term supporter of women's equal rights.

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If white beauty culturists sloughed off their origins to perform the American myth of self-making and individual mobility, black entrepreneurs tended to embed their biographies within the story of African-American women's collective advancement. Madam Walker identified closely with the struggles and dignity of poor women even as she sought entrance into the ranks of the black economic and social elite. She had remade herself in certain ways, hiring a tutor in standard English and carefully fashioning a refined and elegant appearance. Still, she persistently tied her business to the fortunes of the unschooled and poor women whose life experiences she had shared. In 1912, she burst into public awareness when she attempted to address the National Negro Business League at its annual meeting. Booker T. Washington repeatedly refused to recognize her,

apparently not wanting to endorse such a disreputable calling. Finally Walker rushed up to the podium, exclaiming “surely you are not going to shut the door in my face,” and launched into an impassioned speech. “I am a woman that come from the cotton fields of the South; I was promoted from there to the washtub . . . then I was promoted to the cook kitchen,” she said emphatically, “and from there I promoted myself into the business of manufacturing hair goods and preparations.” Walker proved her mettle, and Washington welcomed her back the following year, when as a featured speaker she pointedly disclaimed, “I am not ashamed of my past; I am not ashamed of my humble beginning. Don’t think because you have to go down in the wash-tub that you are any less of a lady!”

“The cosmetic business is interesting among modern industries in its opportunities for women,” Helena Rubinstein observed. “Here they have found a field that is their own province—working for women with women, and giving that which only women can give—an intimate understanding of feminine needs and feminine desires.” More accurately, it was Rubinstein, Arden, Walker, and many other beauty culturists who defined those needs and desires. These businesswomen fashioned, in effect, a consumer market for beauty largely outside dominant distribution networks and the emerging organizations of national advertising and marketing. Linking the growth of commerce to job creation and training, entwining cosmetics purchases and beauty services, many of these enterprises braided together women’s identities as consumers and workers. In this way they brought groups of women into the growing consumer culture who had previously had only a tenuous connection to it. Poor, working-class, and black women, largely ignored by national advertisers and magazines, joined the affluent in the market for beauty.

Rubinstein and the other women entrepreneurs established a tradition of beauty culture, which claimed women would find a lifetime of beauty by adopting daily rituals of skin and hair care that required coordinated products and techniques. Rubinstein never achieved her dream that society would quit viewing beauty culture as a “frivolous or wasteful expenditure of time”—a view that had much to do with lasting stereotypes of women. By drawing upon female sociability and customs, however, women entrepreneurs made formerly hidden and even unacceptable beauty practices public, pleasurable, and normal. In this way, they contributed substantially to modern definitions of femininity, to the growing emphasis on making and monitoring appearance, and to the centrality of commerce and consumption in women’s lives.

#### *Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1. Comment on the meaning within the title as it relates to the information found in this piece.
2. What did you learn from reading this piece that you had never known or thought of before?
3. What organization does this author choose to use in writing this piece? How effective is it, and what other choices did she have?
- 4.

What specific audience might be most interested in this piece and why?

5.

Compare and contrast the three women whose stories are presented in this article. What do these women have in common? In what ways do they differ from one another.

6.

What role did men and society play in the rise of women in this field of cosmetics? Could the women have made it in this field without these factors?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Write an essay in which you “argue” that another current industry would best be served if it would be run and operated primarily by women.

2.

Research any field of business you are interested in, and trace the major entrepreneurs and contributors in this field.

3.

Explain a process you went through in order to succeed at a skill or a hobby. Include the people who may have helped you along the way, as well as the setbacks you might have encountered. Based on your experience and the experience of the women in this piece, what conclusions can you draw regarding what people need in order to succeed?

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MARJORIE INGALLS

*Alternative Bride*

*Marjorie Ingalls is the author of The Field Guide to North American Males (1997), a parody of the National Audubon Society's Field Guide to North American Birds. This essay originally appeared in Ms. (September/October 1997).*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Make a list of eleven very picky, specific things that you would find desirable in your lifelong mate.

2.

Marriage: when and why should people tie the knot?

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How does a purple-haired, tattooed, nose-ringed feminist get married? It should like the setup to a pigboy Rush Limbaugh joke. But it's what I'm trying to figure out.

I was never the kind of girl who had wedding fantasies. I never sketched wedding dresses in my notebook or wrote my hoped-for married name over and over in flowy, smiley-face-over-thei-cursive. (Vomit.) When I grew up, I met a succession of boys who were fun to sleep with. I even fell in love with one, but at the time, I wasn't ready to think about spending the rest of my life with anyone. Besides, he was kind of wussy.

Then I met Jonathan. Reasons why I love Jonathan: Never bores me. Loves Eeyore even more than I do. Beautiful, big, strong hands. Owns every issue of *Sassy*. Has eyes like the sea after a storm. Grows daisies and sunflowers for me. Lots of chest hair. Does interpretive naked dance around the house after a shower. Sings “la! la! la!” like Pee-Wee

Herman. Amazing cook (hardly ever consults recipes). Always, always puts the seat down.

We started as friends and did that sneaky, irresistible build into love. It took my tiny reptilian brain a while to figure out I was a goner. Now I reread our e-mail from back then and shake my head at my delusional, unconscious flirting technique. The very first thing he said after we finally slept together—I kid you not—was, “If you want the children to be named Ingall, I’m fine with that.”

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He was my first serious Jewish boyfriend. My mom was *plotzing* with joy. Two weeks after we moved in together, Hanukkah came and we lit the menorah together. Finding each other was a miracle. We’d lived on the same street in college but never met. Then we moved to opposite coasts and met through the wonder of e-mail, and pixels began to dance on the screen.

We’re already living together, so why get married? Because I know what I’m getting (the aforementioned good stuff, plus temper tantrums, inability to hang up shirts after wearing them, black sulks, narcissism, offside use of the phrase “Cut it out, you’re acting like my mother”) and want to spend my life with him anyway. I want to acknowledge this in front of our family and friends, in our religious tradition. We’re not kids; we know what *forever* means. (Oh, God, it means we never get to sleep with anyone else again!) I’ve heard of weddings where the couple says, “as long as our love shall last.” Um, no. I want to say in front of everyone that this is holy, and legally binding, and I care enough about this person to enter into an ancient covenant with him. (I think I’m far from alone in my desire for both community and continuity. To some degree, I think that’s why so many Gen-Xers are having big weddings. Or maybe it’s just a trend, like martinis and lounge music.)

Marrying Jonathan means figuring out how to turn a patriarchal institution into something that does not harsh my feminist mellow. Two institutions, really, because marriage is for me inextricably tied with Judaism. Suddenly I’m thinking about Jewish children, Jewish household rituals, a Jewish wedding ceremony.

Lately I’ve been obsessing about the *ketubah*, the Jewish marriage contract. How can I make it reflect my values while still keeping it in accordance with Halakah, Jewish law? The traditional *ketubah* is a legal document (it mentions neither love nor God) stating that the groom has “acquired” the bride for a given price and agrees to support her. The bride merely assents, wordlessly. This is pretty darn retro, especially considering the fact that, in our household, I’ve been the primary breadwinner for the past year. Instead, our *ketubah* will have Jonathan and me each say that we will support the other. Instead of the orthodox business of having the *ketubah* signed by two male witnesses, we’ll use four: two men and two women. Oh, and then there’s the little business of my dearly departed maidenhead. We will not be mentioning it.

The fun stuff is pondering the design of the contract. I first considered incorporating a quote from the *Son of Songs*: the *Friends* haircut of *ketubah* quotations—lovely, yet so common as to totally lack individuality. Instead, I think we’ll use a quote from the blessing said every month on Rosh Chodesh, the new moon. I love moon stuff anyway (I am woman! Hear me menstruate!), and the Rosh Chodesh idea conveys the little quotidian miracles Judaism celebrates. A good marriage is also about the little things. And as I said, I think Jonathan’s and my meeting was a little miracle. We could have met

at any time, but had I met Jonathan in college, I would not have been ready for a grown-up relationship. We'll incorporate stars and moons into the , *to match the motif I painted on various bits of furniture around the house.*

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So anyway, here's my translation from Hebrew of the blessing: "Grant us long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of strength and health, a life of piety, a life free of shame and reproach, a life of wealth and honor, a life full of love of Torah and fear of the heavens, a life in which all our hearts' desires for goodness will be fulfilled." A bit literal, but a good backstory, as they say.

It's healthy, I think, to re-examine old institutions and futz with them rather than throw them out. Working for change from within lets you feel connected; turning your back entirely sets you adrift. There's a lot to be proud of in Judaism's attitude toward marriage: Jewish law, for instance, has always said that minor girls can't be betrothed; that women have the right to refuse any potential husband, no matter what their parents command; that women can sue for divorce on various grounds, including sexual dissatisfaction: that conjugal rape is prohibited. I like it that Jewish tradition has the bride and the groom escorted to the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) by their parents; much nicer than having the bride's dad hand her off to her husband like a football. It still blows that in Judaism, men have the power to grant a divorce. Jonathan and I will either put in the *ketubah* that he will give me a divorce if I want one, or we'll have a prenuptial agreement. Kinda icky to be pondering, and I do think this is forever, but better safe than sorry.

We all personalize institutions to reflect who we are. For our wedding, I'm planning on keeping my hair purple and rubber-stamping moons and stars on the yarmulkes. Jonathan will smash the ritual glass and preside, tongs in hand, over the barbecue the day before. After the honeymoon, we'll continue in the household roles we forged over the past year: He does most of the cooking, I do most of the cleaning, he gardens, I paint and decorate. I don't really expect marriage to change anything, but in my head it clears the way for having kids, which I'm crazy-mad looking forward to. I'm supporting him now so he can support me when I want to drop out and have me some pups.

A section of the Song of Songs says:

Set me as a seal upon your heart

A seal upon your arm

For Love is strong as death

Cruel as the grave

I thought about using it as a *ketubah* motif. Then I thought about how I could personalize it further. So I'm thinking of getting another tattoo, of Eeyore. Because Jonathan is the seal upon my arm. I can be so literal sometimes.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What three words would you choose to describe this author? Explain.

2.

Compare and contrast your prereading list of things you would like in a mate with the list that Ingalls provides in paragraph 3. What does her list reveal about her? What does your list reveal about you?



3.

What reasons does Ingalls give for agreeing to marry the man with whom she's been living? How does this match up with your second prereading response?

4.

Do you agree? Is love mostly a matter of luck and timing? Support your answer with your own experiences as well as your observations of others.

5.

Compare the traditional Jewish marriage contract with the one the author has designed. What is the major difference between the two, and which one would you prefer to use? Explain.

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Argue for an “inside” change of any ritual within one of the following: education, religion, families, divorce, high school proms, dating rituals, your choice.

2.

Research the rites and traditions of marriage within a culture other than your own. Compare this to the traditions in your own culture.

3.

