

**THE PROBLEM OF THE OLD MAN: MANHOOD, CLASS, AND RETIREMENT IN
THE UNITED STATES, 1910s-1950s**

by

Gregory John Wood

BS, Northern Michigan University, 1996

MA, Wayne State University, 1999

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This dissertation was presented

by

Gregory John Wood

It was defended on

February 3, 2006

and approved by

Lisa Brush, PhD, Sociology

Maurine Greenwald, PhD, History

Werner Troesken, PhD, History

Dissertation Director: Richard Oestreicher, PhD, History

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As the life cycle began to expand after 1900, "old age" became a new twentieth-century site where, like the nineteenth-century factory, working-class males struggled to define and sustain identities as "men." By studying "the problem of the old man," this dissertation revises historians' understandings of gender and class -- showing how gender, class, and aging have fundamentally intersected and, in the process, shaped the histories of work, the welfare state, and organized labor.

The first three chapters explore how the rise of mass production catalyzed "the problem of the old man" during the 1910s and 1920s, and why state pensions emerged as the principal way to uphold manhood in later life. Chapter 1 examines how mass production employers emphasized youth and speed in the workplace, making "growing old" a major source of unease about manhood. Chapter 2 addresses why many experts in social provision concluded by 1929 that only pensions from the state could uphold the masculinity of the aging male breadwinner. Chapter 3 looks at how both the state and the workers tried to find ways to uphold the economic foundations of manhood during the Great Depression, ranging from Social Security to labor organizing.

The final chapters examine the shifting class and gender politics that accompanied the rise of modern "retirement" during the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 4 discusses how expanding job opportunities, increasing incomes, and suburbanization made middle-class status a key

foundation of manhood after World War II. As a result, aging professionals displaced factory workers in "the problem of the old man" discourse. Chapter 5 examines the strategies older men used to affirm manhood after retirement. As in their "working years," retired men struggled to be youthful and "productive." Many retired men busied themselves with rigorous routines of sports, "tinkering," and yard work in order to demonstrate their manhood. During the postwar years, as the average length of life continued to expand, men embraced a contradictory definition of manhood that depended on males' ability to sustain economic success and youthful bodies -- even as their bodies aged and they faced the end of their careers due to retirement.

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Parts of chapters 1 and 3 will appear in a forthcoming article: "'Beyond the Age of Earning': Masculinity, Work, and Age Discrimination in the Automobile Industry, 1916-1939." *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*, 3:2 (Summer 2006).

1.0 INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF THE OLD MAN

In general, it appears that male members of the working class start to work from fourteen to eighteen, reach their prime in the twenties, and begin to fail in their late forties...

Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd (1929)¹

Retire and be happy.

Irving Salomon (1951)²

Throughout the twentieth century, working-class men typically faced the loss of their social and economic status as workers and breadwinners due to age -- often the result of several causes, ranging from age discrimination to ill health to voluntary retirement on a pension. Employment and breadwinner status defined working males' identities as "working-class men," and the loss of a job, as men pointed out, meant the end of manhood. Since industrial employers, for example, demanded youth and speed on new mass production assembly lines, and the majority of Americans would live longer and longer lives, "growing old" became an increasing threat to manhood. By the 1950s, most men, working-class and middle-class, would be formally retired

¹ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company 1929), 30.

² Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951).

by their employers. What would manhood mean in this period of life when men no longer worked? How could a male remain gendered as a "man" without employment and breadwinner status? Men's efforts to address "the problem of the old man" contributed to the widespread emphasis on preserving male authority and independence that shaped labor and welfare state politics during the twentieth century.³ "Growing old," as this dissertation shows, became a major source of gender crisis, and aging men struggled to import hierarchies of gender and class into the lengthening terrain of "old age." Over the course of the twentieth century, the average duration of life in the United States increased by 30 years, from 47 in 1900 to 77 in 2000.⁴ The percent of men and women over 65 has also expanded considerably: from 4.1 percent of the US population in 1900, to 12.7 percent in 1993. The number of older Americans continues to grow.⁵

The comments made by Robert S. Lynd, Helen Merrell Lynd, and Irving Salomon suggest how discussions of gender, class, and aging changed considerably between the 1920s and 1950s. During the early twentieth century, "the problem of the old man" was a discussion of older working-class men's problems with employer ageism and pension politics. Those who wrote about older working men's struggles with manhood were social reformers, progressive academics, labor-friendly politicians, and craft unionists. The Lynds, for instance, sociologists by training, warned Americans that age discrimination undermined working-class men's status as workers and breadwinners as they reached their forties and fifties, jeopardizing the foundations

³ I adopted the title of this dissertation from a 1922 article about older working-class men's problems with industry pensions. See Gorton James, "The Problem of the Old Man," *Survey*, 16 September 1921, 673. I discuss James' article at length in chapter 2.

⁴ See tables 1-3, found in chapter 1.

⁵ "The Senior Profile," *USA Today*, 20 July 1995.

of manhood. By the 1950s, however, the class politics of this discourse had shifted decidedly away from the working class, focusing on middle-class affluence as the basis of postwar manhood. Irving Salomon, a retired executive in pursuit of a new career as an advice author, cheerfully told older men to accept retirement and "be happy," presuming that most men were like him: members of an upwardly mobile post-World War II middle class who worried most about how to stay active in retirement. By the 1950s, the working class had been written out of "the problem of the old man" discourse. For the remainder of the century, middle-class status, as well as an affinity for youth and productivity, provided the basis for Americans' thinking about manhood and retirement.

My dissertation questions historians' typically ageless formulations of intersecting social categories and identities. By studying "the problem of the old man," this dissertation revises historians' understandings of gender and class -- showing how gender, class, and *aging* have fundamentally intersected and, in the process, shaped the histories of work, the welfare state, and organized labor. For example, employers' assumptions about age greatly determined which males could be "working men." Most frequently, discussions of interrelating forms of identity and social relations emphasize class, race, and gender. Since the 1960s and 1970s, historians have fruitfully illustrated how class, race, and gender function as structures of power and building blocks of identities. These power structures have, as scholars point out, limited the civil rights and economic opportunities of working people, persons of color, and women, among other social groups. However, scholars' treatment of class, race, and gender relations ignores the importance of age hierarchies as components of these social identities and relations, the ways identities and social relations change over the life course, and how aging shapes anxieties and conflicts over gender and class. Historians do not typically recognize anxieties about "growing

old" as a basic feature of gender and class identities, nor do they consider how these categories intersect with and contest the others. Citing a 1990 conference paper by Thomas Holt, Earl Lewis once described race, class, and gender as an "iron triangle" in historical scholarship. While these concepts have enriched historical knowledge, they also can, as Lewis points out, limit "the range of our imagination."⁶ This study takes historians' view of intersecting social categories and identities into another direction, highlighting gender, class, and aging as parallel and contesting identities and social relations.

⁶ See Earl Lewis, "Invoking Concepts, Problematizing Identities: The Life of Charles N. Hunter and the Implications for the Study of Gender and Labor," *Labor History*, 34:2-3 (Spring-Summer 1993), 295-296; as well as Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Protest, Resistance, and Survival in the Jim Crow South," *Labor History*, 39:2 (1998), 173; and Christopher Tomlins, "Why Wait for Industrialism? Work, Legal Culture, and the Example of Early America -- An Historiographical Argument," *Labor History*, 40:1 (1999), 7-8. During the 1990s, successful books by historians of race and labor such as Alexander Saxton, Robin DG Kelley, David R. Roediger, George Lipsitz, Tera Hunter, Amy Dru Stanley, Daniel Letwin, Rick Halpern, and Neil Foley underscored historians' serious interest in the intersections of race, gender, and class: See David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1990); Robin DG Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); idem, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994); George Lipsitz, *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packerhouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); and Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For a major study of the intersections of gender and race, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For important examinations of gender and class in labor history, see the works cited in notes 7-9, 11-12, 16-17. Scholars have urged historians to pursue other forms of identity, including age. These works, however, continue to focus on questions of class, race, and gender. For instance, see Lewis, "Invoking Concepts, Problematizing Identities, 295-296; and Gunja Sengupta, "Elites, Subalterns, and American Identities: A Case Study of African-American Benevolence," *American Historical Review*, 109:4 (October 2004), esp. 1105. Ava Baron cites age as a key category of analysis for gender and labor historians. However, Baron is predominantly interested in younger working-class men and boys: Ava Baron, "Questions of Gender: Deskilling and Demasculinization in the US Printing Industry, 1830-1915," *Gender & History*, 1:2 (Summer 1989), 180, and "An 'Other' Side of Gender Antagonism at Work: Men, Boys, and the Remasculinization of Printers' Work, 1830-1920," in *Work Engendered*. A 2004 essay, which examined young women as national symbols in *fin-de-siecle* France, also argued for discussions of age in gender history. This article, however, focuses on young women. See David M. Pomfret, "'A Muse for the Masses': Gender, Age, and Nation in France, Fin de Siecle," *American Historical Review*, 109:5 (December 2004), 1441-1442.

Specifically, this dissertation critiques identities and social categories within the historiographies on gender, labor, and manhood in the United States. By studying the intersections of aging, class, and gender, this work is intended to contribute to gender, labor, and manhood historians' broader interests in (1) the construction of gender within the contexts of work and class, organized labor, the welfare state; and (2) how men and women's responses to economic change draw upon, challenge, or reinforce ideas about gender. This study simultaneously builds on gender and labor historians' investigations into the issues of gender identity and sexual difference in working-class life, while urging scholars to explore how the expanding prevalence of "growing old" in the twentieth century, a period when youth became a building block of popular culture and managerial ideology, contributed to worries about gender in working-class life, as well as how men (and women) responded to their uncertainties about the relationships between gender and "growing old." "The Problem of the Old Man" reminds historians not only that manhood is a key theme in the study of male workers, but also that later life formed an essential twentieth-century arena where working men struggled to fabricate and preserve manhood.

The dissertation begins in the early twentieth century: As the average life expectancy began to rapidly expand after 1900, and the population of older persons in the US steadily increased, "old age" became a new twentieth-century site where, like the nineteenth-century factory, working-class males struggled to define and sustain identities as "men." During the 1920s and 1930s, men demanded state old age pensions, Social Security, and seniority clauses to protect the male breadwinner ideal in later life. These new economic foundations for manhood failed to resolve men's worries, however. As the institution of "retirement" took shape on the foundations of Social Security and pensions, men struggled to establish manhood in this

unfamiliar and unsteady terrain. Retirement signified the end of work, which had been the basis of a male's identity. To reconstruct manhood, retiring men of the 1940s and 1950s ironically embraced ideals of youth, middle-class status, productivity, and physicality. However, manhood remained precarious in retirement because aging bodies and fixed incomes did not permit all men to revel in physical activity, complete labor, or enjoy middle-class lifestyle standards that were predicated on leisure and homeownership in expanding middle-class suburbs. Finally, since aging women shared (and still share) homes, communities, and workplaces with older men, retirement never became uniquely male. Even today, in the early 2000s, despite decades of organizing, legislation, and advice, "growing old" remains a source of unease about gender.