Interview people from three separate generations in order to find out their opinions on marriage. What do you think is the ideal age for marriage? What are the reasons people should get married? When shouldn't they? What makes for a successful marriage? Ask any other questions that would give you solid information on how each person feels, and then write up a report with your findings.

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DEBORAH BLUM

*The Gender Blur*

Deborah Blum (born in 1954 in Urbana, Illinois) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer and professor of journalism at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. She is author of *The Monkey Wars* (1994) about the use of animals in scientific experiments and *Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences between Men and Women* (1997), which synthesizes current research from evolutionary biology, anthropology, animal behavior, neuroscience, and psychology.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

What one factor do you think most influences how a child looks at the world? His or her parents, peers, genetic factors, environmental influences, something else?

2.

Describe your favorite toys and interests when you were a small child. Who gave you the toys? How did you get interested in a particular subject?

3.

Which came first: the chicken or the egg?

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I was raised in one of those university-based, liberal elite families that politicians like to ridicule. In my childhood, every human being—regardless of gender—was exactly alike

under the skin, and I mean exactly, barring his or her different opportunities. My parents wasted no opportunities to bring this point home. One Christmas, I received a Barbie doll and a softball glove. Another brought a green enamel stove, which baked tiny cakes by the heat of a lightbulb, and also a set of steel-tipped darts and competition-quality dartboard. Did I mention the year of the chemistry set and the ballerina doll?

It wasn't until I became a parent—I should say, a parent of two boys—that I realized I had been fed a line and swallowed it like a sucker (barring the part about opportunities, which I still believe). This dawned on me during my older son's dinosaur phase, which began when he was about 21

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. Oh, he loved dinosaurs, all right, but only the blood-swilling carnivores. Plant-eaters were wimps and losers, and he refused to wear a T-shirt marred by a picture of a stegosaur. I looked down at him one day, as he was snarling around my feet and doing his toddler best to gnaw off my right leg, and I thought: This goes a lot deeper than culture. Raising children tends to bring on this kind of politically incorrect reaction. Another friend came to the same conclusion watching a son determinedly bite his breakfast toast into the shape of a pistol he hoped would blow away—or at least terrify—his younger brother. Once you get past the guilt part—Did I do this? Should I have bought him that plastic allosaur with the oversized teeth?—such revelations can lead you to consider the far more interesting field of gender biology, where the questions take a different shape: Does love of carnage begin in culture or genetics, and which drives which? Do the gender roles of our culture reflect an underlying biology, and, in turn, does the way we behave influence that biology?

The point I'm leading up to—through the example of my son's innocent love of predatory dinosaurs—is actually one of the most straightforward in this debate. One of the reasons we're so fascinated by childhood behaviors is that, as the old saying goes, the child becomes the man (or woman, of course). Most girls don't spend their preschool years snarling around the house and pretending to chew off their companion's legs. And they—mostly—don't grow up to be as aggressive as men. Do the ways that we amplify those early differences in childhood shape the adults we become? Absolutely. But it's worth exploring the starting place—the faint signal that somehow gets amplified.

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“There's plenty of room in society to influence sex differences,” says Marc Breedlove, a behavioral endocrinologist at the University of California at Berkeley and a pioneer in defining how hormones can help build sexually different nervous systems. “Yes, we're born with predispositions, but it's society that amplifies them, exaggerates them. I believe that—except for the sex differences in aggression. Those [differences] are too massive to be explained simply by society.”

Aggression does allow a straightforward look at the issue. Consider the following statistics: Crime reports in both the United States and Europe record between 10 and 15 robberies committed by men for every one by a woman. At one point, people argued that this was explained by size difference. Women weren't big enough to intimidate, but that would change, they predicted, with the availability of compact weapons. But just as little girls don't routinely make weapons out of toast, women—even criminal ones—don't seem drawn to weaponry in the same way that men are. Almost twice as many male thieves and robbers use guns as their female counterparts do.

Or you can look at more personal crimes; domestic partner murders. Three-fourths of men use guns in those killings; 50 percent of women do. Here's more from the domestic front: In conflicts in which a woman killed a man, he tended to be the one who had started the fight—in 51.8 percent of the cases, to be exact. When the man was the killer, he again was the likely first aggressor, and by an even more dramatic margin. In fights in which women died, they had started the argument only 12.5 percent of the time. Enough. You can parade endless similar statistics but the point is this: Males are more aggressive, not just among humans but among almost all species on earth. Male chimpanzees, for instance, declare war on neighboring troops, and one of their strategies is a warning strike: They kill females and infants to terrorize and intimidate. In terms of simple, reproductive genetics, it's an advantage of males to be aggressive: You can muscle your way into dominance, winning more sexual encounters, more offspring, more genetic future. For the female—especially in a species like ours, with time for just one successful pregnancy a year—what's the genetic advantage in brawling?

Thus the issue becomes not whether there is a biologically influenced sex difference in aggression—the answer being a solid, technical “You betcha”—but rather how rigid that difference is. The best science, in my opinion, tends to align with basic common sense. We all know that there are extraordinarily gentle men and murderous women. Sex differences are always generalizations: They refer to a behavior, with some evolutionary rationale behind it. They never define, entirely, an individual. And that fact alone should tell us that here's always—even in the most biologically dominated traits—some flexibility, an instinctive ability to respond, for better and worse, to the world around us.

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This is true even with physical characteristics that we've often assumed are nailed down by genetics. Scientists now believe height, for instance, is only about 90 percent heritable. A person's genes might code for a six-foot-tall body, but malnutrition could literally cut that short. And there's also some evidence, in girls anyway, that children with stressful childhoods tend to become shorter adults. So while some factors are predetermined, there's evidence that the prototypical male/female body design can be readily altered.

It's a given that humans, like most other species—bananas, spiders, sharks, ducks, any rabbit you pull out of a hat—rely on two sexes for reproduction. So basic is that requirement that we have chromosomes whose primary purpose is to deliver the genes that order up a male or a female. All other chromosomes are numbered, but we label the sex chromosomes with the letters X and Y. We get one each from our mother and our father, and the basic combinations are these: XX makes female, XY makes male.

There are two important—and little-known—points about these chromosomal matches. One is that even with this apparently precise system, there's nothing precise—or guaranteed—about the physical construction of male and female. The other point makes that possible. It appears that sex doesn't matter in the early stages of embryonic development. We are unisex at the point of conception.

If you examine an embryo at about six weeks, you see that it has the ability to develop in either direction. The fledgling embryo has two sets of ducts—Wolffian for male, Mullerian for female—an either/or structure, held in readiness for further development. If testosterone and other androgens are released by hormone-producing cells, then the

Wolffian ducts develop into the channel that connects penis to testes, and the female ducts wither away.

Without testosterone, the embryo takes on a female form; the male ducts vanish and the Mullerian ducts expand into oviducts, uterus, and vagina. In other words, in humans, anyway (the opposite is true in birds), the female is the default sex. Back in the 1950s, the famed biologist Alfred Jost showed that if you castrate a male rabbit fetus, choking off testosterone, you produce a completely feminized rabbit.

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We don't do these experiments in humans—for obvious reasons—but there are naturally occurring instances that prove the same point. For instance: In the fetal testes are a group of cells, called Leydig cells, that make testosterone. In rare cases, the fetus doesn't make enough of these cells (a defect known as Leydig cell hypoplasia). In this circumstance we see the limited power of the XY chromosome. These boys have the right chromosomes and the right genes to be boys; they just don't grow a penis. Obstetricians and parents often think they see a baby girl, and these children are routinely raised as daughters. Usually, the “mistake” is caught about the time of puberty, when menstruation doesn't start. A doctor's examination shows the child to be internally male; there are usually small testes, often tucked within the abdomen. As the researchers put it, if the condition had been known from the beginning, “the sisters would have been born as brothers.” Just to emphasize how tricky all this body-building can get, there's a peculiar genetic defect that seems to be clustered by heredity in a small group of villages in the Dominican Republic. The result of the defect is a failure to produce an enzyme that concentrates testosterone, specifically for building the genitals. One obscure little enzyme only, but here's what happens without it: You get a boy with undescended testes and a penis so short and stubby that it resembles an oversized clitoris.

In the mountain villages of this Caribbean nation, people are used to it. The children are usually raised as “conditional” girls. At puberty, the secondary tide of androgens rises and is apparently enough to finish the construction project. The scrotum suddenly descends, the phallus grows, and the child develops a distinctly male body—narrow hips, muscular build, and even slight beard growth. At that point, the family shifts the child over from daughter to son. The dresses are thrown out. He begins to wear male clothes and starts dating girls. People in the Dominican Republic are so familiar with this condition that there's a colloquial name for it: *guevedoces*, meaning “eggs (or testes) at 12.”

It's the comfort level with this slip-slide of sexual identity that's so remarkable and, I imagine, so comforting to the children involved. I'm positive that the sexual transition of these children is less traumatic than the abrupt awareness of the “sisters who would have been brothers.” There's a message of tolerance there, well worth repeating, and there are some other key lessons too.

These defects are rare and don't alter the basic male-female division of our species. They do emphasize how fragile those divisions can be. Biology allows flexibility, room to change, to vary and grow. With that comes room for error as well. That it's possible to live with these genetic defects, that they don't merely kill us off, is a reminder that we, male and female alike, exist on a continuum of biological possibilities that can overlap and sustain either sex.

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Marc Breedlove points out that the most difficult task may be separating how the brain responds to hormones from how the brain responds to the *results* of hormones. Which brings us back, briefly, below the belt: In this context, the penis is just a result, the product of androgens at work before birth. “And after birth,” says Breedlove, “virtually everyone who interacts with that individual will note that he has a penis, and will, in many instances, behave differently than if the individual was a female.”

Do the ways that we amplify physical and behavioral differences in childhood shape who we become as adults? Absolutely. But to understand that, you have to understand the differences themselves—their beginning and the very real biochemistry that may lie behind them.

Here is a good place to focus on testosterone—a hormone that is both well-studied and generally underrated. First, however, I want to acknowledge that there are many other hormones and neurotransmitters that appear to influence behavior. Preliminary work shows that fetal boys are a little more active than fetal girls. It’s pretty difficult to argue socialization at that point. There’s a strong suspicion that testosterone may create the difference.

And there are a couple of relevant animal models to emphasize the point. Back in the 1960s, Robert Goy, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, first documented that young male monkeys play much more roughly than young females. Goy went on to show that if you manipulate testosterone level—raising it in females, damping it down in males—you can reverse those effects, creating sweet little male monkeys and rowdy young females.

Is testosterone the only factor at work here? I don’t think so. But clearly we can argue a strong influence, and, interestingly, studies have found that girls with congenital adrenal hypoplasia—who run high in testosterone—tend to be far more fascinated by trucks and toy weaponry than most little girls are. They lean toward rough-and-tumble play, too. As it turns out, the strongest influence on this “abnormal” behavior is not parental disapproval, but the company of other little girls, who tone them down and direct them toward more routine girl games.

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And that reinforces an early point: If there is indeed a biology to sex differences, we amplify it. At some point—when it is still up for debate—we gain a sense of our gender, and with it a sense of “gender-appropriate” behavior.

Some scientists argue for some evidence of gender awareness in infancy, perhaps by the age of 12 months. The consensus seems to be that full-blown “I’m a girl” or “I’m a boy” instincts arrive between the ages of 2 and 3. Research shows that if a family operates in a very traditional, Beaver Cleaver kind of environment, filled with awareness of and association with “proper” gender behaviors, the “boys do trucks, girls do dolls” attitude seems to come very early. If a child grows up in a less traditional family, with an emphasis on partnership and sharing—“We all do the dishes, Joshua”—children maintain a more flexible sense of gender roles until about age 6.

In this period, too, relationships between boys and girls tend to fall into remarkably strict lines. Interviews with children find that 3-year-olds say that about half their friendships are with the opposite sex. By the age of 5, that drops to 20 percent. By 7, almost no boys or girls have, or will admit to having, best friends of the opposite sex. They still hang out

on the same playground, play on the same soccer teams. They may be friendly, but the real friendships tend to be boy-to-boy or girl-to-girl.

There's some interesting science that suggests that the space between boys and girls is a normal part of development; there are periods during which children may thrive and learn from hanging out with peers of the same sex. Do we, as parents, as a culture at large, reinforce such separations? Is the pope Catholic? One of my favorite studies looked at little boys who asked for toys. If they asked for a heavily armed action figure, they got the soldier about 70 percent of the time. If they asked for a "girl" toy, like a baby doll or a Barbie, their parents purchased it maybe 40 percent of the time. Name a child who won't figure out how to work *that* system.

How does all this fit together—toys and testosterone, biology and behavior, the development of the child into the adult, the way that men and women relate to one another?

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Let me make a cautious statement about testosterone: It not only has some body-building functions, it influences some behaviors as well. Let's make that a little less cautious: These behaviors include rowdy play, sex drive, competitiveness, and an in-your-face attitude. Males tend to have a higher baseline of testosterone than females—in our species, about seven to ten times as much—and therefore you would predict (correctly, I think) that all of those behaviors would be more generally found in men than in women. But testosterone is also one of my favorite examples of how responsive biology is, how attuned it is to the way we live our lives. Testosterone, it turns out, rises in response to competition and threat. In the days of our ancestors, this might have been hand-to-hand combat or high-risk hunting endeavors. Today, scientists have measured testosterone rise in athletes preparing for a game, in chess players awaiting a match, in spectators following a soccer competition.

If a person—or even just a person's favored team—wins, testosterone continues to rise. It falls with a loss. (This also makes sense in an evolutionary perspective. If one was being clobbered with a club, it would be extremely unhelpful to have a hormone urging one to battle on.) Testosterone also rises in the competitive world of dating, settles down with a stable and supportive relationship, climbs again if the relationship starts to falter.

It's been known for years that men in high-stress professions—say, police work or corporate law—have higher testosterone levels than men in the ministry. It turns out that women in the same kind of strong-attitude professions have higher testosterone than women who choose to stay home. What I like about this is the chicken-or-egg aspect. If you argue that testosterone influenced the behavior of those women, which came first? Did they have high testosterone and choose the law? Or did they choose the law, and the competitive environment ratcheted them up on the androgen scale? Or could both be at work?

And, returning to children for a moment, there's an ongoing study by Pennsylvania researchers, tracking that question in adolescent girls, who are being encouraged by their parents to engage in competitive activities that were once for boys only. As they do so, the researchers are monitoring, regularly, two hormones: testosterone and cortisol, a stress hormone. Will these hormones rise in response to this new, more traditionally male environment? What if more girls choose the competitive path; more boys choose the other? Will female testosterone levels rise, male levels fall? Will that wonderful,

unpredictable, flexible biology that we've been given allow a shift, so that one day, we will literally be far more alike?

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We may not have answers to all those questions, but we can ask them, and we can expect that the answers will come someday, because science clearly shows us that such possibilities exist. In this most important sense, sex differences offer us a paradox. It is only through exploring and understanding what makes us different that we can begin to understand what binds us together.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What conflict is established in the first two paragraphs? What does the author do to both intrigue you, the reader, and set forth the context of her writing?

2.

Explain to an audience of ten-year-olds what the author's point is between biological factors and children's behavior.

3.

For this same audience of ten-year-olds, summarize the difference that Blum sees between males and females.

4.

What does it mean—that “the child becomes the man (or woman, of course).”

5.

For you personally, what is the most important knowledge you gained from reading this piece?

6.

What factors, other than the ones Blum mentions, might explain aggressive behavior in males today?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Explain a moment or incident in your childhood when you became most acutely aware of your gender. How did you change as a result of this insight?

2.

Observe preschool children in a day-care setting, paying close attention to their behaviors, interests, and interactions with others. Compare your finding to several claims Blum makes in this piece regarding different behaviors for different genders.

3.

Find two other journal articles that deal with aggressiveness in males today, and compare and contrast these readings to the claims that Blum makes in this piece. Out of the three, which one is most reliable? Most convincing? Most entertaining?

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W. D. WETHERELL

*The Bass, The River, and Sheila Mant*

W. D. Wetherell (born in 1948) is a novelist and story writer who is currently the holder of the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Strauss Living Award for outstanding achievement. His recent books include *Vermont River: The Classic Portrait of a Man and*

*His River* (1984), *Upland Stream: Notes on the Fishing Passion* (1991), and *One River More: A Celebration of Rivers and Fly Fishing* (1998). He lives in rural western New Hampshire, close to the prime trout water of the Connecticut River.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

The year you were fourteen—what was it like for you?

2.

Describe your first real crush. Who was the focus of your desires, and how did this experience turn out?

3.

Freewrite about the best or worst summer you ever had.

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There was a summer in my life when the only creature that seemed lovelier to me than a largemouth bass was Sheila Mant. I was fourteen. The Mant family had rented the cottage next to ours on the river; with their parties, their frantic games of softball, their constant comings and goings, they appeared to me denizens of a brilliant existence. “Too noisy by half,” my mother quickly decided, but I would have given anything to be invited to one of their parties, and when my parents went to bed I would sneak through the woods to their hedge and stare enchanted at the candlelit swirl of white dresses and bright, paisley skirts. Sheila was the middle daughter—at seventeen, all but out of reach. She would spend her days sunbathing on a float my Uncle Sierbert had moored in their cove, and before July was over I had learned all her moods. If she lay flat on the diving board with her hand trailing idly in the water, she was pensive, not to be disturbed. On her side, her head propped up by her arm, she was observant, considering those around her with a look that seemed queenly and severe. Sitting up, arms tucked around her long, suntanned legs, she was approachable, but barely, and it was only in those glorious moments when she stretched herself prior to entering the water that her various suitors found the courage to come near.

These were many. The Dartmouth heavyweight crew would scull by her house on their way upriver, and I think all eight of them must have been in love with her at various times during the summer; the coxswain would curse them through his megaphone, but without effect—there was always a pause in their pace when they passed Sheila’s float. I suppose to these jaded twenty-year-olds she seemed the incarnation of innocence and youth, while to me she appeared unutterably suave, the epitome of sophistication. I was on the swim team at school, and to win her attention would do endless laps between my house and the Vermont shore, hoping she would notice the beauty of my flutter kick, the power of my crawl. Finishing, I would boost myself up onto our dock and glance casually over toward her, but she was never watching, and the miraculous day she was, I immediately climbed the diving board and did my best tuck and a half for her, and continued diving until she had left and the sun went down and my longing was like a madness and I couldn’t stop.

It was late August by the time I got up the nerve to ask her out. The tortured will-I’s, won’t-I’s, the agonized indecision over what to say, the false starts toward her house and embarrassed retreats—the details of these have been seared from my memory, and the



only part I remember clearly is emerging from the woods toward dusk while they were playing softball on their lawn, as bashful and frightened as a unicorn.

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Sheila was stationed halfway between first and second, well outside the infield. She didn't seem surprised to see me—as a matter of fact, she didn't seem to see me at all.

“If you're playing second base, you should move closer,” I said.

She turned—I took the full brunt of her long red hair and well-spaced freckles.

“I'm playing outfield,” she said, “I don't like the responsibility of having a base.”

“Yeah, I can understand that,” I said, though I couldn't. “There's a band in Dixford tomorrow night at nine. Want to go?”

One of her brothers sent the ball sailing over the leftfielder's head; she stood and watched it disappear toward the river.

“You have a car?” she asked, without looking up.

I played my master stroke. “We'll go by canoe.”

I spent all of the following day polishing it. I turned it upside down on our lawn and rubbed every inch with Brillo, hosing off the dirt, wiping it with chamois until it gleamed as bright as aluminum ever gleamed. About five, I slid it into the water, arranging cushions near the bow so Sheila could lean on them if she was in one of her pensive moods, propping up my father's transistor radio by the middle thwart so we could have music when we came back. Automatically, without thinking about it, I mounted my Mitchell reel on my Pflueger spinning rod and stuck it in the stern.

I say automatically, because I never went anywhere that summer without a fishing rod.

When I wasn't swimming laps to impress Sheila, I was back in our driveway practicing casts, and when I wasn't practicing casts, I was tying the line to Tosca, our springer spaniel, to test the reel's drag, and when I wasn't doing any of those things, I was fishing the river for bass.

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Too nervous to sit at home, I got in the canoe early and started paddling in a huge circle that would get me to Sheila's dock around eight. As automatically as I brought along my rod, I tied on a big Rapala plug, let it down into the water, let out some line and immediately forgot all about it.

It was already dark by the time I glided up to the Mants' dock. Even by day the river was quiet, most of the summer people preferring Sunapee or one of the other nearby lakes, and at night it was a solitude difficult to believe, a corridor of hidden life that ran between banks like a tunnel. Even the stars were part of it. They weren't as sharp anywhere else; they seemed to have chosen the river as a guide on their slow wheel toward morning, and in the course of the summer's fishing, I had learned all their names.

I was there ten minutes before Sheila appeared. I heard the slam of their screen door first, then saw her in the spotlight as she came slowly down the path. As beautiful as she was on the float, she was even lovelier now—her white dress went perfectly with her hair, and complimented her figure even more than her swimsuit.

It was her face that bothered me. It had on its delightful fullness a very dubious expression.

“Look,” she said. “I can get Dad's car.”

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“It’s faster this way,” I lied. “Parking’s tense up there. Hey, it’s safe. I won’t tip it or anything.”

She let herself down reluctantly into the bow. I was glad she wasn’t facing me. When her eyes were on me, I felt like diving in the river again from agony and joy.

I pried the canoe away from the dock and started paddling upstream. There was an extra paddle in the bow, but Sheila made no move to pick it up. She took her shoes off, and dangled her feet over the side.

Ten minutes went by.

“What kind of band?” she said.

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“It’s sort of like folk music. You’ll like it.”

“Eric Caswell’s going to be there. He strokes number four.”