1.1 GENDER, LABOR, AND MANHOOD

"The Problem of the Old Man" builds on the insights of numerous earlier scholars in women's history, labor and working-class history, and the history of masculinity. Women's historians first introduced the category of gender to labor history. Beginning in the 1970s, feminist labor historians challenged the centrality of male workers in the field. They showed that women had always worked in a variety of settings (paid and unpaid), organized labor unions, and struck for higher wages and better working conditions. In the process, they illustrated how women had never been confined to homes or been passive recipients of historical change. Women's historians also demonstrated how the sexual division of labor was a major component of the

social and economic changes wrought by industrialization.⁷ Before 1800, men and women typically worked together on farms and in commodity production to support their households; but throughout the 1800s, the industrial revolution divorced "work" from family, moving production to towns, cities, and factories.⁸ In addition to the marginalization of women in the market economy, women's labor historians examined the barriers to women's employment by showing how employers and male workers constructed skills and occupations as male. While women worked in textile factories and the needle trades, men predominated in manufacturing employment. Working-class women mostly worked in domestic service, clerical work, and textiles. Women's historians showed how gender *and* class (as well as race and ethnicity) defined women's experiences as workers.⁹

⁷ For introductions to the field of US women's history, see Ava Baron, "Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future," in *Work Engendered: Towards a New History of American Labor*, ed. Ava Baron (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 9-14; Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multi-Cultural Reader in US Women's History*, second edition (New York: Routledge, 1994); Jane Sherron De Hart and Linda K. Kerber, "Introduction: Gender and the New Women's History," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, fifth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-24; and Linda Gordon, "US Women's History," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 267-273. On gender as a category of analysis, see Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

⁸ For an overview of working-class women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); as well as various sections of Nancy Cott, ed., *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). On the early industrial revolution and ideas about women's work, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); and Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁹ There is a rich literature on the construction of gender and the sexual division of labor during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. See Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Maurine Greenwald and Richard Oestreicher, "Engendering US History: Rethinking Masternarratives," unpublished essay in the author's possession, 2001; SJ Kleinberg, *The Shadow of the Mills: Working-Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870-1907* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex*

The work of women's historians facilitated the study of masculinity. To understand men's opposition to feminism and women's employment, scholars looked at how males constructed gendered identities as "men." The subordination of women to male authority, in part, defined these identities. Early works by Peter Filene and Peter N. Stearns focused on the construction of a male gender role in middle-class culture, as well as men's anxieties about women's political activities and male vulnerability.¹⁰ During the 1990s, the masculinity literature expanded. These studies focused on middle-class and working-class men, and their responses to economic change. Ava Baron's *Work Engendered* (1990) was a benchmark. This collection of essays highlighted how men's responses to changing labor processes and unemployment reflected not only a politics of class, but also gendered conceptualizations of work, union, and community.¹¹ The essays showed how working-class men have historically

during World War II (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*; Stansell, *City of Women*; Dublin, *Women at Work*; Boydston, *Home and Work*; Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Nancy F. Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Angel Kwolek-Folland, "Gender, Self, and Work in the Life Insurance Industry, 1880-1930," in *Work Engendered*, 168-190; Dorothy Sue Cobble, "'Drawing the Line': The Construction of a Gendered Work Force in the Food Service Industry," in *Work Engendered*, 216-242; Patricia Cooper, "The Faces of Gender: Sex Segregation and Work Relations at Philco, 1928-1938," in *Work Engendered*, 320-350; Patricia A. Cooper, *Once A Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern American Office Work, 1900-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract*; Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1914-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; and David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

¹⁰ Peter G. Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (1978; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man! Males in Modern Society* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1979).

¹¹ Baron, ed., *Work Engendered*. *Work Engendered* was immediately preceded by Elliot Gorn's study of nineteenth-century boxing, Alice Kessler-Harris' 1989 article on male breadwinner ideology during the Great Depression, and the 1989 *Gender & History* "Formations of Masculinity" forum. See Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prizefighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender

constructed class identities that were gender-specific, as well as acted politically to uphold boundaries between men and women. Roger Horowitz's *Boys and Their Toys?* (2001) complemented *Work Engendered*. This compilation of articles focuses on how working men constructed masculinities through professionalization, the socialization of boys, and the design of technology during the early twentieth century.¹²

The most well-known works on the history of masculinity in the United States focus on middle-class men, particularly in the late-nineteenth century. To understand the roots of modern sexism, E. Anthony Rotundo, Michael Kimmel, and Gail Bederman, as well as Clifford Putney and John F. Kasson, argue that nineteenth-century middle-class men constructed ideals about manhood that have long endured: in particular, male authority in the workplace and politics, domesticity for women, and the expression of male power through physicality. Since the economy was a site of possible failure, sports and bodybuilding provided ways for men to affirm

Ideology in Historical Reconstruction: A Case Study from the 1930s," *Gender & History*, 1:1 (Spring 1989), 31-49; Cynthia Cockburn, "Introduction," *Gender & History*, 1:2 (Summer 1989), 159-163; Keith McClelland, "Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-1880," *Gender & History*, 1:2 (Summer 1989), 164-177; Baron, "Questions of Gender," 178-199; and Ella Johansson, "Beautiful Men, Fine Women and Good Work People: Gender and Skill in Northern Sweden, 1850-1950," *Gender & History*, 1:2 (Summer 1989), 200-212. For other key analyses of working-class manhood during the 1990s, see Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1914-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Alice Kessler-Harris, "Treating the Male As 'Other': Redefining the Parameters of Labor History, 34:2-3 (1993), 190-204; Lisa M. Fine, "'Our Big Factory Family': Masculinity and Paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan," *Labor History*, 34:2-3 (1993), 274-291; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Free Press, 1994); and Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*.

¹² Roger Horowitz, ed., *Boys and Their Toys? Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America* (New York: Routledge, 2001). See also Joshua R. Greenberg, "Advocating 'the Man': Masculinity, Organized Labor, and the Market Revolution in New York, 1800-1840" (PhD diss., American University, 2003); Gregory L. Kaster, "Labour's True Man: Organised Workingmen and the Language of Manliness in the USA, 1827-1877," *Gender & History*, 13:1 (April 2001), 24-64; E. Michelle Kilbourne, "Self-Made Men: The Margins of Manliness Among Northern Industrial Workers, 1850-1920" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2000); Steve Estes, "'I AM a Man!': Race, Masculinity, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike," *Labor History*, 41:2 (Spring 2000), 8-32; Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); and Brian P. Luskey, "The Marginal Men: Merchants' Clerks and Society in the Northeastern United States, 1790-1860" (PhD, diss., Emory University, 2004).

male power on their own terms. Trapped in the modern twentieth century, unable to escape to the western frontier, men used sport to test their courage and brawn.¹³ Bederman, Kristin Hoganson, and Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore highlighted the intersections of manhood and race, linking men's unease about gender to racial violence and imperialism.¹⁴

As women's labor historians and manhood historians suggest, nineteenth- and twentieth-century economic change -- especially industrial capitalism and class formation -- decisively shaped conflicts and anxieties over gender. The consequences of industrial capitalism have been central to historical analyses of manhood in the women's history literature and the masculinity literature. Historically, men's struggle to affirm manhood has been a significant response to the transformations brought by industrialization.

There are four main arguments in these various literatures which deal with working-class and middle-class manhood in the era of industrialization. First, these historians frequently describe how men battle to protect politics and the workplace as male territory: for instance, they have often opposed women's presence in factories and offices, unions, and politics.¹⁵ Second, in

¹³ Men's responses to the "closing" of the frontier during the 1890s have been a frequently discussed theme in the historiography on masculinity. For important studies of late-nineteenth century men, see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Free Press, 1993); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Gorn, *Manly Art*; Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, ed., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts*, esp. 66-94.

¹⁴ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*; Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

¹⁵ Baron, "Questions of Gender," 178-199; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*; Stansell, *City of Women*, Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, Rotundo, *American Manhood*; Milkman, *Gender at Work*; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*.

factories and offices shared by men and women, men have emphasized careful boundaries between "men's" and "women's" work. Men have frequently classified "their" jobs and skills as masculine, using gendered conceptualizations of work to marginalize and exclude women from hiring and promotion.¹⁶ Working males also used the labor movement to protect their economic and social interests as men, utilizing organization to defend their jobs as the foundation of manhood and the "manliness" of their occupations.¹⁷ This dissertation agrees with scholars who argue that men's responses to economic change reflected a predominant concern with manhood. As historians of gender and labor have argued, "class" has been very much about gender -- for men and women. Working men not only struggled with employers over their economic and social status as "workers"; more specifically, they defended their status as "working-class men."

Third, in addition to the workplace, men have utilized what might be termed "after-hours" activities -- religious organizations, sexuality, hobbies, and sports -- to shore up male power and construct distinct male identities.¹⁸ The socialization of boys into "men" is the fourth major

¹⁶ Milkman, *Gender at Work*; Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*; Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*; Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work*; Benson, *Counter Cultures*; Cooper, "Faces of Gender"; Gregory L. Kaster, "Labour's True Man: Organised Workingmen and the Language of Manliness in the USA, 1827-1877," *Gender & History*, 13:1 (April 2001), 24-64; Kevin Boyle, "The Kiss: Racial and Gender Conflict in a 1950s Automobile Factory," *Journal of American History*, 84:2 (September 1997), 496-523; Jim Rose, "'The Problem Every Supervisor Dreads': Women Workers at the US Steel Duquesne Works during World War II," *Labor History*, 36:1 (Winter 1995), 24, 40-43; Wayne A. Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony: Fraternalism as a Managerial Strategy at the Ford Motor Company," *Journal of Economic History*, 53:4 (December 1993), 824-856.

¹⁷ Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*; Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*; Stansell, *City of Women*; Greenberg, "Advocating 'The Man'"; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 56-57; Rose, "Problem Every Supervisor Dreads."

¹⁸ Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, esp. 16-17; idem, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly*, 41 (September 1989), 432-465; Kristen Haring, "The 'Freer Men' of Ham Radio: How A Technical Hobby Provided Social and Spatial Distance," *Technology and Culture*, 44:4 (October 2003), 734-761; Gorn, *Manly Art*; Timothy Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: Norton, 1992); Michael Kaplan, "New York City Tavern Violence and the Creation of a Working-Class Male Identity," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 15 (Summer 1995), 591-617; Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998);

theme in the historiography on masculinity. Nineteenth-century middle-class "boy culture" and adolescence took shape within the context of separated spheres ideals and industrialization. Male youth worked out masculine identities in the streets -- away from the parlors at home. They also mimicked their fathers' occupations, and learned the values of competition, self-mastery, and strength through fighting and sports. Boyhood prepared young males for manhood in a modern world: to thrive and succeed in the volatile adult male world of business. Historians revealed thus how boys were socialized to accept and endorse conceptualizations of men's and women's different (and unequal) social roles.¹⁹

1.2 HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

How does the study of masculinity and aging enhance, and critique, prevailing themes in the literatures on gender, labor, and manhood? This dissertation questions gender historians' conceptualizations of adulthood. Historians of manhood, for example, tend to treat adulthood

Chauncey, *Gay New York*; Putney, *Muscular Christianity*; Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan and the Perfect Man*; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Rotundo, *American Manhood*; Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony."