“No kidding?” I said. I had no idea who she meant.

“What’s that sound?” she said, pointing toward the shore.

“Bass. That splashing sound?”

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“Over there.”

“Yeah, bass. They come into the shallows at night to chase frogs and moths and things.

Big largemouths. *Micropetrus salmonides*,” I added, showing off.

“I think fishing’s dumb,” she said, making a face. “I mean, it’s boring and all. Definitely dumb.”

Now I have spent a great deal of time in the years since wondering why Sheila Mant should come down so hard on fishing. Was her father a fisherman? Her antipathy toward fishing nothing more than normal filial rebellion? Had she tried it once? A messy encounter with worms? It doesn’t matter. What does, is that at that fragile moment in time I would have given anything not to appear dumb in Sheila’s severe and unforgiving eyes.

She hadn’t seen my equipment yet. What I *should* have done, of course, was push the canoe in closer to shore and carefully slide the rod into some branches where I could pick it up again in the morning. Failing that, I could have surreptitiously dumped the whole outfit overboard, written off the forty or so dollars as love’s tribute. What I actually *did* do was gently lean forward, and slowly, ever so slowly, push the rod back through my legs toward the stern where it would be less conspicuous.

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It must have been just exactly what the bass was waiting for. Fish will trail a lure sometimes, trying to make up their mind whether or not to attack, and the slight pause in the plug’s speed caused by my adjustment was tantalizing enough to overcome the bass’s inhibitions. My rod, safely out of sight at last, bent double. The line, tightly coiled, peeled off the spool with the shrill, tearing zip of a high-speed drill.

Four things occurred to me at once. One, that it was a bass. Two, that it was a big bass.

Three, that it was the biggest bass I had ever hooked. Four, that Sheila Mant must not know.

“What was that?” she said, turning half around.

“Uh, what was what?”

“That buzzing noise.”

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“Bats.”

She shuddered, quickly drew her feet back into the canoe. Every instinct I had told me to pick up the rod and strike back at the bass, but there was no need to—it was already solidly hooked. Downstream, an awesome distance downstream, it jumped clear of the water, landing with a concussion heavy enough to ripple the entire river. For a moment, I thought it was gone, but then the rod was bending again, the tip dancing into the water. Slowly, not making any motion that might alert Sheila, I reached down to tighten the drag.

While all this was going on, Sheila had begun talking and it was a few minutes before I was able to catch up with her train of thought.

“I went to a party there. These fraternity men. Katherine says I could get in there if I wanted. I’m thinking more of UVM or Bennington. Somewhere I can ski.”

The bass was slanting toward the rocks on the New Hampshire side by the ruins of Donaldson’s boathouse. It had to be an old bass—a young one probably wouldn’t have known the rocks were there. I brought the canoe back into the middle of the river, hoping to head it off.

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“That’s neat,” I mumbled. “Skiing. Yeah, I can see that.”

“Eric said I have the figure to be a model, but I thought I should get an education first. I mean, it might be a while before I get started and all. I was thinking of getting my hair styled, more swept back? I mean, Ann-Margret? Like hers, only shorter?”

She hesitated. “Are we going backward?”

We were. I had managed to keep the bass in the middle of the river away from the rocks, but it had plenty of room there, and for the first time a chance to exert its full strength. I quickly computed the weight necessary to draw a fully loaded canoe backwards—the thought of it made me feel faint.

“It’s just the current,” I said hoarsely. “No sweat or anything.”

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I dug in deeper with my paddle. Reassured, Sheila began talking about something else, but all my attention was taken up now with the fish. I could feel its desperation as the water grew shallower. I could sense the extra strain on the line, the frantic way it cut back and forth in the water. I could visualize what it looked like—the gape of its mouth, the flared grills and thick, vertical tail. The bass couldn’t have encountered many forces in its long life that it wasn’t capable of handling, and the unrelenting tug at its mouth must have been a source of great puzzlement and mounting panic.

Me, I had problems of my own. To get to Dixford, I had to paddle up a sluggish stream that came into the river beneath a covered bridge. There was a shallow sandbar at the mouth of this stream—weeds on one side, rocks on the other. Without doubt, this is where I would lose the fish.

“I have to be careful with my complexion. I tan, but in segments. I can’t figure out if it’s even worth it. I shouldn’t even do it probably. I saw Jackie Kennedy in Boston and she wasn’t tan at all.”

Taking a deep breath, I paddled as hard as I could for the middle, deepest part of the bar. I could have threaded the eye of a needle with the canoe, but the pull on the stern threw me off and I overcompensated—the canoe veered left and scraped bottom. I pushed the paddle down and shoved. A moment of hesitation . . . a moment more. . . . The canoe shot

clear into the deeper water of the stream. I immediately looked down at the rod. It was bent in the same, tight arc—miraculously, the bass was still on.

The moon was out now. It was low and full enough that its beam shone directly on Sheila there ahead of me in the canoe, washing her in a creamy, luminous glow. I could see the lithe, easy shape of her figure. I could see the way her hair curled down off her shoulders, the proud, alert tilt of her head, and all these things were as a tug on my heart. Not just Sheila, but the aura she carried about her of parties and casual touchings and grace. Behind me, I could feel the strain of the bass, steadier now, growing weaker, and this was another tug on my heart, not just the bass but the beat of the river and the slant of the stars and the smell of the night, until finally it seemed I would be torn apart between longings, split in half. Twenty yards ahead of us was the road, and once I pulled the canoe up on shore, the bass would be gone, irretrievably gone. If instead I stood up, grabbed the rod and started pumping, I would have it—as tired as the bass was, there was no chance it could get away. I reached down for the rod, hesitated, looked up to where Sheila was stretching herself lazily toward the sky, her small breasts rising beneath the soft fabric of her dress, and the tug was too much for me, and quicker than it takes to write down, I pulled a penknife from my pocket and cut the line in half.

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With a sick, nauseous feeling in my stomach, I saw the rod unbend.

“My legs are sore,” Sheila whined. “Are we there yet?”

Through a superhuman effort of self-control, I was able to beach the canoe and help Sheila off. The rest of the night is much foggier. We walked to the fair—there was the smell of popcorn, the sound of guitars. I may have danced once or twice with her, but all I really remember is her coming over to me once the music was done to explain that she would be going home in Eric Caswell’s Corvette.

“Okay,” I mumbled.

For the first time that night she looked at me, really looked at me.

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“You’re a funny kid, you know that?”

Funny. Different. Dreamy. Odd. How many times was I to hear that in the years to come, all spoken with the same quizzical, half-accusatory tone Sheila used them. Poor Sheila! Before the month was over, the spell she cast over me was gone, but the memory of that lost bass haunted me all summer and haunts me still. There would be other Sheila Mants in my life, other fish, and though I came close once or twice, it was these secret, hidden tuggings in the night that claimed me, and I never made the same mistake again.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What’s your impression of the narrator? Do you like him? Do you think he’s foolish? Is he immature? Something else? Explain.

2.

What three words would you choose to describe Sheila Mant? Does her character seem believable to you? Why?

3.

At what point, exactly, does the narrator start losing interest in Sheila Mant? How do you know this?

4.

How does the setting in this story contribute to the narrators' conflict and illusions?

5.

What is the most important thing the narrator has learned about himself by the end of this experience?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Write about a person, a place, or a moment that at first seemed exciting and magical to you, but once you became more familiar with the object that seemed so magical, you lost your initial illusions.

2.

Write an essay in which you give advice to a group of fourteen-year-olds on how to get along with the opposite sex. In order to keep the interest of this audience, you must, of course, rely primarily on stories, from both your own experiences or those fabricated to make your point.

3.

Write about a mistake in your life that you know you will never repeat.

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DONALD HALL

*The Wedding Couple*

Poet Donald Hall (born in 1928 in New Haven, Connecticut) was a professor of English at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, from 1957 until 1975, when he and his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, moved to a New Hampshire farm to devote themselves to writing full time. After publishing a number of highly regarded volumes of poetry, Hall was diagnosed with cancer, which then metastasized to his liver. In a moving poem, "Otherwise," about that period in their lives, Kenyon wrote: "At noon I lay day / with my mate. It might / have been otherwise. / We ate dinner together / at a table with silver / candlesticks. It might / have been otherwise. / I slept in a bed / in a room with paintings / on the walls, and / planned another day / just like this day. / But one day, I know, / it will be otherwise." Unexpectedly, as Hall was recovering, Kenyon was diagnosed with leukemia and died fifteen months later, in 1995. Without, Hall's fourteenth collection of poetry, lovingly and unsparingly records the daily ordeals of those months. Although this poem, which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 1996, is not about Hall and Kenyon, the devotion of the long-married couple is familiar.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Describe your perfect "wedding couple."

2.

What makes marriages work? What makes them fail?

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Fifteen years ago his heart  
infarcted and he stopped smoking.  
At eighty he trembled  
like a birch but remained vigorous

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and acute.  
When they married,  
fifty years ago, I was twelve.  
I observed the white lace  
veil, the mumbling preacher, and the flowers

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of parlor silence  
and ordinary absurdity; but  
I thought I stood outside  
the parlor.  
For two years she dwindled

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by small strokes  
into a mannequin—speechless almost, almost  
unmoving, eyes open  
and blinking, fitful in perception—  
but a mannequin that suffered

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shame when it stained the bed sheet.  
Slowly, shaking with purpose,  
he carried her to the bathroom,  
undressed and washed her,  
dressed her in clean clothes, and carried her back

25  
to CNN and bed. “All  
you need is love,” sang John and Paul:  
He touched her shoulder; her eyes  
caressed him like a bride’s bold eyes.  
*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.  
What are the different emotions you felt as you were reading this poem? Where, specifically did this poem affect you the most? Explain.
2.  
Compare the metaphors that Hall uses to describe the husband and the wife. What are the implications within each metaphor, and how do these metaphors both complement and differ from one another?
3.  
Why does the author choose to present this poem from an outsider’s point of view? What does the reader gain through this perspective?

4.

What does the speaker mean when he says that “I thought I stood outside / the parlor”?

5.

How does the husband continue to love his wife? How does she continue to love him?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Write a model of this same poem, writing it first from the husband’s point of view and then from the wife’s point of view. Compare and contrast the three versions.

2.

Interview a couple you know who has been married for fifty years or more. Through talking with them, aim to understand their marriage journey and the place where they are today.

3.

Collect ten to fifteen articles from a local newspaper about couples who have celebrated an important wedding anniversary. What information do you learn about the couples? What can you not see? What can you imagine? How do these couples compare or contrast to the ones in “The Wedding Couple”?

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#### TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS: WOMEN AND MEN

1. Compare Peter Filene’s assessment of the American male conflict with Paula Allen’s description of the Native American woman’s conflict in “Where I Come from Is Like This.”

2. Watch a few popular sitcoms on television today, noting especially the roles that men and women play. After several observations, compare these media roles with those mentioned in any two essays in this chapter. Do the media portrayals support the conflicts mentioned in either of the essays? As far as your own experience is concerned, which portrayal is most true?

3. Write an essay in which you analyze the relationships between men and women as presented by several sources in this chapter. Feel free to synthesize your own personal knowledge on this topic into the essay as well.

4. Which sex really has the upper hand in America today? Write an essay in which you argue effectively for either the men or the women.

5. Write a one-act play in which the characters in “The Wedding Couple” give advice to a male from this section who does not quite understand women, and a woman from this section who does not quite understand men. Aim to uncover several mysteries and conflicts that both genders have with one another.

6. In what ways do you see white women’s lives in the United States as different from the lives of minority women? Write an essay in which you analyze these two groups in order to find the similarities and the differences among women according to their culture.

7. Write a possible solution to one of the social problems mentioned in this chapter. First, set the scope of the problem, and explore several possibilities. Then settle on what you feel may be the best solution.

8. Working as a group with several other students in your class, design a questionnaire that raises questions about how men view women on your college campus or how women view men. Distribute the questionnaire among faculty, staff, and students. After studying the data you gather, write an essay in which you draw conclusions from the information

you received and from the discussions with your group about these data. Do your conclusions coincide with or contradict any of the writers in this chapter?

9. Compare the power that men have with the power that women possess. Are these two groups equally “strong,” or does one group have an advantage over the other? Make sure you document your findings with sources from this chapter and any outside sources you wish to consult.

10. Working with a group of your fellow students, interview professional women to discover how the feminist movement has affected their careers, their roles, and the quality of their lives. Interview professional men for the same purpose. Then write a report explaining and evaluating your findings. Do these findings contradict or confirm the beliefs of any author in this chapter? Do they contradict or confirm your own?

## MARJORIE INGALL

### *Alternative Bride*

*Marjorie Ingall is the author of The Field Guide to North American Males (1997), a parody of the National Audubon Society's Field Guide to North American Birds. This essay originally appeared in Ms. (September/October 1997).*

### *Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Make a list of eleven very picky, specific things that you would find desirable in your lifelong mate.

2.

Marriage: when and why should people tie the knot?

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How does a purple-haired, tattooed, nose-ringed feminist get married? It sounds like the setup to a pigboy Rush Limbaugh joke. But it's what I'm trying to figure out. I was never the kind of girl who had wedding fantasies. I never sketched wedding dresses in my notebook or wrote my hoped-for married name over and over in flowy, smiley-face-over-the-*i* cursive. (Vomit.) When I grew up, I met a succession of boys who were fun to sleep with. I even fell in love with one, but at the time, I wasn't ready to think about spending the rest of my life with anyone. Besides, he was kind of wussy. Then I met Jonathan. Reasons why I love Jonathan: Never bores me. Loves Eeyore even more than I do. Beautiful, big, strong hands. Owns every issue of *Sassy*. Has eyes like the sea after a storm. Grows daisies and sunflowers for me. Lots of chest hair. Does interpretive naked dance around the house after a shower. Sings “la! la! la!” like Pee-Wee Herman. Amazing cook (hardly ever consults recipes). Always, always puts the seat down.

We started as friends and did that sneaky, irresistible build into love. It took my tiny reptilian brain a while to figure out I was a goner. Now I reread our e-mail from back then and shake my head at my delusional, unconscious flirting technique. The very first thing he said after we finally slept together—I kid you not—was, “If you want the children to be named Ingall, I'm fine with that.”

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He was my first serious Jewish boyfriend. My mom was *plotzing* with joy. Two weeks after we moved in together, Hanukkah came and we lit the menorah together. Finding



each other was a miracle. We'd lived on the same street in college but never met. Then we moved to opposite coasts and met through the wonder of e-mail, and pixels began to dance on the screen.

We're already living together, so why get married? Because I know what I'm getting (the aforementioned good stuff, plus temper tantrums, inability to hang up shirts after wearing them, black sulks, narcissism, offside use of the phrase "Cut it out, you're acting like my mother") and want to spend my life with him anyway. I want to acknowledge this in front of our family and friends, in our religious tradition. We're not kids; we know what *forever* means. (Oh, God, it means we never get to sleep with anyone else again!) I've heard of weddings where the couple says, "as long as our love shall last." Um, no. I want to say in front of everyone that this is holy, and legally binding, and I care enough about this person to enter into an ancient covenant with him. (I think I'm far from alone in my desire for both community and continuity. To some degree, I think that's why so many Gen-Xers are having big weddings. Or maybe it's just a trend, like martinis and lounge music.)

Marrying Jonathan means figuring out how to turn a patriarchal institution into something that does not harsh my feminist mellow. Two institutions, really, because marriage is for me inextricably tied with Judaism. Suddenly I'm thinking about Jewish children, Jewish household rituals, a Jewish wedding ceremony.

Lately I've been obsessing about the *ketubah*, the Jewish marriage contract. How can I make it reflect my values while still keeping it in accordance with Halakah, Jewish law? The traditional *ketubah* is a legal document (it mentions neither love nor God) stating that the groom has "acquired" the bride for a given price and agrees to support her. The bride merely assents, wordlessly. This is pretty darn retro, especially considering the fact that, in our household, I've been the primary breadwinner for the past year. Instead, our *ketubah* will have Jonathan and me each say that we will support the other. Instead of the orthodox business of having the *ketubah* signed by two male witnesses, we'll use four: two men and two women. Oh, and then there's the little business of my dearly departed maidenhead. We will not be mentioning it.

The fun stuff is pondering the design of the contract. I first considered incorporating a quote from the *Song of Songs*; the *Friends* haircut of *ketubah* quotations—lovely, yet so common as to totally lack individuality. Instead, I think we'll use a quote from the blessing said every month on Rosh Chodesh, the new moon. I love moon stuff anyway (I am woman! Hear me menstruate!), and the Rosh Chodesh idea conveys the little quotidian miracles Judaism celebrates. A good marriage is also about the little things. And as I said, I think Jonathan's and my meeting was a little miracle. We could have met at any time, but had I met Jonathan in college, I would not have been ready for a grown-up relationship. We'll incorporate stars and moons into the *ketubah*, to match the motif I painted on various bits of furniture around the house.

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So anyway, here's my translation from Hebrew of the blessing: "Grant us long life, a life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessing, a life of strength and health, a life of piety, a life free of shame and reproach, a life of wealth and honor, a life full of love of Torah and fear of the heavens, a life in which all our hearts' desires for goodness will be fulfilled." A bit literal, but a good backstory, as they say.

It's healthy, I think, to re-examine old institutions and futz with them rather than throw them out. Working for change from within lets you feel connected; turning your back entirely sets you adrift. There's a lot to be proud of in Judaism's attitude toward marriage: Jewish law, for instance, has always said that minor girls can't be betrothed; that women have the right to refuse any potential husband, no matter what their parents command; that women can sue for divorce on various grounds, including sexual dissatisfaction; that conjugal rape is prohibited. I like it that Jewish tradition has the bride and the groom escorted to the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) by their parents; much nicer than having the bride's dad hand her off to her husband like a football. It still blows that in Judaism, men have the power to grant a divorce. Jonathan and I will either put in the *ketubah* that he will give me a divorce if I want one, or we'll have a prenuptial agreement. Kinda icky to be pondering, and I do think this is forever, but better safe than sorry.

We all personalize institutions to reflect who we are. For our wedding, I'm planning on keeping my hair purple and rubber-stamping moons and stars on the yarmulkes. Jonathan will smash the ritual glass and preside, tongs in hand, over the barbecue the day before. After the honeymoon, we'll continue in the household roles we forged over the past year: He does most of the cooking, I do most of the cleaning, he gardens, I paint and decorate. I don't really expect marriage to change anything, but in my head it clears the way for having kids, which I'm crazy-mad looking forward to. I'm supporting him now so he can support me when I want to drop out and have me some pups.

A section of the Song of Songs says:

Set me as a seal upon your heart

A seal upon your arm

For Love is strong as death

Cruel as the grave

I thought about using it as a *ketubah* motif. Then I thought about how I could personalize it further. So I'm thinking of getting another tattoo, of Eeyore. Because Jonathan is the seal upon my arm. I can be so literal sometimes.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What three words would you choose to describe this author? Explain.

2.

Compare and contrast your prereading list of things you would like in a mate with the list that Ingall provides in paragraph 3. What does her list reveal about her? What does your list reveal about you?

3.

What reasons does Ingall give for agreeing to marry the man with whom she's been living? How does this match up with your second prereading response?

4.

Do you agree? Is love mostly a matter of luck and timing? Support your answer with your own experiences as well as your observations of others.

5.

Compare the traditional Jewish marriage contract with the one the author has designed. What is the major difference between the two, and which one would you prefer to use? Explain.

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Argue for an “inside” change of any ritual within one of the following: education, religion, families, divorce, high school proms, dating rituals, your choice.

2.

Research the rites and traditions of marriage within a culture other than your own. Compare this to the traditions in your own culture.

3.

Interview people from three separate generations in order to find out their opinions on marriage. What do you think is the ideal age for marriage? What are the reasons people should get married? When shouldn't they? What makes for a successful marriage? Ask any other questions that would give you solid information on how each person feels, and then write up a report with your findings.

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DEBORAH BLUM

*The Gender Blur*

*Deborah Blum (born in 1954 in Urbana, Illinois) is a Pulitzer Prize–winning science writer and professor of journalism at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. She is author of The Monkey Wars (1994) about the use of animals in scientific experiments and Sex on the Brain: The Biological Differences between Men and Women (1997), which synthesizes current research from evolutionary biology, anthropology, animal behavior, neuroscience, and psychology.*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

What one factor do you think most influences how a child looks at the world? His or her parents, peers, genetic factors, environmental influences, something else?

2.

Describe your favorite toys and interests when you were a small child. Who gave you the toys? How did you get interested in a particular subject?

3.

Which came first: the chicken or the egg?

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I was raised in one of those university-based, liberal elite families that politicians like to ridicule. In my childhood, every human being—regardless of gender—was exactly alike under the skin, and I mean exactly, barring his or her different opportunities. My parents wasted no opportunity to bring this point home. One Christmas, I received a Barbie doll and a softball glove. Another brought a green enamel stove, which baked tiny cakes by the heat of a lightbulb, and also a set of steel-tipped darts and competition-quality dartboard. Did I mention the year of the chemistry set and the ballerina doll?

It wasn't until I became a parent—I should say, a parent of two boys—that I realized I had been fed a line and swallowed it like a sucker (barring the part about opportunities, which I still believe). This dawned on me during my older son's dinosaur phase, which began when he was about 21

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. Oh, he loved dinosaurs, all right, but only the blood-swilling carnivores. Plant-eaters were wimps and losers, and he refused to wear a T-shirt marred by a picture of a stegosaur. I looked down at him one day, as he was snarling around my feet and doing his toddler best to gnaw off my right leg, and I thought: This goes a lot deeper than culture. Raising children tends to bring on this kind of politically incorrect reaction. Another friend came to the same conclusion watching a son determinedly bite his breakfast toast into the shape of a pistol he hoped would blow away—or at least terrify—his younger brother. Once you get past the guilt part—Did I do this? Should I have bought him that plastic allosaur with the oversized teeth?—such revelations can lead you to consider the far more interesting field of gender biology, where the questions take a different shape: Does love of carnage begin in culture or genetics, and which drives which? Do the gender roles of our culture reflect an underlying biology, and, in turn, does the way we behave influence that biology?