¹⁹ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, chs. 2-3; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 162-164; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 77-120. For additional historical analyses of the boyhood/adolescent transition to manhood in US history, see Jeffrey Ryan Suzik, "'Building Better Men': The CCC Boy and the Changing Social Ideal of Manliness," in *Boys and Their Toys? Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America*, ed. Roger Horowitz (New York: Routledge, 2001), 111-138; Ruth Oldenziel, "'Boys and Their Toys: The Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild, 1930-1968, and the Making of a Male Technical Domain,'" in *Boys and Their Toys?* 139-168; Todd Alexander Postol, "Masculine Guidance: Boys, Men, and Newspapers, 1930-1939," in *Boys and Their Toys?* 169-196; and E. Michelle Kilbourne, "Self-Made Men: The Margins of Manliness Among Northern Industrial Workers, 1850-1920" (PhD diss., Emory University, 2000). Scholars in anthropology and sociology also focus heavily on the socialization of boys. See David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts in Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); RW Connell, *The Men and the Boys* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); idem, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Michael Messner, "The Life of a Man's Seasons: Male Identity in the Life Course of the Jock," in *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, ed. Michael Kimmel (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1987), 53-67.

unproblematically, overlooking how aging bodies destabilize manhood. In addition, this study critiques manhood historians' tendency to focus on youth, especially adolescence and boyhood. The lengthening of life expectancies, coupled with the unfolding prevalence of age discrimination and increasing work paces during the early 1900s, made adulthood a very unstable portion of the life cycle. Historians of gender, labor, and manhood have not yet recognized how the contradictions between longer lives and ageism jeopardized manhood. Some medical historians and sociologists have examined how aging disrupts gender identities and structures gender inequalities. The dissertation concurs with these scholars who argue that old age has been viewed by men and women as a period of gender ambiguity. During the 1800s and 1900s, aging, especially as it implied physical decline, challenged idealized male and female body types that emphasized physical strength and youthful appearance.²⁰

Aging, as a category of analysis, broadens gender, labor, and manhood historians' conceptualizations of anxieties about manhood as an important response to economic change. During the long nineteenth century and into the twentieth, as gender historians argue, the workplace, the polling place, and the labor movement, for example, were key sites where men and women constructed and challenged gender boundaries. Scholars have frequently cited men's

²⁰ Laura Davidow Hirshbein, "The Transformation of Old Age: Expertise, Gender, and National Identity, 1900-1950" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2000); idem, "William Osler and *The Fixed Period*: Conflicting Medical and Popular Ideas About Old Age," *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 161 (24 September 2001), 2074-2078; Toni M. Calasanti and Kathleen F. Slevin, *Gender, Social Inequalities, and Aging* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001). The broader historiography on aging and the aged in the US is not primarily concerned with gender as a category of analysis. See David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience Since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); and David Van Tassel and Peter N. Stearns, eds., *Old Age in a Bureaucratic Society: The Elderly, the Experts, and the State in American History* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986). For an exception, see Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For a brief discussion of aging male bodies and "male embodiment" in masculinity studies, see Stephen M. Whitehead, *Men and Masculinities: Key Themes and New Directions* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002), 199-202.

insistence upon the intrinsically masculine qualities of their work or craft, the labor movement or religious organizations as institutions that affirmed male power and authority, or men's interest in "after-hours" activities to demonstrate manhood. This study enhances historians' analyses of working men's responses to economic shifts by showing how men demanded old age pensions, Social Security, and seniority to insulate manhood from the upheavals that accompanied industrialization.²¹ Men viewed pensions and seniority as essential ways to import gender -- specifically the male breadwinner ideal -- into the period of old age.

Retirement was a major theme in the gender and labor history of the twentieth century. Discussions of retirement should not be confined to the history of aging or the history of social provision. Beginning in the 1940s and 1950s, older men grappled with gender in retirement, when they, at least theoretically, no longer left their homes for work. Retirement became a uniquely twentieth-century arena where, like the factory or union hall, men labored to establish gender identities and boundaries.

²¹ The history of the welfare state and social provision are major components of women's and gender history, though masculinity has remained a minor component of this field: scholars such as Theda Skocpol, Ann Shola Orloff, and Linda Gordon view the welfare state as a major site where sexual difference and gender inequality have been constructed and reinforced. Scholars have also focused on race and class, illustrating how welfare programs, mothers' pensions, and Social Security slighted working-class women and women of color. Recently, some scholars have examined men and social provision. In his analyses of delinquent male breadwinners during the Progressive Era, Michael Willrich argues that welfare state scholars should consider more closely how welfare state politics policed working-class masculinity. See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); Ann Shola Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1880-1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); Linda Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1880-1945," *American Historical Review*, 97:1 (February 1992), esp. 19-22, 47-50; Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Gwendolyn Mink, *The Wages of Motherhood: Inequality in the Welfare State, 1917-1942* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 148-167; and Michael Willrich, "Home Slackers: Men, the State, and Welfare in Modern America," *Journal of American History*, 87:2 (September 2000), esp. 460-464. Other scholars choose to focus on the public-private frameworks of welfare state thought, treating gender only briefly. See Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

Finally, this dissertation emphasizes that class functions as a changing, unstable category in gender history. While gender historians have frequently written about men and women of specific classes, such as the working class or the middle class, "the problem of the old man" underlines how class politics shifted in experts' discussions of manhood. Originally, "the problem of the old man" discourse hinged on working-class men's struggles with age discrimination, mass production assembly lines, and pension shortcomings in a volatile industrial economy. But after World War II, as Americans embraced notions of a widening middle-class society, upward mobility on a broad scale, and suburban growth, "the problem of the old man's" working-class foundations gave way to a new preoccupation with the aging middle-class professional. Discussions of aging and manhood now took place within the widening of middle-class culture in the United States. Historians have not often written about shifting class politics within gender discourses.

1.3 THE CHAPTERS

The first three chapters explore how the rise of mass production instigated "the problem of the old man" during the 1910s and 1920s, and how state pensions emerged as the principal way to resolve men's anxieties about manhood in later life. Chapter 1 examines how the rise of mass production put a premium on youth and speed in the workplace during the early twentieth century, making "growing old" a major source of anxiety about manhood. In the auto and steel industries, two prominent industries where mass production most firmly took hold, assembly line speeds, the use of new machinery, hiring age limits, and arbitrary dismissals due to age undermined older men's ties to employment and male breadwinner ideals. Many important

observers of industry -- including leading members of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL), and the US Department of Labor, as well as new organizations such as the Anti-Age Limit League and the Anti-Forty-Five-Year Age Limit League -- acknowledged that "growing old" jeopardized working-class men's status as workers and breadwinners.

Chapter 2 addresses why state pensions became the most popular solution to "the problem of the old man." During the 1920s, many experts in social provision and craft unionists concluded that only pensions from the state could uphold the masculinity of the aging male breadwinner. Working men, experts argued, could not depend on accumulating savings for old age, due to employers' disregard for older men. Other possible solutions were not acceptable; they undermined or questioned manhood. Aging men disliked institutionalization and relying on children because these support systems failed to sustain independent households headed by a male breadwinner. In addition, pensions from industry would not suffice since so few employers offered them. Working men and experts viewed state pensions as just and deserved rewards for older workers after a lifetime of work. Before the 1930s, experts and workers had already concluded that only pensions from the state could maintain manhood in later life.

Chapter 3 begins by exploring how the struggling older working-class man, confronting worsening ageism and assembly line speedups, underpinned the popular image of "the forgotten man" during the Great Depression. "The problem of the old man" worsened during the 1930s. Employers continued to discriminate against older men, and the speed of work paces continually increased. As a result, widespread concerns for men's need for steady economic support in later life contributed to the passing of the Social Security Act in 1935. Pensions, however, were only one of several ways that older men tried to shore up the economic foundations of manhood. The

shortcomings of state pensions and Social Security (the federal government did not send out the first checks until 1940) contributed to older men's interest in organization -- especially the Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO), Townsend Clubs, and Forty Plus Clubs -- to demand greater access to jobs and pensions. Moreover, older men explored better nutrition, private savings schemes, and health advice to strengthen their bodies, bolster their assets, and sustain their ability to work.

The final chapters examine men's worries surrounding the rise of modern retirement during the 1940s and 1950s. On the foundations of Social Security and an expanding system of workplace pensions, postwar Americans established a formal process for retiring older men. Companies wanted to rationalize the process of creating room for "new blood" (young men) in their firms. Around the age of sixty-five, more and more men were retired from their full-time jobs by their employers. The fourth and fifth chapters explore two questions that troubled men: First, should a man retire at all since work was so fundamental to his identity? Second, once a man retired, how could he remain manly without work? During the late 1940s and 1950s, when mass culture reflected a strong middle-class orientation, experts envisioned the typical older worker as an aging professional or executive. Chapter 4 explores how a postwar middle-class cultural orientation and burgeoning American nationalism during the early Cold War contributed to postwar men's anxieties about retirement. American culture celebrated men who could successfully work and acquire the accoutrements of middle-class suburban living, as well as work towards economic success of the American nation. Chapter 5 examines the strategies older men used to reconstruct manhood once they had been retired. In retirement, as in their "working years," aging men struggled to refashion masculinity around ideals of youth and productivity, as well as comfortable middle-class suburban lifestyles. Retired men tried to busy themselves with

rigorous routines of leisure, hobbies, sports, and part-time employment, ideally in suburban homes and communities. As a result of these standards, however, that emphasized physical ability and upper-class status, the idea of retirement became an uneasy site for the preservation of manhood.

Throughout the twentieth century, men's anxieties about aging greatly contributed to their worries about the boundaries between the masculine and the feminine. The post-World War II gendering of retirement was unstable. Popular culture continues to favor youth over age, just as men and women continue to live longer than previous generations. And an ongoing emphasis on middle-class culture, especially the celebration of affluence and upward mobility, defines social standards that pensions, savings, and Social Security benefits cannot, for many Americans, sufficiently provide or sustain. Moreover, retirement and old age were never entirely male terrain, despite experts' insistence that retiring was a process that applied specifically to men. Both men and women aged; they shared the life cycle stage of old age, as well as the homes and communities in which they lived. Finally, the gendered relationship between work and retirement changed over the twentieth century. The expansion of women's employment over longer periods of time complicated the earlier idea that men were the only ones who retired. Since the 1960s, more and more women have retired from long careers, collecting Social Security and pensions. During the early 2000s, in response to the continuing gender ambiguities of aging, older men began to embrace new forms of physical culture as a way to re-assert manhood.

When they interviewed aging working-class men and women for *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (1929), Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd heard numerous remarks

concerning the uneasy relationship between "growing old" and men's ties to the workplace.²² As males aged in factories that favored young workers, they worried about how they could sustain identities as "men." The first chapter begins in the early 1900s, when industrial managers reorganized work around youth and speed.

²² Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 34-35.

2.0 CHAPTER 1: MANHOOD, WORK, AND "GROWING OLD" DURING THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

*Laid off. Age 60. 8 years in plant. "Change in process."
Discharged. Age 53. 10 years in plant. "Unreliable."
Laid off. Age 50. 5 years in plant. "Reduction in force."
Discharged. Age 49. 15 years in plant. "Careless."
Laid off. Age 43. 12 years in plant. "Slow."
Dropped. Age 41. 3 years in plant. "Physically unadapted."*

And so on. It apparently takes ten years to find that one man is "unreliable," and fifteen years to find that another is "careless." Both answers undoubtedly hide the real reason -- "too old."

Stuart Chase (1929)²³

During the 1920s, Stuart Chase worried that "growing old" undermined men's reliance on factory employment for their livelihood and social status. He implied that industrial managers denied older men their manhood by hiring only young workers. Chase cited William M. Leiserson's examinations of discharge records at a major industrial firm in the Midwest where for two years "not a single permanent employee over 45 was hired." The documents suggested that managers invented several excuses to fire older men. Chase reminded men that "growing old" did not mean a quiet retirement to the rocking chair, surrounded by adoring grandchildren and generous

²³ Stuart Chase, "Laid Off at Forty," *Harpers Magazine*, August 1929, 341.

pension checks. Masculinity, which depended on the economic authority and social status men gained through work, became precarious because of, as Stuart Chase put it, "the apparently increasing difficulty with which men over forty retain their jobs, and the even greater difficulty with which they find a new job once they have lost an old one."²⁴ Chase, among others, worried particularly about "growing old" as a source of male anxiety, although other sources existed during the early twentieth century: the recent "closing" of the western frontier, women's suffrage activism, the Nineteenth Amendment, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, the prominence of women in factories, offices, movies, and stores, the visibility of "flappers" in the media, and concerns about the effeminizing effects of "civilization."²⁵

Productive work, functional bodies, and male breadwinner ideals were prerequisites for manhood during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the transition to mass production made "growing old" a significant impediment to men's long-term employment.

²⁴ Chase, "Laid Off at Forty," 340.

²⁵ Michael Kimmel, "The Contemporary 'Crisis' of Masculinity in Historical Perspective," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 138; Karen Manners Smith, "New Paths to Power, 1890-1920," in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy Cott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 374-412; Sarah Jane Deutsch, "From Ballots to Breadlines, 1920-1940," in *No Small Courage*, 413-446; William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Joanne Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Female Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Elizabeth Faue, *Writing the Wrongs: Eva Valesh and the Rise of Labor Journalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980); Sharon Hartman Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter: Gender, Class, and the Origins of Modern Office Work* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Dana Frank, *Purchasing Power: Consumer Organizing, Gender, and the Seattle Labor Movement, 1919-1929* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Employers valued youth and speed; young men could be paid less, and their agile bodies allowed them to work longer hours at physical tasks. Age discrimination became rampant in mass production industry. Employers instituted hiring age limits, layoffs, and firings of older men in the name of "productivity" and "efficiency." When an employer pronounced that a man was "too old," as Stuart Chase argued, it meant that manhood was in jeopardy.

2.1 MANHOOD, YOUTH, AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

Beginning in the early nineteenth century, dominant ideals about working-class manhood hinged on productive work, the male breadwinner ideal, the notion of a family wage, functional bodies, and the power they gave males within the home and the public.²⁶ The "heroic artisan" of the United States and the "representative artisan" of England, for instance, celebrated physical ability, "honest" toil, and the ability to independently provide for a household. With his sleeves rolled up and an apron around his waist, the adult working man shouldered a hammer and carved out his masculinity in the market and the workplace.²⁷ Labor icons in the nineteenth century

²⁶ John Tosh, "What Should Historians Do With Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain," *History Workshop*, 38 (Autumn 1994), 185-186; Martha May, "The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: The Ford Motor Company and the Five Dollar Day," *Feminist Studies*, 8:2 (Summer 1982), 400-403; Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 51-53; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 28-29; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 168-169; Maurine Greenwald, "Working-Class Feminism and the Family Wage Ideal: The Seattle Debate on Married Women's Right to Work, 1914-1920," *Journal of American History*, 76:1 (June 1989), 121; Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Laura Davidow Hirshbein, "William Osler and *The Fixed Period*: Conflicting Medical and Popular Ideas About Old Age," *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 161 (24 September 2001), 2075; on the social and cultural construction of gender and masculinity, see Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 7; and Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 42-45.

²⁷ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 28-33, 144; Melissa Dabakis, "Douglas Tilden's Mechanics Fountain: Labor and the 'Crisis of Masculinity' in the 1890s," *American Quarterly*, 47:2 (June 1995), 204-235; Keith

pointed to these themes, such as the mighty arm-and-hammer symbol adopted by the General Trades Union of New York City in 1836.²⁸ The ability to complete gainful labor -- either as a wage earner, or more ideally as an independent proprietor -- became an overriding prerequisite for masculinity. As the Detroit branch of the Greenback Labor Party noted in a broad 1881 definition of the working man: "By 'workingmen' our organization means every man, who by his own legitimate and honest industry, provides for himself and his family."²⁹ Through work and breadwinning, males constructed gendered identities as "men."

Even in the early nineteenth century, men recognized aging as a threat to manhood. They understood that an older body could endanger a male's ability to work and earn. An aging man might retain some status as a font of wisdom during the 1800s, but this was not necessarily enough to remain a "man."³⁰ This depended on the ability of his body to complete labor. Men sometimes discussed how aging imperiled their economic stability and personal independence. In the 1840s, men in the shoe industry feared that limited job prospects and low wages denied them a "competence" (enough money for economic stability in old age). A struggling older shoe cutter committed suicide in 1848, dramatically underscoring how aging could menace manhood.

McClelland, "Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-1880," *Gender & History*, 1:2 (Summer 1989), 164-177; idem, "Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-1880," in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London: Routledge, 1991), 74.

²⁸ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), photo insert 14. On antebellum working-class manhood, see Joshua R. Greenberg, "Advocating 'the Man': Masculinity, Organized Labor, and the Market Revolution in New York, 1800-1840" (PhD diss., American University, 2003); and Brian P. Luskey, "The Marginal Men: Merchants' Clerks and Society in the Northeastern United States, 1790-1860" (PhD, diss., Emory University, 2004).

²⁹ Richard Oestreicher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 133.

³⁰ On older men and women as sources of wisdom in the early nineteenth century, see Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, ch. 1.

"As I grow old, and my health fails, and I find myself less able to provide for myself and live as I want to, and not be dependent on others," the man wrote in his suicide note, "I take the method you will find when it happens."³¹ An ironworker remarked in 1875 that boilers were "old" at forty because of "declining strength."³² Because of the demanding work, especially constant exposure to intense heat, it was difficult to work in the mills for so many years. In 1884, workers at International Harvester in Chicago petitioned Cyrus H. McCormick about a superintendent who targeted older men for dismissal. "It only pains us to relate to you," workers wrote, "that a good many of our old hands is not here this season and if Mr. Evans is kept another season a good many more will leave."³³

In addition to the important relationship between masculinity and work, ideals about manhood became increasingly oriented around overtly young bodies. By the late-nineteenth century, men worried about strength and longevity, as they believed "civilization" and modernity rendered them economically, socially, and physically vulnerable. As more and more men lived in crowded cities and worked in sedentary office jobs or exhausting factories, they agonized over the erosion of their bodies due to abuse and disuse. By 1900, men invested heavily in new ways to strengthen their bodies and protect their health. In advice books and advertisements, experts urged men to exercise, drink elixirs, engage in outdoor activities, and surgically "rejuvenate"

³¹ See Paul Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution: Lynn Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 172-173, 116; Bruce Laurie, *Artisans Into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 57; and Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 76.

³² "The Boiler," *National Labor Tribune*, 18 January 1875, 2.

³³ Quoted in Herbert G. Gutman, "Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919," *American Historical Review*, 78:3 (June 1973), 564-565.

their glands in order to stay virile, strong, and young.³⁴ This emphasis on sustaining robust health suggested that youth was a basic component of masculinity. In contrast, "growing old" evoked worries about physical decline and the loss of manhood. Experts condemned the aging male's supposedly declining physical and mental capabilities. Upon his own retirement, William Osler (a professor in the Johns Hopkins University medical school) stated in 1905 that men over forty no longer ranked among the productive elements of society.³⁵ Men cherished what young bodies could accomplish; when men's bodies aged, masculinity became more difficult to demonstrate. An aging Ernest Hemingway, struggling with cancer and depression, understood this too well. Just before his suicide in 1961, Hemingway mourned: "What does a man care about? Staying healthy. Working good . . . I haven't any of them."³⁶

Men in the United States and Great Britain celebrated young bodies and their physicality through sport. As the industrial revolution robbed men of their masculine vigor, working-class and middle-class men embraced sport to get it back. Men flocked to prizefights and football games to celebrate manliness and male bodies. Successful boxers, football players, and wrestlers embodied the manly virtues of competition, strength, and fair play. When the famous prizefighters Jack Johnson (a black man) and Jim Jeffries (a white man) squared off in a racially charged bout in 1910, white men's admiration of Jeffries and black men's praise of Johnson collectively affirmed how the fighters' size, strength, and athleticism represented the highest forms of manhood. Jeffries also used the fight to prove he was still a *young* man, coming out of

³⁴ Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, ch. 1; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 175-184; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 186-193, 223-224; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 127-131; Hirshbein, "Transformation of Old Age," 128-166.

³⁵ Hirshbein, "Transformation of Old Age," 40-43; idem, "William Osler," 2074-2075.

³⁶ Quoted in Betty Friedan, *The Fountain of Age* (New York: Touchstone, 1993), 225.

retirement to challenge Johnson. Body builders were other manly models; they personified the male body's potential. Eugene Sandow, a weightlifter who toured the US and Europe and published numerous photos of his physique, successfully marketed himself as the finest specimen of physical culture. Sandow excited audiences with his strength and his body. He possessed massive arms and a chiseled back; there were no sagging chins, flabby arms, or skinny legs on his finely tooled frame. Sandow was "the perfect man," as John F. Kasson points out.³⁷

During the interwar period, the ideal male body was younger than ever. In addition to the boxing ring and the gridiron, the movies became a new site where men and women could revel in young male bodies. In 1920s cinema, Douglas Fairbanks and Rudolph Valentino embodied manliness with their youth and physicality. Valentino exuded a macho sexuality and robust physical presence. Audiences reveled in Fairbanks' handsome looks and "vibrancy."³⁸ During the 1920s and 1930s, labor iconography showed how union men continued to envision the ideal militant worker as a young man. In the *Detroit Labor News*, a publication of the Detroit Federation of Labor, illustrations from the 1920s most frequently depicted brawny (and younger) laboring men, battling against Communist unionism, low wages, and yellow dog contracts.³⁹ Working-class men of the 1930s celebrated their manhood through class struggle and

³⁷ Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win*, 58-79; Frederic Cople Jaher, "White America Views Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and Muhammad Ali," in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Donald Spivey (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 155-157; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 137-141; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 225, 242-244; Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 114; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 1-5, 15; Putney, *Muscular Christianity*; Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*; Matthew Lindaman, "Wrestling's Hold on the Western World before the Great War," *Historian*, 62:4 (Summer 2000), 779-797.

³⁸ Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper: American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 92-93.

³⁹ Gregory Wood, "'The Paralysis of the Labor Movement': Men, Masculinity, and Unions in 1920s Detroit," *Michigan Historical Review*, 30:1 (Spring 2004), 78, 81.

unionization. To build strong unions and protect their jobs, unionists in Minneapolis, for example, implied that young male bodies would lead the charge. Labor publications celebrated the muscular young man in cartoons. Armed with his youth, the working man wrenched social justice from his employer.⁴⁰

Just as popular culture celebrated youth, so did employers. Beginning in the early 1900s, industrial employers deliberately reorganized work around youth and speed. Mass production required the fastest, most efficient production techniques and younger workers who could keep up with the heightened pace. The cachet of youth and speed began among management and filtered down to the shopfloor. At US Steel, Andrew Carnegie described his managers as "Young Geniuses." He believed that young college-educated men brought dynamism and energy to a rapidly changing business environment. They did not have the biases toward "old ways," as well as the supposed lethargy of older executives. Managers at US Steel banished aging executives from their ranks. When executives aged and became supposedly less effective, they were simply released from their employment.⁴¹ This attitude towards older ages extended down to the lowest ranks of the industrial workforce. Foremen and managers on the shopfloor, obsessed with efficiency themselves, consistently preferred younger men.

The prominence of youth in the factory accompanied the rise of mass production. Working men faced new conditions at work throughout the late 1800s and the early 1900s. During the nineteenth century most factories were small, and workers and bosses often labored in close proximity to one another. By 1900, however, the situation had changed. Workplaces

⁴⁰ Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 70, 75-76, 80-81, 85, 93.