The point I'm leading up to—through the example of my son's innocent love of predatory dinosaurs—is actually one of the most straightforward in this debate. One of the reasons we're so fascinated by childhood behaviors is that, as the old saying goes, the child becomes the man (or woman, of course). Most girls don't spend their preschool years snarling around the house and pretending to chew off their companion's legs. And they—mostly—don't grow up to be as aggressive as men. Do the ways that we amplify those early differences in childhood shape the adults we become? Absolutely. But it's worth exploring the starting place—the faint signal that somehow gets amplified.

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“There's plenty of room in society to influence sex differences,” says Marc Breedlove, a behavioral endocrinologist at the University of California at Berkeley and a pioneer in defining how hormones can help build sexually different nervous systems. “Yes, we're born with predispositions, but it's society that amplifies them, exaggerates them. I believe that—except for the sex differences in aggression. Those [differences] are too massive to be explained simply by society.”

Aggression does allow a straightforward look at the issue. Consider the following statistics: Crime reports in both the United States and Europe record between 10 and 15 robberies committed by men for every one by a woman. At one point, people argued that this was explained by size difference. Women weren't big enough to intimidate, but that would change, they predicted, with the availability of compact weapons. But just as little girls don't routinely make weapons out of toast, women—even criminal ones—don't seem drawn to weaponry in the same way that men are. Almost twice as many male thieves and robbers use guns as their female counterparts do.

Or you can look at more personal crimes: domestic partner murders. Three-fourths of men use guns in those killings; 50 percent of women do. Here's more from the domestic front: In conflicts in which a woman killed a man, he tended to be the one who had started the fight—in 51.8 percent of the cases, to be exact. When the man was the killer,

he again was the likely first aggressor, and by an even more dramatic margin. In fights in which women died, they had started the argument only 12.5 percent of the time. Enough. You can parade endless similar statistics but the point is this: Males are more aggressive, not just among humans but among almost all species on earth. Male chimpanzees, for instance, declare war on neighboring troops, and one of their strategies is a warning strike: They kill females and infants to terrorize and intimidate. In terms of simple, reproductive genetics, it's an advantage of males to be aggressive: You can muscle your way into dominance, winning more sexual encounters, more offspring, more genetic future. For the female—especially in a species like ours, with time for just one successful pregnancy a year—what's the genetic advantage in brawling?

Thus the issue becomes not whether there is a biologically influenced sex difference in aggression—the answer being a solid, technical “You betcha”—but rather how rigid that difference is. The best science, in my opinion, tends to align with basic common sense. We all know that there are extraordinarily gentle men and murderous women. Sex differences are always generalizations: They refer to a behavior, with some evolutionary rationale behind it. They never define, entirely, an individual. And that fact alone should tell us that there's always—even in the most biologically dominated traits—some flexibility, an instinctive ability to respond, for better and worse, to the world around us.

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This is true even with physical characteristics that we've often assumed are nailed down by genetics. Scientists now believe height, for instance, is only about 90 percent heritable. A person's genes might code for a six-foot-tall body, but malnutrition could literally cut that short. And there's also some evidence, in girls anyway, that children with stressful childhoods tend to become shorter adults. So while some factors are predetermined, there's evidence that the prototypical male/female body design can be readily altered.

It's a given that humans, like most other species—bananas, spiders, sharks, ducks, any rabbit you pull out of a hat—rely on two sexes for reproduction. So basic is that requirement that we have chromosomes whose primary purpose is to deliver the genes that order up a male or a female. All other chromosomes are numbered, but we label the sex chromosomes with the letters X and Y. We get one each from our mother and our father, and the basic combinations are these: XX makes female, XY makes male. There are two important—and little-known—points about these chromosomal matches. One is that even with this apparently precise system, there's nothing precise—or guaranteed—about the physical construction of male and female. The other point makes that possible. It appears that sex doesn't matter in the early stages of embryonic development. We are unisex at the point of conception.

If you examine an embryo at about six weeks, you see that it has the ability to develop in either direction. The fledgling embryo has two sets of ducts—Wolffian for male, Mullerian for female—an either/or structure, held in readiness for further development. If testosterone and other androgens are released by hormone-producing cells, then the Wolffian ducts develop into the channel that connects penis to testes, and the female ducts wither away.

Without testosterone, the embryo takes on a female form; the male ducts vanish and the Mullerian ducts expand into oviducts, uterus, and vagina. In other words, in humans, anyway (the opposite is true in birds), the female is the default sex. Back in the 1950s, the

famed biologist Alfred Jost showed that if you castrate a male rabbit fetus, choking off testosterone, you produce a completely feminized rabbit.

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We don't do these experiments in humans—for obvious reasons—but there are naturally occurring instances that prove the same point. For instance: In the fetal testes are a group of cells, called Leydig cells, that make testosterone. In rare cases, the fetus doesn't make enough of these cells (a defect known as Leydig cell hypoplasia). In this circumstance we see the limited power of the XY chromosome. These boys have the right chromosomes and the right genes to be boys; they just don't grow a penis. Obstetricians and parents often think they see a baby girl, and these children are routinely raised as daughters. Usually, the "mistake" is caught about the time of puberty, when menstruation doesn't start. A doctor's examination shows the child to be internally male; there are usually small testes, often tucked within the abdomen. As the researchers put it, if the condition had been known from the beginning, "the sisters would have been born as brothers." Just to emphasize how tricky all this body-building can get, there's a peculiar genetic defect that seems to be clustered by heredity in a small group of villages in the Dominican Republic. The result of the defect is a failure to produce an enzyme that concentrates testosterone, specifically for building the genitals. One obscure little enzyme only, but here's what happens without it: You get a boy with undescended testes and a penis so short and stubby that it resembles an oversized clitoris.

In the mountain villages of this Caribbean nation, people are used to it. The children are usually raised as "conditional" girls. At puberty, the secondary tide of androgens rises and is apparently enough to finish the construction project. The scrotum suddenly descends, the phallus grows, and the child develops a distinctly male body—narrow hips, muscular build, and even slight beard growth. At that point, the family shifts the child over from daughter to son. The dresses are thrown out. He begins to wear male clothes and starts dating girls. People in the Dominican Republic are so familiar with this condition that there's a colloquial name for it: *guedoces*, meaning "eggs (or testes) at 12."

It's the comfort level with this slip-slide of sexual identity that's so remarkable and, I imagine, so comforting to the children involved. I'm positive that the sexual transition of these children is less traumatic than the abrupt awareness of the "sisters who would have been brothers." There's a message of tolerance there, well worth repeating, and there are some other key lessons too.

These defects are rare and don't alter the basic male-female division of our species. They do emphasize how fragile those divisions can be. Biology allows flexibility, room to change, to vary and grow. With that comes room for error as well. That it's possible to live with these genetic defects, that they don't merely kill us off, is a reminder that we, male and female alike, exist on a continuum of biological possibilities that can overlap and sustain either sex.

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Marc Breedlove points out that the most difficult task may be separating how the brain responds to hormones from how the brain responds to the *results* of hormones. Which brings us back, briefly, below the belt: In this context, the penis is just a result, the product of androgens at work before birth. "And after birth," says Breedlove, "virtually

everyone who interacts with that individual will note that he has a penis, and will, in many instances, behave differently than if the individual was a female.”

Do the ways that we amplify physical and behavioral differences in childhood shape who we become as adults? Absolutely. But to understand that, you have to understand the differences themselves—their beginning and the very real biochemistry that may lie behind them.

Here is a good place to focus on testosterone—a hormone that is both well-studied and generally underrated. First, however, I want to acknowledge that there are many other hormones and neurotransmitters that appear to influence behavior. Preliminary work shows that fetal boys are a little more active than fetal girls. It’s pretty difficult to argue socialization at that point. There’s a strong suspicion that testosterone may create the difference.

And there are a couple of relevant animal models to emphasize the point. Back in the 1960s, Robert Goy, a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, first documented that young male monkeys play much more roughly than young females. Goy went on to show that if you manipulate testosterone level—raising it in females, damping it down in males—you can reverse those effects, creating sweet little male monkeys and rowdy young females.

Is testosterone the only factor at work here? I don’t think so. But clearly we can argue a strong influence, and, interestingly, studies have found that girls with congenital adrenal hypoplasia—who run high in testosterone—tend to be far more fascinated by trucks and toy weaponry than most little girls are. They lean toward rough-and-tumble play, too. As it turns out, the strongest influence on this “abnormal” behavior is not parental disapproval, but the company of other little girls, who tone them down and direct them toward more routine girl games.

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And that reinforces an early point: If there is indeed a biology to sex differences, we amplify it. At some point—when it is still up for debate—we gain a sense of our gender, and with it a sense of “gender-appropriate” behavior.

Some scientists argue for some evidence of gender awareness in infancy, perhaps by the age of 12 months. The consensus seems to be that full-blown “I’m a girl” or “I’m a boy” instincts arrive between the ages of 2 and 3. Research shows that if a family operates in a very traditional, Beaver Cleaver kind of environment, filled with awareness of and association with “proper” gender behaviors, the “boys do trucks, girls do dolls” attitude seems to come very early. If a child grows up in a less traditional family, with an emphasis on partnership and sharing—“We all do the dishes, Joshua”—children maintain a more flexible sense of gender roles until about age 6.

In this period, too, relationships between boys and girls tend to fall into remarkably strict lines. Interviews with children find that 3-year-olds say that about half their friendships are with the opposite sex. By the age of 5, that drops to 20 percent. By 7, almost no boys or girls have, or will admit to having, best friends of the opposite sex. They still hang out on the same playground, play on the same soccer teams. They may be friendly, but the real friendships tend to be boy-to-boy or girl-to-girl.

There’s some interesting science that suggests that the space between boys and girls is a normal part of development; there are periods during which children may thrive and learn from hanging out with peers of the same sex. Do we, as parents, as a culture at large,

reinforce such separations? Is the pope Catholic? One of my favorite studies looked at little boys who asked for toys. If they asked for a heavily armed action figure, they got the soldier about 70 percent of the time. If they asked for a “girl” toy, like a baby doll or a Barbie, their parents purchased it maybe 40 percent of the time. Name a child who won’t figure out how to work *that* system.

How does all this fit together—toys and testosterone, biology and behavior, the development of the child into the adult, the way that men and women relate to one another?