⁴¹ David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (1960; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 25.

had become increasingly hierarchical and large.⁴² As market competition intensified, managers maximized efficiency, striving for greater profits. They emphasized low labor costs and control over production, and skilled workers stood in the way of managers' interest in rationalization. Managers wanted to end their dependence on skilled workers' knowledge in building products such as cars or steel, pursuing ways to undermine what David Montgomery has described as "workers' control." In meatpacking, employers used the assembly line and subdivided tasks to gain control over production. In steel, Bessemer Converters allowed manufacturers to undermine puddlers' expertise. In the auto industry, assembly lines and mechanized tools helped employers undermine skilled workers' autonomy. As mechanization became common, workers' influence in the factory waned.⁴³ Managers took control, and many older men lost the security

⁴² Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); Brody, *Steelworkers*; Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*; Nikki Mandell, *The Corporation as Family: The Gendering of Corporate Welfare, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Jonathan Rees, "Managing the Mills: Labor Policy in the American Steel Industry, 1892-1937" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1997).

⁴³ Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906; New York: Bantam Books, 1981), esp. 32-40; James R. Barrett, *Work and Community in the Jungle: Chicago's Packinghouse Workers, 1894-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); John Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (1910; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989); Brody, *Steelworkers*; Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*; idem, *Workers' Control*; Mortler W. LaFever, "Workers, Machinery, and Production in the Automobile Industry," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1924, 1-26; Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Steve Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); Joyce Shaw Peterson, *American Automobile Workers, 1900-1933* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Thomas Klug, "The Roots of the Open Shop: Employers, Trade Unions, and Craft Labor Markets in Detroit, 1859-1907" (PhD diss., Wayne State University, 1993); David Gartman, *Auto Slavery: The Labor Process in the American Automobile Industry, 1897-1950* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Steve Babson, *Building the Union: Skilled Workers and Anglo-Gaelic Immigrants in the Rise of the UAW* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Wayne A. Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony: Fraternalism as a Managerial Strategy at the Ford Motor Company," *Journal of Economic History*, 53:4 (December 1993), 824-856; Robert Asher and Ronald Edsforth, eds., with the assistance of Stephen Merlino, *Autowork* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

they might have wielded earlier. By using unskilled labor, manufacturers cut back the employment of experienced men, who usually earned higher wages. In the 1920s, a study conducted at the Ford Motor Company reported that "most [jobs] could be satisfactorily filled by women or older children."⁴⁴

Uneasiness about the vulnerability of manhood fueled experts and unionists' critiques of mass production and scientific management. Experts and workers pointed to numerous factors that weakened working-class manhood: the loss of skilled positions and the eroding status of skilled workers, erratic wages, the decline of organized labor, increasing work paces, and the persistence and severity of unemployment cycles and recessions. Due to their inconsistent employment and limited earnings, unskilled working-class men often relied on their children for financial contributions to the household in the 1800s and early 1900s. And in addition to taking in boarders, more and more wives pursued employment in stores, factories, and offices.⁴⁵ Unskilled men -- married and unmarried -- struggled to work steadily. During the interwar period, the temporary nature of work often appeared in working-class fiction. In Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1935), layoffs pushed Larry Donovan from job to job throughout the 1910s, 1920s, and early 1930s: he worked in a rail yard, did turns in a steel mill, tolerated the smell in a rubber factory, and labored as an assembly line worker in the auto industry. Thomas Bell, in *Out of This Furnace* (1940), illustrated how steelworkers and their families experienced lengthy and frequent bouts of unemployment in the early twentieth century.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony," 831.

⁴⁵ Smith, "New Paths to Power," 377; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 52-54; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 22, 31, 124-125.

⁴⁶ Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited: A Novel of the 1930s* (1933; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991); Thomas Bell, *Out of this Furnace* (1941; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976). For additional

For older working-class men, the difficulties that accompanied unemployment were even more acute because of the ways that industry made aging in particular a problem. With employers' systematized preferences for younger workers and high production speeds, older men found themselves in a vulnerable situation. Unpredictable wage rates, workplace accidents, sickness, the lack of seniority, the weakness of unions, and frequent bouts with unemployment hindered the ability of the aging working man to build a stable future. As the pension advocate Abraham Epstein noted in 1922, "[T]he great mass of wage earners in this country lead continuously a precarious and hand-to-mouth existence."⁴⁷ Older men, experts feared, were destined for what Samuel Gompers described in 1911 as "the scrap heap."⁴⁸ Observers worried that if rationalization symbolized the present and the future of industry, then the future held no place for aging working men.

During the 1910s and 1920s, working men confronted a glaring contradiction: they wanted to remain working male breadwinners across a lengthening life span, but employers were shortening the number of years they could work. Men lived longer than ever in the twentieth century, while at the same time employers' ideal worker became a young man. In 1900, the average American lived 47 years. By 1920, the average life span was 54 years. Ten years later,

discussions of Conroy and Bell's work, see Douglas Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America: Jack Conroy and the Tradition of Midwestern Literary Radicalism, 1898-1990* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Laura Hapke, *Labor's Text: The Worker in American Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 223-224, 226-227, 230. On mobile workers, see Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

⁴⁷ Abraham Epstein, *Facing Old Age: A Study of Old Age Dependency in the United States and Old Age Pensions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 142.

⁴⁸ *American Federationist*, April 1911, quoted in Samuel Gompers, *Labor and the Employer* (New York: EP Dutton & Company, 1920), 142.

life expectancy had risen to 59 (Table 1). Work became far more uncertain in later life. "While life has been lengthened," AO Wharton, president of the International Association of Machinists (IAM), lamented in 1929, "it has not been matched by a proportionate increase in the working period."⁴⁹ The mass production work experience, especially in steel and auto manufacturing, underscored how "growing old" jeopardized manhood.

Table 1. Average Life Expectancy in the US, 1900-2000

Year	Number of years
1900	47
1920	54
1940	63
1960	70
1980	74
1990	75
2000	77

* 30-year increase since 1900.

* Averages include men and women.

* Numbers are rounded.

Sources: US Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1975), 55; National Center for Health Statistics, *Health, United States, 2004, with Chart Book on Trends in the Health of Americans* (Hyattsville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, 2004), available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/04trend.pdf#027](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/04trend.pdf#027).

Table 2. Men: Average Life Expectancy in the US, 1900-2000

Year	Number of Years
1900	46

⁴⁹ AO Wharton, "Age Limits for Industrial Workers -- Then What?" *American Federationist*, July 1929, 807.

1950	66
1960	67
1970	67
1980	70
1990	72
2000	74

* 28-year increase since 1900.

* Numbers are rounded.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *Health, United States, 2004, with Chart Book on Trends in the Health of Americans* (Hyattsville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, 2004), available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/04trend.pdf#027>.

Table 3. Women: Average Life Expectancy in the US, 1900-2000

Year	Number of Years
1900	48
1950	71
1960	73
1970	75
1980	77
1990	79
2000	80

* 32-year increase since 1900.

* Numbers are rounded.

Source: National Center for Health Statistics, *Health, United States, 2004, with Chart Book on Trends in the Health of Americans* (Hyattsville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, 2004), available at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/04trend.pdf#027>.

2.2 MASS PRODUCTION WORK AND THE OLDER MAN

Obsessed with efficiency, employers in autos and steel, among other industries, accelerated work paces with assembly lines and new machine tools. "The motto of life in America in our twentieth century would seem to be: Speed -- more speed -- top speed," magazine writer EK Parkinson noted in 1922. "For speed is impressed and drilled into our youth."⁵⁰ Despite Frederick Winslow Taylor's celebrated philosophy of "scientific management," which emphasized how technology could ease workers' burdens, industrial work still required heavy lifting and a range of movement. For men past forty, whose bodies could be slower and weaker, labor became a burden. Mass production and rationalization wore down men's physical abilities, making it difficult to remain steadily employed in industrial occupations. As Abraham Epstein summarized in 1928: "With the introduction of new machinery, skill and experience are no longer of importance. Each new invention and the introduction of each new machine diminishes the value of the old mechanics' experience and renders it worthless. Only the young, the adaptable, and the supple of limb are desired."⁵¹ Since mass production emphasized youth and speed as core production and managerial values, the entire industrial system functioned (whether managers intended so or not) as a form of age discrimination.

Over time, fast work paces and heavy labor wore down men's physical capacities. As men aged and developed heart, kidney, and lung conditions (the "silent sickness," according to one doctor), their ability to sustain manly bodies became more uncertain.⁵² Older men struggled

⁵⁰ EK Parkinson, "After Fifty -- What?" *Outlook*, 13 September 1922, 62.

⁵¹ Abraham Epstein, "You After Forty," *Forum*, February 1928, 267-268.

⁵² "The Problem of Middle Age in Industry," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1930, 541.

with physical limitations. The physical nature of mass production labor exacerbated health troubles and created new ones. Employers often accelerated the pace of work, while continuing to require lifting and a wide range of physical movements.

The steel and auto industries figured most prominently in observers' discussions of aging and mass production. By 1910, Progressive reformer John Fitch concluded that men could barely keep up. In Pittsburgh's finishing mills, employers cherished speed. In *The Steel Workers* (1910), Fitch described a situation where he

watched the heater's helper before the furnace, pulling out billet after billet and throwing them along the steel floor to the "rougher." Dressed only in trousers and a flannel shirt with sleeves cut off at the shoulder, the sweat was pouring from his body and his muscles stood out in knots. The rougher was leaping at his work, thrusting the red billets almost in a stream through the first pair of rolls, and yet before he could turn back there was always another billet on the floor behind him . . . they went at an ever increasing speed and with ever increasing strength...

He argued that only strong, young men could work there: "They are the younger men who work at these mills. Here is where agility is at a premium and where a false step may possibly mean death, there is no room for the man whose joints are stiff or whose eye is not keen."⁵³

Fitch also argued that mass production made men age more quickly. He asserted that steel labor made men "old" at forty. Long hours in an intense work environment led to rapid physical decline. Men struggled with fatigue, burns, stooped backs, seared eyes, and sullen demeanors. "Often I was told by workmen of forty and forty-five," Fitch noted, "that they had been at their best at thirty years of age, and that at thirty-five they had begun to feel a perceptible

⁵³ John Fitch, *The Steel Workers* (1910; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 51.

decline in strength."⁵⁴ Other workers and authors agreed. "After a man passed thirty, he plodded like the oldest, shoulders slumped, legs heavy, bloodshot eyes burning in a blackened face," novelist Thomas Bell wrote.⁵⁵ In Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1935), a steel mill manager tells Bun Grady, a struggling older man, "A man has to be spry, and it takes a young man to stand the gaff."⁵⁶ In addition, mistakes meant disability or death, since fire and metal -- the tools of the trade -- tore through skin, bones, and organs.

Dangerous working conditions made it difficult to remain employed over time. While older working-class men tried to be casual and nonchalant about their problems, they acknowledged that labor wore heavily on their bodies. An aging man who worked on a Bessemer converter in a Pittsburgh mill ("one of the oldest men in his mill") told John Fitch "his strength is not up to what it was, say, fifteen years ago." The man had a history of terrible injuries: eye injuries, a shattered leg, and severe burns. But he kept a stiff upper lip, taking pride in his ability to hang on to his job. These injuries were "trifles," the man argued. Given the danger they faced on a daily basis, it was rare for men to remain employed for so long. Many lost their jobs, quit, or died. Fitch pointed out that "The men who went to work with him as young men are nearly all dead."⁵⁷

By the late 1910s and 1920s, local unions of the Amalgamated Association (AA) spoke openly about their worries regarding the ways aging injured their attractiveness to employers.

⁵⁴ Fitch, *Steel Workers*, 183.

⁵⁵ John Fitch, "Old Age at Forty," *American Magazine*, March 1911, 655-664; Bell, *Out of this Furnace*, 167.

⁵⁶ Conroy, *Disinherited*, 137; Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America*, 130.

⁵⁷ Fitch, *Steel Workers*, 12-13.

Steelworker H. Dewees wrote to the *Amalgamated Journal* in 1918: ". . . you will find the workman at his place of toil every day and makes no complaint so long as he gets a fair day's wages for his toil and a chance to lay by a little for such a time as he will not, be able to toil as hard as he does today, for as he becomes older his ability to toil becomes less." He continued, "and then comes to the time when the employer will show his hand. We have seen it time and time again. If you can't do it, I [management] will get some one who will, so out you go."⁵⁸ Hugo the Third, an aging steelworker in West Virginia noted simply in 1918, "Today men that work dread the thoughts of getting old."⁵⁹ In 1924, Hugo visited AA members in Wisconsin. After meeting with men there, he published a poem that spoke to older men throughout the steel industry: "There is a man now old and slow/Whose aching heart is filled with woe/The foreman said: 'He'll have to go'/No longer can he hit the ball/He's out of luck in spring or fall/He sadly waits the final call."⁶⁰

The acceleration of line speeds to meet high production goals (called speedups) exacerbated older men's health troubles. "You've got to work like hell at Fords," a working man noted in 1926. "You can't let up . . . You've got to get out production and if you can't get it out, you get out."⁶¹ The acceleration of line speeds to meet high production goals exacerbated older men's health troubles. John Szymanski, who worked at the Auto-Lite factory in Toledo, Ohio, remembered: "I found that my sympathy always went out to my fellow worker, especially if I

⁵⁸ H. Dewees, Report of Girard Lodge No. 95, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 31 October 1918, 10. For background on the AA, see Paul Krause, *The Battle for Homestead, 1880-1892: Politics, Culture, and Steel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

⁵⁹ Hugo the Third, Report of Crescent Lodge No. 8, WV, *Amalgamated Journal*, 14 November 1918, 19.

⁶⁰ "The Speed Merchant," *Amalgamated Journal*, 11 December 1924, 11.

⁶¹ Addington, "Reds at the Rouge," 9; Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony," 850-851.

was working with an older person." During 1929, he and an older man assembled starter frames. The pace of work was intense. "Why, you were bouncing around like a rubber ball," Szymanski recalled. "And this guy's doing the same thing." The pace took its toll on the aging man. During a break one day the man tried to eat his lunch, but muscle spasms made it too difficult to sit. Szymanski told interviewers, "You felt sorry for these people." If the older man could not work, he would be fired. At Packard, Robert Cruden met an aging body polisher, Frenchie. The speedups plagued all of the workers, but Frenchie in particular could not complete his work. The intense pace worsened his chronic stomach pain. When Cruden asked Frenchie why he stayed, the aging man said he *had* to work. The man believed he would not find another job.⁶²

2.3 EXPERTS AND THE AGE PROBLEM

Prominent unionists, scholars, and politicians of the late 1920s readily acknowledged the uneasy relationships between "growing old" and working-class manhood. The onslaught of scientific management and technological change, they argued, undermined older working men's ties to the factory. Assembly lines, technological change, and speedups hindered older men's ability to work. During 1928 and 1929, several major books and essays condemned managers' demands for high production speeds and young workers: Secretary of Labor James J. Davis' *Monthly Labor Review* essay on "'Old Age' at 50" (1928); Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynds'

⁶² Korth and Beegle, *I Remember Like Today*, 49-50; Cruden, "No Loitering," 697; idem, "Ask the Man Who Works There," 3; "The Auto Industry and its Workers," *Labor Age*, April 1929, 3. See also "Same Vicious Speed-up System," *Auto Workers News*, August 1927, 2; "Human Scrap Pile Grows," *Auto Workers News*, July 1929, 3; and Steve Nelson, James R. Barrett, and Rob Ruck, *Steve Nelson: American Radical* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1981), 30; "The Auto Industry and its Workers," *Labor Age*, April 1929, 3.

Middletown: A Study in American Culture (1929); and the *American Federationist* symposium on "The Older Worker" (1929).⁶³ They all noticed a troubling problem in working men's lives: In the factory, "growing old" contributed to the end of manhood.

James J. Davis (himself a former ironworker) noted the contradiction between "improved" production techniques and managers' affections for young workers. At his desk in Washington, DC, Davis read letters from older working men, urging him to do something about ageism.⁶⁴ Since machinery could do the "work," Davis argued that employers should embrace older men. "With the infinite number of our industrial operations coming to be done by machinery ever more automatic and easier for human hands to run, the reasons for firing the older workers fade to almost nothing," Davis asserted. "Where machines do so much and the worker so little, the worker of 60 becomes as able as the one of 20." More importantly, aging working men lacked the recklessness of younger men; they remained at their jobs -- rather than hire in, work for a while, and move on.⁶⁵ Ageism biased employers' thinking against the merits of older men. Davis wrote, "Now we hear and more and more of the worker whose employer is willing to release him [the older man], whatever his skill and value, for no other cause than that he has reached an age beyond which it is thought he is, or will be, useless."⁶⁶ While James J.

⁶³ Abraham Epstein's 1928 book, *The Challenge of the Aged*, could be included here. See Abraham Epstein, *The Challenge of the Aged*, with an introduction by Jane Addams (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928). However, I discuss these works because they focused specifically on men's troubles with mass production technologies. Epstein did not study the shopfloor per se. Epstein's *Challenge of the Aged* is discussed at length in chapter 2.

⁶⁴ Davis refers to these letters in "Why Should Workers Be Fired at 50?" *Detroit Labor News*, 31 August 1928, 9.

⁶⁵ Davis, "'Old Age' at Fifty," 1097, 1098-1099; "Evils of Age Limitation," *Wall Street Journal*, 25 June 1928, 13.

⁶⁶ James J. Davis, "'Old Age' at Fifty," *Monthly Labor Review*, June 1928, 1095, 1099-1100.

Davis overlooked how new technologies actually intensified factory work, he brought greater attention to managers' biases against older workers.

Following Davis' lead, the American Federation of Labor helped make aging men's struggles a national issue. In its 1929 symposium on "The Older Worker," Federation unions reported on new technologies and older men. James Maloney, president of the Glass Bottle Blowers Association, argued that new machines displaced aging men. He discussed the glass blowing craft's proud tradition, noting that his organization began in 1846. During the 1800s, skilled men made glass by hand; skill was essential. Then, Maloney argued, age discrimination never occurred: "As far as our information goes there never was any discrimination on the part of employers . . . there was no age limit beyond which men could find employment."⁶⁷ Production techniques changed with the Owens Automatic Bottle Machine in 1905. By 1906, there were 5 machines in operation, producing "95 to 105 gross of beer bottles" each day. The machines "eliminated the skilled bottle blower until today there are very few of the old skilled craftsmen who can find employment in the trade to which they gave the best years of their lives."⁶⁸ Bottle production became mass production.

During the 1920s, technical consultants told textile employers to install new machines and hire younger bodies. As prices for textiles dropped during the New Era, consultants urged manufacturers to streamline their operations and accelerate production in the hopes of lowering prices and maximizing profits. Thomas F. McMahon, president of the United Textile Workers, attacked employers' demands for improved machinery and speed. By implementing new

⁶⁷ James Maloney, "Glass Bottle Blowers," *American Federationist*, July 1929, 803.

⁶⁸ Maloney, "Glass Bottle Blowers," 803.

machines and intensifying the pace, McMahon argued, employers forced older men and women out, hiring young workers to run the new "stretchout system." He continued, "Workers who have the right to expect steady employment because of experience and skill are cast aside since the introduction of improved machinery into our industry." As speeds accelerated, young workers became the ideal laborer "because of their physical ability to carry a greater load than those who are more advanced in years, or over the 45-year limit." Textile workers knew stories about managers who told anxious job applicants to throw a hand brush down the length of the looms. When the brush landed, the boss told a man, amidst the constant din of the machinery: "All right! The job is yours. You run all these looms."⁶⁹ This new worker would have to race up and down the row of machines, keeping them all running simultaneously. Machines intensified work paces and led to the loss of 150,000 jobs. Most of those affected, "we are informed, are forty-five years of age or over."⁷⁰

Middletown: A Study in American Culture, the famous sociological study of Muncie, Indiana, verified older workers' worries about mass production, speedups, and employers' preferences for younger men. After conducting extensive interviews with men and women, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd concluded that ageism was a major product of modern industry. The "head of a leading machine shop" told them that older men did not fair well in the new era of "speeding up of machines and the eliminating of the human factor by machinery." The manager reported there was "less opportunity for older men in industry now than there used

⁶⁹ Bernstein, *Lean Years*, 4.

⁷⁰ Thomas F. McMahon, "Textile Workers," *American Federationist*, July 1929, 810, 811. See also Robert W. Dunn and Jack Hardy, *Labor and Textiles* (New York: International Publishers, 1931), 95. On the decline of the textile industry during the 1920s, see Bernstein, *Lean Years*, 3.

to be." While his company did not have a policy of firing older men, the manager pointed out, "we find that when a man reaches fifty he is slipping down in production." A superintendent at another factory noted, "The age dead line is creeping down on those men -- I'd say by forty-five they are through."⁷¹ Managers' technological changes emphasized speed, and employers assumed that young workers were the best fit. A general manager at another machine shop reported that as his factory rationalized, the workforce somehow became more youthful. "Speed and specialization tend to bring us younger men," he observed. The manager implied that natural laws of production led to the change, but new hiring policies surely brought young men in the door.⁷²

New mass production facilities differed from older factories. In skilled jobs, older men found greater safety. Expertise still mattered. At "Plant I," which dated back to the 1880s, many older men were found. It was, the Lynds argued, "one of the few places in town that tries to look out for its older workers."⁷³ Aging men could be found at smaller foundries, where experience, because of older machinery, remained important. A superintendent told the Lynds: "Molders are working up to sixty-five in Middletown at present. After a man reaches forty to forty-five he begins to slow down, but these older, experienced men are often valuable about the shop." This did not apply to the new factories: "But that's not true in the machine shops. There a man is harnessed to a machine and he *can't* slow down. If he does, his machine runs away with him."⁷⁴ There, managers wanted agile men with strong backs.

⁷¹ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 33, 34.

⁷² Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 33.

⁷³ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 32.

⁷⁴ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 33. Emphasis in original.

The wives of the aging men in "Middletown" worried intensely about their husbands' ability to keep up with the new work paces in the factories. The wife of a fifty-six year-old steel worker argued that her husband had a "Good future if he's not getting too old. The [plant] is . . . pushing more every year." Another wife said of her husband, a pattern maker, that he "is 40 and in about ten years from now will be on the shelf. A pattern maker isn't much wanted after 45." Women feared that mass production robbed older men of their roles as workers and breadwinners; employers only seemed to care about speeding assembly lines. Another woman, whose husband was a forty year-old laborer, stated very plainly: "Whenever you get old they are done with you."⁷⁵ After talking with so many working-class men, their wives, and employers, the Lynds concluded that "in modern machine production it is speed and endurance that are at a premium."⁷⁶ Old age pension advocate Abraham Epstein agreed. "The conditions in Middletown are typical," he wrote.⁷⁷

Experts worried about aging men's status as workers during the 1920s. The transition towards mass production -- with its emphasis on assembly lines and speedups -- made it difficult for older men to remain employed. As employers redefined work around speed, they increasingly looked towards younger workers to occupy the jobs they offered. In the name of "efficiency," manufacturers instituted various systems of dismissal and hiring age limits (both formal and informal) to build a younger workforce.