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Let me make a cautious statement about testosterone: It not only has some body-building functions, it influences some behaviors as well. Let’s make that a little less cautious: These behaviors include rowdy play, sex drive, competitiveness, and an in-your-face attitude. Males tend to have a higher baseline of testosterone than females—in our species, about seven to ten times as much—and therefore you would predict (correctly, I think) that all of those behaviors would be more generally found in men than in women. But testosterone is also one of my favorite examples of how responsive biology is, how attuned it is to the way we live our lives. Testosterone, it turns out, rises in response to competition and threat. In the days of our ancestors, this might have been hand-to-hand combat or high-risk hunting endeavors. Today, scientists have measured testosterone rise in athletes preparing for a game, in chess players awaiting a match, in spectators following a soccer competition.

If a person—or even just a person’s favored team—wins, testosterone continues to rise. It falls with a loss. (This also makes sense in an evolutionary perspective. If one was being clobbered with a club, it would be extremely unhelpful to have a hormone urging one to battle on.) Testosterone also rises in the competitive world of dating, settles down with a stable and supportive relationship, climbs again if the relationship starts to falter. It’s been known for years that men in high-stress professions—say, police work or corporate law—have higher testosterone levels than men in the ministry. It turns out that women in the same kind of strong-attitude professions have higher testosterone than women who choose to stay home. What I like about this is the chicken-or-egg aspect. If you argue that testosterone influenced the behavior of those women, which came first? Did they have high testosterone and choose the law? Or did they choose the law, and the competitive environment ratcheted them up on the androgen scale? Or could both be at work?

And, returning to children for a moment, there’s an ongoing study by Pennsylvania researchers, tracking that question in adolescent girls, who are being encouraged by their parents to engage in competitive activities that were once for boys only. As they do so, the researchers are monitoring, regularly, two hormones: testosterone and cortisol, a stress hormone. Will these hormones rise in response to this new, more traditionally male environment? What if more girls choose the competitive path; more boys choose the other? Will female testosterone levels rise, male levels fall? Will that wonderful, unpredictable, flexible biology that we’ve been given allow a shift, so that one day, we will literally be far more alike?

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We may not have answers to all those questions, but we can ask them, and we can expect that the answers will come someday, because science clearly shows us that such possibilities exist. In this most important sense, sex differences offer us a paradox. It is



only through exploring and understanding what makes us different that we can begin to understand what binds us together.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What conflict is established in the first two paragraphs? What does the author do to both intrigue you, the reader, and set forth the context of her writing?

2.

Explain to an audience of ten-year-olds what the author's point is between biological factors and children's behavior.

3.

For this same audience of ten-year-olds, summarize the difference that Blum sees between males and females.

4.

What does it mean—that “the child becomes the man (or woman, of course).”

5.

For you personally, what is the most important knowledge you gained from reading this piece?

6.

What factors, other than the ones Blum mentions, might explain aggressive behavior in males today?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Explain a moment or incident in your childhood when you became most acutely aware of your gender. How did you change as a result of this insight?

2.

Observe preschool children in a day-care setting, paying close attention to their behaviors, interests, and interactions with others. Compare your finding to several claims Blum makes in this piece regarding different behaviors for different genders.

3.

Find two other journal articles that deal with aggressiveness in males today, and compare and contrast these readings to the claims that Blum makes in this piece. Out of the three, which one is most reliable? Most convincing? Most entertaining?

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W. D. WETHERELL

*The Bass, the River, and Sheila Mant*

*W. D. Wetherell (born in 1948) is a novelist and story writer who is currently the holder of the American Academy of Arts and Letters' Strauss Living Award for outstanding achievement. His recent books include Vermont River: The Classic Portrait of a Man and His River (1984), Upland Stream: Notes on the Fishing Passion (1991), and One River More: A Celebration of Rivers and Fly Fishing (1998). He lives in rural western New Hampshire, close to the prime trout water of the Connecticut River.*

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

The year you were fourteen—what was it like for you?

2.

Describe your first real crush. Who was the focus of your desires, and how did this experience turn out?

3.

Freewrite about the best or worst summer you ever had.

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There was a summer in my life when the only creature that seemed lovelier to me than a largemouth bass was Sheila Mant. I was fourteen. The Mants had rented the cottage next to ours on the river; with their parties, their frantic games of softball, their constant comings and goings, they appeared to me denizens of a brilliant existence. “Too noisy by half,” my mother quickly decided, but I would have given anything to be invited to one of their parties, and when my parents went to bed I would sneak through the woods to their hedge and stare enchanted at the candlelit swirl of white dresses and bright, paisley skirts. Sheila was the middle daughter—at seventeen, all but out of reach. She would spend her days sunbathing on a float my Uncle Sierbert had moored in their cove, and before July was over I had learned all her moods. If she lay flat on the diving board with her hand trailing idly in the water, she was pensive, not to be disturbed. On her side, her head propped up by her arm, she was observant, considering those around her with a look that seemed queenly and severe. Sitting up, arms tucked around her long, suntanned legs, she was approachable, but barely, and it was only in those glorious moments when she stretched herself prior to entering the water that her various suitors found the courage to come near.

These were many. The Dartmouth heavyweight crew would scull by her house on their way upriver, and I think all eight of them must have been in love with her at various times during the summer; the coxswain would curse them through his megaphone, but without effect—there was always a pause in their pace when they passed Sheila’s float. I suppose to these jaded twenty-year-olds she seemed the incarnation of innocence and youth, while to me she appeared unutterably suave, the epitome of sophistication. I was on the swim team at school, and to win her attention would do endless laps between my house and the Vermont shore, hoping she would notice the beauty of my flutter kick, the power of my crawl. Finishing, I would boost myself up onto our dock and glance casually over toward her, but she was never watching, and the miraculous day she was, I immediately climbed the diving board and did my best tuck and a half for her, and continued diving until she had left and the sun went down and my longing was like a madness and I couldn’t stop.

It was late August by the time I got up the nerve to ask her out. The tortured will-I’s, won’t-I’s, the agonized indecision over what to say, the false starts toward her house and embarrassed retreats—the details of these have been seared from my memory, and the only part I remember clearly is emerging from the woods toward dusk while they were playing softball on their lawn, as bashful and frightened as a unicorn.

5

Sheila was stationed halfway between first and second, well outside the infield. She didn’t seem surprised to see me—as a matter of fact, she didn’t seem to see me at all. “If you’re playing second base, you should move closer,” I said.

She turned—I took the full brunt of her long red hair and well-spaced freckles. “I’m playing outfield,” she said, “I don’t like the responsibility of having a base.” “Yeah, I can understand that,” I said, though I couldn’t. “There’s a band in Dixford tomorrow night at nine. Want to go?”

10

One of her brothers sent the ball sailing over the leftfielder’s head; she stood and watched it disappear toward the river.

“You have a car?” she asked, without looking up.

I played my master stroke. “We’ll go by canoe.”

I spent all of the following day polishing it. I turned it upside down on our lawn and rubbed every inch with Brillo, hosing off the dirt, wiping it with chamois until it gleamed as bright as aluminum ever gleamed. About five, I slid it into the water, arranging cushions near the bow so Sheila could lean on them if she was in one of her pensive moods, propping up my father’s transistor radio by the middle thwart so we could have music when we came back. Automatically, without thinking about it, I mounted my Mitchell reel on my Pfleuger spinning rod and stuck it in the stern.

I say automatically, because I never went anywhere that summer without a fishing rod.

When I wasn’t swimming laps to impress Sheila, I was back in our driveway practicing casts, and when I wasn’t practicing casts, I was tying the line to Tosca, our springer spaniel, to test the reel’s drag, and when I wasn’t doing any of those things, I was fishing the river for bass.

15

Too nervous to sit at home, I got in the canoe early and started paddling in a huge circle that would get me to Sheila’s dock around eight. As automatically as I brought along my rod, I tied on a big Rapala plug, let it down into the water, let out some line and immediately forgot all about it. It was already dark by the time I glided up to the Mants’ dock. Even by day the river was quiet, most of the summer people preferring Sunapee or one of the other nearby lakes, and at night it was a solitude difficult to believe, a corridor of hidden life that ran between banks like a tunnel. Even the stars were part of it. They weren’t as sharp anywhere else; they seemed to have chosen the river as a guide on their slow wheel toward morning, and in the course of the summer’s fishing, I had learned all their names.

I was there ten minutes before Sheila appeared. I heard the slam of their screen door first, then saw her in the spotlight as she came slowly down the path. As beautiful as she was on the float, she was even lovelier now—her white dress went perfectly with her hair, and complimented her figure even more than her swimsuit.

It was her face that bothered me. It had on its delightful fullness a very dubious expression.

“Look,” she said. “I can get Dad’s car.”

20

“It’s faster this way,” I lied. “Parking’s tense up there. Hey, it’s safe. I won’t tip it or anything.”

She let herself down reluctantly into the bow. I was glad she wasn’t facing me. When her eyes were on me, I felt like diving in the river again from agony and joy.

I pried the canoe away from the dock and started paddling upstream. There was an extra paddle in the bow, but Sheila made no move to pick it up. She took her shoes off, and dangled her feet over the side.

Ten minutes went by.

“What kind of band?” she said.

25

“It’s sort of like folk music. You’ll like it.”

“Eric Caswell’s going to be there. He strokes number four.”

“No kidding?” I said. I had no idea who she meant.

“What’s that sound?” she said, pointing toward the shore.

“Bass. That splashing sound?”

30

“Over there.”

“Yeah, bass. They come into the shallows at night to chase frogs and moths and things.

Big largemouths. *Micropetrus salmonides*,” I added, showing off.

“I think fishing’s dumb,” she said, making a face. “I mean, it’s boring and all. Definitely dumb.”

Now I have spent a great deal of time in the years since wondering why Sheila Mant should come down so hard on fishing. Was her father a fisherman? Her antipathy toward fishing nothing more than normal filial rebellion? Had she tried it once? A messy encounter with worms? It doesn’t matter. What does, is that at that fragile moment in time I would have given anything not to appear dumb in Sheila’s severe and unforgiving eyes.

She hadn’t seen my equipment yet. What I *should* have done, of course, was push the canoe in closer to shore and carefully slide the rod into some branches where I could pick it up again in the morning. Failing that, I could have surreptitiously dumped the whole outfit overboard, written off the forty or so dollars as love’s tribute. What I actually *did* do was gently lean forward, and slowly, ever so slowly, push the rod back through my legs toward the stern where it would be less conspicuous.

35

It must have been just exactly what the bass was waiting for. Fish will trail a lure sometimes, trying to make up their mind whether or not to attack, and the slight pause in the plug’s speed caused by my adjustment was tantalizing enough to overcome the bass’s inhibitions. My rod, safely out of sight at last, bent double. The line, tightly coiled, peeled off the spool with the shrill, tearing zip of a high-speed drill.

Four things occurred to me at once. One, that it was a bass. Two, that it was a big bass.

Three, that it was the biggest bass I had ever hooked. Four, that Sheila Mant must not know.

“What was that?” she said, turning half around.

“Uh, what was what?”

“That buzzing noise.”

40

“Bats.”

She shuddered, quickly drew her feet back into the canoe. Every instinct I had told me to pick up the rod and strike back at the bass, but there was no need to—it was already solidly hooked. Downstream, an awesome distance downstream, it jumped clear of the

water, landing with a concussion heavy enough to ripple the entire river. For a moment, I thought it was gone, but then the rod was bending again, the tip dancing into the water. Slowly, not making any motion that might alert Sheila, I reached down to tighten the drag.

While all this was going on, Sheila had begun talking and it was a few minutes before I was able to catch up with her train of thought.

“I went to a party there. These fraternity men. Katherine says I could get in there if I wanted. I’m thinking more of UVM or Bennington. Somewhere I can ski.”

The bass was slanting toward the rocks on the New Hampshire side by the ruins of Donaldson’s boathouse. It had to be an old bass—a young one probably wouldn’t have known the rocks were there. I brought the canoe back into the middle of the river, hoping to head it off.

45

“That’s neat,” I mumbled. “Skiing. Yeah, I can see that.”

“Eric said I have the figure to model, but I thought I should get an education first. I mean, it might be a while before I get started and all. I was thinking of getting my hair styled, more swept back? I mean, Ann-Margret? Like hers, only shorter?”

She hesitated. “Are we going backward?”

We were. I had managed to keep the bass in the middle of the river away from the rocks, but it had plenty of room there, and for the first time a chance to exert its full strength. I quickly computed the weight necessary to draw a fully loaded canoe backwards—the thought of it made me feel faint.

“It’s just the current,” I said hoarsely. “No sweat or anything.”

50

I dug in deeper with my paddle. Reassured, Sheila began talking about something else, but all my attention was taken up now with the fish. I could feel its desperation as the water grew shallower. I could sense the extra strain on the line, the frantic way it cut back and forth in the water. I could visualize what it looked like—the gape of its mouth, the flared gills and thick, vertical tail. The bass couldn’t have encountered many forces in its long life that it wasn’t capable of handling, and the unrelenting tug at its mouth must have been a source of great puzzlement and mounting panic.

Me, I had problems of my own. To get to Dixford, I had to paddle up a sluggish stream that came into the river beneath a covered bridge. There was a shallow sandbar at the mouth of this stream—weeds on one side, rocks on the other. Without doubt, this is where I would lose the fish.

“I have to be careful with my complexion. I tan, but in segments. I can’t figure out if it’s even worth it. I shouldn’t even do it probably. I saw Jackie Kennedy in Boston and she wasn’t tan at all.”

Taking a deep breath, I paddled as hard as I could for the middle, deepest part of the bar. I could have threaded the eye of a needle with the canoe, but the pull on the stern threw me off and I overcompensated—the canoe veered left and scraped bottom. I pushed the paddle down and shoved. A moment of hesitation . . . a moment more. . . . The canoe shot clear into the deeper water of the stream. I immediately looked down at the rod. It was bent in the same, tight arc—miraculously, the bass was still on. The moon was out now. It was low and full enough that its beam shone directly on Sheila there ahead of me in the canoe, washing her in a creamy, luminous glow. I could see the lithe, easy shape of her

figure. I could see the way her hair curled down off her shoulders, the proud, alert tilt of her head, and all these things were as a tug on my heart. Not just Sheila, but the aura she carried about her of parties and casual touchings and grace. Behind me, I could feel the strain of the bass, steadier now, growing weaker, and this was another tug on my heart, not just the bass but the beat of the river and the slant of the stars and the smell of the night, until finally it seemed I would be torn apart between longings, split in half. Twenty yards ahead of us was the road, and once I pulled the canoe up on shore, the bass would be gone, irretrievably gone. If instead I stood up, grabbed the rod and started pumping, I would have it—as tired as the bass was, there was no chance it could get away. I reached down for the rod, hesitated, looked up to where Sheila was stretching herself lazily toward the sky, her small breasts rising beneath the soft fabric of her dress, and the tug was too much for me, and quicker than it takes to write down, I pulled a penknife from my pocket and cut the line in half.

55

With a sick, nauseous feeling in my stomach, I saw the rod unbend.

“My legs are sore,” Sheila whined. “Are we there yet?”

Through a superhuman effort of self-control, I was able to beach the canoe and help Sheila off. The rest of the night is much foggier. We walked to the fair—there was the smell of popcorn, the sound of guitars. I may have danced once or twice with her, but all I really remember is her coming over to me once the music was done to explain that she would be going home in Eric Caswell’s Corvette.

“Okay,” I mumbled.

For the first time that night she looked at me, really looked at me.

60

“You’re a funny kid, you know that?”

Funny. Different. Dreamy. Odd. How many times was I to hear that in the years to come, all spoken with the same quizzical, half-accusatory tone Sheila used then. Poor Sheila! Before the month was over, the spell she cast over me was gone, but the memory of that lost bass haunted me all summer and haunts me still. There would be other Sheila Mants in my life, other fish, and though I came close once or twice, it was these secret, hidden tuggings in the night that claimed me, and I never made the same mistake again.

*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.

What’s your impression of the narrator? Do you like him? Do you think he’s foolish? Is he immature? Something else? Explain.

2.

What three words would you choose to describe Sheila Mant? Does her character seem believable to you? Why?

3.

At what point, exactly, does the narrator start losing interest in Sheila Mant? How do you know this?

4.

How does the setting in this story contribute to the narrator’s conflict and illusions?

5.

What is the most important thing the narrator has learned about himself by the end of this experience?

*Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.

Write about a person, a place, or a moment that at first seemed exciting and magical to you, but once you became more familiar with the object that seemed so magical, you lost your initial illusions.

2.

Write an essay in which you give advice to a group of fourteen-year-olds on how to get along with the opposite sex. In order to keep the interest of this audience, you must, of course, rely primarily on stories, from both your own experiences or those fabricated to make your point.

3.

Write about a mistake in your life that you know you will never repeat.

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DONALD HALL

*The Wedding Couple*

Poet Donald Hall (born in 1928 in New Haven, Connecticut) was a professor of English at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, from 1957 until 1975, when he and his wife, the poet Jane Kenyon, moved to a New Hampshire farm to devote themselves to writing full time. After publishing a number of highly regarded volumes of poetry, Hall was diagnosed with cancer, which then metastasized to his liver. In a moving poem, "Otherwise," about that period in their lives, Kenyon wrote: "At noon I lay down / with my mate. It might / have been otherwise. / We ate dinner together / at a table with silver / candlesticks. It might / have been otherwise. / I slept in a bed / in a room with paintings / on the walls, and / planned another day / just like this day. / But one day, I know, / it will be otherwise." Unexpectedly, as Hall was recovering, Kenyon was diagnosed with leukemia and died fifteen months later, in 1995. Without, Hall's fourteenth collection of poetry, lovingly and unsparingly records the daily ordeals of those months. Although this poem, which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in May 1996, is not about Hall and Kenyon, the devotion of the long-married couple is familiar.

*Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing*

1.

Describe your perfect "wedding couple."

2.

What makes marriages work? What makes them fail?

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Fifteen years ago his heart  
infarcted and he stopped smoking.  
At eighty he trembled  
like a birch but remained vigorous  
and acute.

When they married,  
fifty years ago, I was twelve.  
I observed the white lace  
veil, the mumbling preacher, and the flowers  
of parlor silence

and ordinary absurdity; but  
I thought I stood outside  
the parlor.  
For two years she dwindled  
by small strokes

into a mannequin—speechless almost, almost  
unmoving, eyes open  
and blinking, fitful in perception—  
but a mannequin that suffered  
shame when it stained the bed sheet.

Slowly, shaking with purpose,  
he carried her to the bathroom,  
undressed and washed her,  
dressed her in clean clothes, and carried her back  
to CNN and bed. “All

you need is love,” sang John and Paul:  
He touched her shoulder; her eyes  
caressed him like a bride’s bold eyes.  
*Suggestions for Writing and Discussion*

1.  
What are the different emotions you felt as you were reading this poem? Where, specifically, did this poem affect you the most? Explain.
  2.  
Compare the metaphors that Hall uses to describe the husband and the wife. What are the implications within each metaphor, and how do these metaphors both complement and differ from one another?
  3.  
Why does the author choose to present this poem from an outsider’s point of view? What does the reader gain through this perspective?
  4.  
What does the speaker mean when he says that “I thought I stood outside / the parlor”?
  5.  
How does the husband continue to love his wife? How does she continue to love him?
- Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing*

1.



Write a model of this same poem, writing it first from the husband's point of view and then from the wife's point of view. Compare and contrast the three versions.

2.

Interview a couple you know who has been married for fifty years or more. Through talking with them, aim to understand their marriage journey and the place where they are today.

3.

Collect ten to fifteen articles from a local newspaper about couples who have celebrated an important wedding anniversary. What information do you learn about the couples? What can you not see? What can you imagine? How do these couples compare or contrast to the ones in "The Wedding Couple"?

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### TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS:

#### WOMEN AND MEN

1. Compare Peter Filene's assessment of the American male conflict with Paula Allen's description of the Native American woman's conflict in "Where I Come from Is Like This."

2. Watch a few popular sitcoms on television today, noting especially the roles that men and women play. After several observations, compare these media roles with those mentioned in any two essays in this chapter. Do the media portrayals support the conflicts mentioned in either of the essays? As far as your own experience is concerned, which portrayal is most true?

3. Write an essay in which you analyze the relationships between men and women as presented by several sources in this chapter. Feel free to synthesize your own personal knowledge on this topic into the essay as well.

4. Which sex really has the upper hand in America today? Write an essay in which you argue effectively for either the men or the women.

5. Write a one-act play in which the characters in "The Wedding Couple" give advice to a male from this section who does not quite understand women, and a woman from this section who does not quite understand men. Aim to uncover several mysteries and conflicts that both genders have with one another.

6. In what ways do you see white women's lives in the United States as different from the lives of minority women? Write an essay in which you analyze these two groups in order to find the similarities and the differences among women according to their culture.

7. Write a possible solution to one of the social problems mentioned in this chapter. First, set the scope of the problem, and explore several possibilities. Then settle on what you feel may be the best solution.

8. Working as a group with several other students in your class, design a questionnaire that raises questions about how men view women on your college campus or how women view men. Distribute the questionnaire among faculty, staff, and students. After studying the data you gather, write an essay in which you draw conclusions from the information you received and from the discussions with your group about these data. Do your conclusions coincide with or contradict any of the writers in this chapter?

9. Compare the power that men have with the power that women possess. Are these two groups equally "strong," or does one group have an advantage over the other? Make sure

you document your findings with sources from this chapter and any outside sources you wish to consult.

10. Working with a group of your fellow students, interview professional women to discover how the feminist movement has affected their careers, their roles, and the quality of their lives. Interview professional men for the same purpose. Then write a report explaining and evaluating your findings. Do these findings contradict or confirm the beliefs of any author in this chapter? Do they contradict or confirm your own?

*Discuss issues related to gender that are suggested by either of these photos.*