⁷⁵ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1929), 34-35.

⁷⁶ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 31.

⁷⁷ Abraham Epstein, "Facing Old Age," *Commonweal*, 11 December 1929, 163.

2.4 HIRING AGE LIMITS AND DISMISSALS

"All the shops and factories in this town," a Canton, Ohio, man grumbled in 1927, "strictly enforce the age limit which is 45 and 50 years and anyone on the shady side of 50 cannot secure employment in any shop or factory."⁷⁸ When Len de Caux, a future CIO unionist, sought work at a Chicago electrical firm during the 1920s, a manager told him: "Western Electric is looking for young men like you."⁷⁹ Hiring age limits, and arbitrary dismissals, were the second pillar of "the problem of the old man." Mass production assembly lines complicated older men's endurance on the job, while age discrimination kept many out altogether. Men's problems with age limits and dismissals exploded across the pages of writings by workers, unionists, industrial relations scholars, and social provision experts during the 1920s. Age limits not only affected the employment of the oldest workers, but more employers refused to hire men past the age of forty. "Growing old" quickly became a problem in men's lives.

The 1930 census reports suggest that mass production employers preferred to hire young men. In the previous census, the Census Bureau organized the adult age brackets into 5 categories: 18-19, 20-24, 25-44, 45-64, and 65 and up. The large 25-44 and 45-64 brackets distort the substantial drop in job prospects that began when men reached their 40s. The Fifteenth Census, which provided 4-year brackets (20-24, 25-29, etc.), provides a more detailed view of age and labor force participation. In the auto industry, the workforce was disproportionately younger than the national average for men employed. Over 70 percent of male operatives (Table 4) and 65 percent of male laborers (Table 5) were under 40 years old.

⁷⁸ GR Price, Report of Nimishillen Lodge, 32, Ohio, *Amalgamated Journal*, 27 October 1927, 9.

⁷⁹ Len de Caux, *Labor Radical: From the Wobblies to CIO* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 108.

For the country as a whole, however, the numbers were more balanced. Just over half (52 percent) of all men listed as employed were under 40 (Table 6).

Table 4. Men employed as operatives in the auto industry, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
18 to 39	100,337	70.2
40 to 69	40,767	28.5

Total given in census (N) = **142,925**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population, Vol. IV: Occupations, By States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 48-49 (Table 22).

Table 5. Men employed as laborers in the auto industry, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
18 to 39	78,564	65.4
40 to 69	39,601	33.1

Total given in census (N) = **120,150**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, 50-51 (Table 22).

Table 6. Men listed as employed throughout the United States, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
18 to 39	20,139,580	52.8
40 to 69	15,616,110	41.0

Total given in census (N) = **38,077,804**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, 44-45 (Table 22).

The age imbalance of the workforce may have been greater than the US Census numbers indicate. In 1930, President Herbert Hoover ordered census takers to revise their statistics, reflecting a lower (and to his view, more realistic) portrait of the unemployed. As Irving Bernstein wrote, the president insisted that men who refused to seek work and seasonal workers between jobs should not be included with the "actual" unemployed population.⁸⁰ The US Census' tabulations underestimated the extent of joblessness. The number of unemployed older men may have been higher than reported. A variety of sources yield statistical data suggesting that older men could not hire into the auto industry: nearly 75 percent of the men at Ford's Highland Park plant during the early 1920s were under 40; of 2,677 Mexican men hired at Ford between 1918 and 1933, 2.2 percent were over 40 (75.3 percent were between 20 and 29); and only 2 percent of the men at Chrysler in 1928 were over 35.⁸¹

Employers' statistics also pointed to biases in hiring practices. In *Moving Forward* (1930), Henry Ford proudly gave numbers to prove that his firm employed aging men. While some older men certainly worked for Ford in 1930, his statistics demonstrated that the vast majority of the workers were under 40. Roughly 62 percent of men were under 40, while only 34 percent were between 40 and 69 (Table 7). While Ford could prove he employed aging men, the numbers indicate that he favored younger workers.

⁸⁰ Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (1960; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 268; Harry Weiss, "New Models -- Old Workers," *American Federationist*, January 1936, 84.

⁸¹ Thurber M. Smith, "The Unemployment Problem: A Catholic Solution" (PhD diss., St. Louis University, 1932), 85-86; Zaragosa Vargas, "Mexican Auto Workers at Ford Motor Company, 1918-1933" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 56; idem, *Proletarians of the North: A History of Mexican Industrial Workers in Detroit and the Midwest, 1917-1933* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 61; Robert W. Dunn, "Youth Demanded on Speeded Up Auto Belt," press release, 22 November 1928, Folder 26, Box 2, Dunn Papers, Reuther Library.

Table 7. Men employed at the Ford Rouge factory, February 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
18 to 39	57,621	62.4
40 to 69	31,356	34.0

Total given in source (N) = **92,208**

Source: Henry Ford, with Samuel Crowther, *Moving Forward* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1930), 93-94.

In the steel industry, census numbers also show a bias in hiring. Like managers in the auto industry, steel employers relied on young men. However, managers in steel were not as brazen as employers in auto. The steel numbers were somewhat lower than those found in auto manufacturing. For the "operatives" category in the 1930 census, the number of men between the ages of 18 and 39 constituted 63.2 percent of the total. Men between the ages of 40 and 69 only formed 35 percent (Table 8). Like the auto industry, these numbers were more imbalanced than the national statistics (see Table 6).

Table 8. Men Employed As Operatives in the Steel Industry, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
18-39	65,459	63.2
40-69	36,154	35.0

Total given in source (N): **103,575**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, 48-49 (Table 22).

According to the census statistics, the number of "laborers" in the steel industry was closer to the national average. The number of "laborers" between the ages of 18 and 39 in the steel industry rested at 59.2 percent in 1930 (Table 9), whereas the national average for men's employment sat at 52.8 percent (Table 6).⁸² However, the numbers probably overestimate the number of men actually employed by steel manufacturers. Other sources suggest that the number of older men who struggled to hire into the steel industry was perhaps very high during the 1920s. Statistical studies of steel hiring suggested that age limits kept many older men out of steel mill employment. Horace B. Davis cited a 1930 study commissioned by the state of New York: fewer than 1/7 of 212 new hires were over 45. Worse, only 3 of the men were first-time steelworkers.⁸³

Table 9. Men Employed As Laborers in the Steel Industry, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
18-39	138,827	59.2
40-69	90,884	38.8

Total given in source (N): **234,524**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, 50-51 (Table 22).

⁸² A closer look at the numbers shows that a precipitous drop-off takes place at the age of 50. The number of "laborers" in steel drops from 24,326 (ages 45-59) to 16,667 (ages 50-54) -- the greatest reduction for all ages in this category. See US Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, Population, Vol. IV: Occupations, By States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 50-51 (Table 22).

⁸³ Davis, *Labor and Steel*, 22.

In addition to statistical material collected by scholars, steelworkers insisted time and time again in the pages of the *Amalgamated Journal* throughout the 1910s, 1920s, and early 1930s that they confronted age discrimination on a consistent basis. In Indiana, steelworker Samuel Craig noted that "jobs are scarce, especially for men that are up in years."⁸⁴ A struggling Youngstown man, known as Old Dad Heneks, warned young men: "Prepare, and be ready when you get to the age of 45."⁸⁵ The wife of a pattern maker in "Middletown" reported, "They [factory employers] always put in the young men."⁸⁶ If we use the census in a cautious way to gauge hiring patterns, and augment this material with data from other sources, it becomes clear that auto and steel manufacturers preferred young men.

Historians underestimate the extent of age discrimination before World War II. The recent historical and economic literature on older men's labor force participation before the 1940s emphasizes that industrialization did not turn older men into paupers. Several scholars argue that aging men labored profitably into later life. They benefited from increasing wages, and sought easier jobs to maintain an income. Some older men became proprietors, while others called on their children to help them.⁸⁷ These historians, however, overlook how older working-

⁸⁴ Samuel Craig, Report of Fort Wayne Lodge, 17, Ind., *Amalgamated Journal*, 11 October 1928, 19.

⁸⁵ Old Dad Heneks, Report of Youngstown, Ohio, Lodge, *Amalgamated Journal*, 3 July 1930, 14.

⁸⁶ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 35.

⁸⁷ Brian Gratton, "The New History of the Aged: A Critique," in *Old Age in a Bureaucratic Society: The Elderly, the Experts, and the State in American History*, ed. David Van Tassel and Peter N. Stearns (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 17; idem, "The Poverty of Impoverishment Theory: The Economic Well-Being of the Elderly, 1890-1950," *Journal of Economic History*, 56:1 (March 1996), 39-61; Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, "The Labor of Older Americans: Retirement of Men On and Off the Job, 1870-1937," *Journal of Economic History*, 56:1 (March 1986), 1-30; Susan B. Carter and Richard Sutch, "Myth of the Industrial Scrap Heap: A Revisionist View of Turn-of-the-Century American Retirement," *Journal of Economic History*, 56:1 (March 1996), 5-38. Some recent work acknowledges that age discrimination may have been a problem. See Carole Haber and Brian Gratton, *Old Age and the Search for Security: An American Social History* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), ch. 3; and Dora L. Costa, *The Evolution of Retirement: An American Economic History, 1880-1990* (Chicago:

class men could not usually find steady work or a stable business, lamented the diminished earnings and status that came with lower-paying jobs, and regretted the loss of independence that accompanied relying on children. In New York during the 1910s, for example, the wife of a struggling aging man told a social worker that "It would set him [her husband] crazy if he had to be dependent on his sons."⁸⁸ It may have been custom for nineteenth-century industrial employers to offer jobs as sweepers and watchmen to their oldest men, but the informality of the practice did not suffice in the era of the large mass production factory where large numbers of men worked. Employers did not need so many sweepers and watchmen, and foremen often protected only their favorites.⁸⁹

Hiring age limits constituted the most evident form of age discrimination during the early-twentieth century. In the United States, employers in industries such as steel used age limits to regulate which of their workers could be eligible for a pension from the company. For job-seeking middle-aged men, however, pensions restricted the number of places they could work. Managers did not want to hire older men only to pension them a few years later. Employers used age limits to insure that the men who received pensions had worked for a long time, usually 20 years. If a 50 year-old man applied for work at a pensioning firm, he would reach 65 years of age (the usual pension age) in only 15 years; it was unprofitable to pension men who did not give the maximum amount of time to the company. Stuart Chase remarked that if an older man "comes seeking work in a plant which has a pension plan, there is a strong

University of Chicago Press, 1998), 100.

⁸⁸ Mabel Louise Nassau, *Old Age Poverty in Greenwich Village* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915).

⁸⁹ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 34; Gorton James, "The Problem of the Old Man," *Survey*, 16 September 1921, 672.

economic motive to discriminate against him if he is past his prime. The older he is, the nearer he will be to the pension provision, hence the more costly to the company."⁹⁰ After 1900, age limits became the norm in steel. In 1902, American Steel and Wire announced "no experienced person over forty-five years shall hereafter be taken into the employ of the company." At Carnegie Steel, managers adopted a policy "to accept no more men over forty" in 1904. The announcements led to tangible "dissatisfaction" among steelworkers. By 1929, at least 21 steel companies ("including some of the largest," according to industry scholar Horace B. Davis) had established age limits.⁹¹

Despite their unfolding prominence in the early 1900s, hiring age limits had a lengthy history in the US and Europe. Pension scholar Murray Webb Latimer discovered that age limits originated long before the era of welfare capitalism; he traced them back to the industrial revolution of the early 1800s. In Great Britain, for example, men in the needle trades complained that employers disregarded their "usefulness" after a certain age, favoring cheaper young workers over men with experience. Throughout the nineteenth century, numerous industries adopted hiring age limits. By 1900, age limits existed in mining, maritime trade, mule-spinners, and in industrial occupations. Given the absence of pensions in nineteenth-century England, Latimer implied that employers had long instituted ageist hiring policies. In the US, age limits took hold first in the railroad industry during the late 1800s.⁹² Beginning around 1900, age limits appeared in meatpacking, inspiring Upton Sinclair to conclude that age

⁹⁰ Chase, "Laid Off at Forty," 344.

⁹¹ Fitch, *Steel Workers*, 183-184; "The Age Limit in Steel Mills," *New York Times*, 27 September 1904, 8; "Age Limits Revised," *New York Times*, 26 August 1905, 6; Davis, *Labor and Steel*, 22.

⁹² Latimer, *Industrial Pension Systems*, 790-798.

discrimination "was the rule everywhere in America."⁹³ By 1910, hiring age limits had taken hold in steel. During the next decade, the auto and textile industries became new sites where age limits took hold. By 1933, Leo Wolman and Gustav Peck would conclude in *Recent Social Trends*: "there is much evidence to support the growing belief that industry is honey combed with strict hiring age rules."⁹⁴

In Chicago, where steel and meatpacking were major industries, the Chicago Federation of Labor was quick to condemn the expanding system of hiring age limits and age discrimination practices. In 1904, the Federation threatened to withdraw all "police and legal protection" from factories that practiced discrimination against aging working men. The Chicago Federation of Labor's critiques reached the editors' desks at the *Wall Street Journal*, who, perhaps surprisingly, argued in sympathy with the unionists. While they disagreed with the craft union's promise to interfere with "the right of all" to police protections, the newspaper endorsed the Federation's contention that ageism was becoming a major industrial problem. "To discharge a man," the *Journal's* editors wrote, "who is skillful, faithful, sober and experienced simply because he has reached a certain age or was first employed after he had reached the age of 35, seems entirely unsound in policy and unfair in its effects."⁹⁵

Working men despised hiring age limits. In 1905, the same year William Osler proclaimed that men over 40 were useless, and a year after managers at Carnegie Steel announced that the company would not hire any men over 40, struggling men in Chicago formed

⁹³ Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (1906; New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 43.

⁹⁴ Leo Wolman and Gustav Peck, "Labor Groups in the Social Structure," in *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends*, with a foreword by Herbert Hoover (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1933), 811.

⁹⁵ "The Age Limit," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 October 1904, 1.

an organization called the Anti-Age Limit League. According to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, many of the men in the group were veterans of the recent Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars. They complained that industry, like the military, increasingly imposed age limits on "enlistment." In addition to Dr. Osler's remarks, the Anti-Age Limit League resented Admiral Dewey's recent comments about older men in the United States Navy; he complained that unless young men took charge of the navy the "Nation assuredly will meet with disaster." International rivalry and empire-building, along with industry, required young men who were ready to fight. The League vowed they would fight on behalf of "wage workers" to end the "cruel and unnatural" practice of age discrimination. The league proclaimed: "Of all the obstructions to a man's right to earn a living the ban put upon labor by the 45 year age limit is the cruelest, most obnoxious, and most absurd . . . The floors of the league are open to all honest and industrious and reputable men, especially those who have passed the . . . age limit of 45 years. It will lead the fight against age ostracism."⁹⁶ Despite the League's weighty rhetoric, the group quickly faded from the Chicago newspapers and from the other major city newspapers that had picked up the story.

A new organization appeared in Chicago during 1911; this new group (probably an outgrowth of the earlier Anti-Age Limit League) was known as the Anti-Forty-Five-Year Age Limit League. The group adopted a more heated rhetoric against what the men called "Oslerism." The League released a stern "ultimatum" to industrial employers: "You should ruminate on this: Any discharge or under payment or slighting of any worker over 45 solely on

⁹⁶ "The Anti-Age Limit League," *New York Times*, 20 October 1905, 8; "Fight the Old Age Limit," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 October 1905, 1; "Form Age Limit League," *Chicago Evening Post*, 18 October 1905, 10; "Age Limit Stirs Gray Haired Men," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 19 October 1905, 4; "Anti-Age Limit League," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1905, 2.

account of age will be effectively acted on." The League vowed to "start a battle" with young men and employers for factory jobs. The League held a "mass meeting" to rally older working men. "There were so many present that some had to stand up," the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported. The Anti-45 League condemned ageism as "unjust, unreasonable, illogical, barbarous, and indefensible." Since the previous March, some aging men in Chicago had been wearing "Anti-45" buttons on their jackets in opposition to age limits in the city.⁹⁷ Editors sympathized. Aging men, they argued, possessed attributes that industry needed. "The middle-aged man seeking employment may not offer the impetuosity of youth and its enthusiasms," one editor wrote, "but he can offer discretion and a developed sense of responsibility. He knows the rules of life." When employers hired middle-aged men, they hired fully formed *men* not childish adolescents. The paper agreed with the League, who argued that industry failed to employ older working men.⁹⁸

Hiring age limits were industry norms by the mid-1910s. When industrial relations scholars traveled to factories to study welfare capitalism during the late 1910s and 1920s, they encountered men who complained about the power politics behind age limits and pensions. During a visit to the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company's Minnequa Steel Works, Ben M. Selekman discovered that a 1917 hiring age limit instituted with the pension was "severely

⁹⁷ "Age Limit Foes Plan Big Fight," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 November 1911, 1; "Meet to Oppose 45-Year Limit," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 November 1911, 1; "Protest Against Age Limit," *New York Times*, 27 November 1911, 3; "Men Join to Fight 45-Year Age Limit," *Chicago Record-Herald*, 27 November 1911, 1. The buttons are referred to in "There's Life in the Old Man Yet," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 March 1911, 5.

⁹⁸ "The Virtues of Middle Age," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 November 1911, 10. Playing upon the upcoming Christmas holiday, a cartoonist showed a Santa Claus surprised by toy firms that only hired men under the age of 45. The cartoonist suggested that ageism was common in all industries -- even the toy industry. See "Possible Chance for A Younger Man," *Chicago Daily News*, 28 November 1911, 1.

condemned by the men."⁹⁹ Working men and Employee Representation Plan (ERP) representatives worried the age limit would undermine the male breadwinner role. It not only affected workers already employed, but it threatened others who came to Colorado Fuel and Iron in search of work. "It is not just," an ERP representative noted, "to a man to refuse him employment simply because he is past the age of forty-five." "Men," he continued, "have to live and support their families after they are past this age, regardless of a pension plan."¹⁰⁰ Colorado Fuel and Iron instituted the same age limits in its coal division. Ben Selekman and Mary Van Kleeck discussed the "bitterness" among the miners. Van Kleeck and Selekman "met no coal miner who was in favor of the age limit." While older men were "taciturn," as the visiting scholars described them, the young men were openly angry about the age limit and the pension plan.¹⁰¹

In addition to the codified patterns of age discrimination that were related to pension programs, informal patterns of age discrimination were common in early twentieth-century factories. A range of material related to the steel and automobile industries suggest that employers hired younger men irregardless of their company's policies. Horace B. Davis concluded that "workers well know that employment officers in hiring, discriminate against older workers, limit or no limit, and that they operate more by their own estimate of a man's age than

⁹⁹ Ben M. Selekman, *Employes' Representation in Steel Works: A Study of the Industrial Representation Plan of the Minnequa Steel Works of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1924), 134.

¹⁰⁰ Selekman, *Employes' Representation in Steel*, 134.

¹⁰¹ Ben M. Selekman and Mary Van Kleeck, *Employes' Representation in Coal Mines: A Study of the Industrial Representation Plan of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1924), 198-199.

by his statement."¹⁰² At Colorado Fuel and Iron, doctors systematically examined older men who returned to work after a lay-off. The physical exam required an older man to remove all of his clothes, "even to his socks." For men who had worked for the company for many years, this was an insult. To be poked and prodded by a company doctor affronted their dignity. "I think it is an injustice to him," an ERP representative concluded. Worse, management used the exam to dismiss the older men: "I have been asked by some our old employes to see what could be done with regard to them. Many times these men who have passed the age limit have to stand an examination before they can go back to work; they go over there and of course are turned down because of their age." If a man was in less than "reasonable condition," he would not be rehired. The ERP complained that older men should not be subjected to physical exams.¹⁰³

The 1919 Steel Strike period brought the prevalence of informal patterns of age discrimination into relief. During the strike, patterns of age discrimination emerged at important steel mills in Johnstown and Duquesne, Pennsylvania. Employers fired large numbers of older men in 1919 and 1920. As a rule, steel employers preferred younger bodies, and they wanted to be rid of the veteran Amalgamated Association (AA) leaders. In March 1919, a man in Johnstown (perhaps the Communist union organizer William Z. Foster who visited the city in 1919) reported: "The company began to discharge union men. Somebody decided to leave the new men alone, but to discharge the old-timers, men of 15 to 40 years service, men who cannot

¹⁰² Horace B. Davis, *Labor and Steel* (New York: International Publishers, 1933), 22.

¹⁰³ Selekman, *Employes' Representation in Steel*, 136, 137, 138.

get places in other mills." This went on for some time. "All winter long," the unnamed writer reported, "we have stood aside while veterans were discharged."¹⁰⁴

The strike proved to be, in part, a debate over aging men's status. At Cambria Steel, William Z. Foster discovered links between the employer assault on unionism and the vulnerable status of older working men. He reported to the American Federation of Labor that the company "declared war on the unions . . . They are picking out and discharging the oldest employees they have who belong to the unions . . . Many of the men have from 10 to 35 years in point of service."¹⁰⁵ For the men at Cambria, aging was perilous: "The men sacrificed were the Company's oldest and best employees. Men who had worked faithfully for ten, twenty or thirty years were discharged at a moment's notice. The plan was to pick out the men economically most helpless; men who were old and crippled, or who had large families dependent upon them, or homes half paid for, and make examples of them to frighten the rest." These men "could never hope to work in the steel mills again."¹⁰⁶ Similar patterns appeared in McKeesport. US Steel targeted older men in order to discipline its workers: "In addition to all this [police repression], men are being discharged from the plant in wholesale lots. Most of them are among the oldest employees. This reveals a double purpose on the part of the company. They hope to

¹⁰⁴ Unsigned, Report of Conemaugh Val. No. 112 PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 27 March 1919, 29.

¹⁰⁵ David Brody, *Labor in Crisis: The Steel Strike of 1919* (New York: JB Lippincott Company, 1965), 87. For in-depth examinations of Foster's career, see Edward P. Johanningsmeier, *Forging American Communism: The Life of William Z. Foster* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and James R. Barrett, *William Z. Foster and the Tragedy of American Radicalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

¹⁰⁶ William Z. Foster, *The Great Steel Strike and Its Lessons* (1920; reprint, New York: DaCapo Press, 1971), 43-44.

intimidate the men and prevent their joining the union and also to be relieved from the payments of old age pensions, under which plan these men would soon become beneficiaries."¹⁰⁷

Age limits made it difficult for unemployed older men to secure new jobs, essentially allowing employers to threaten older union leaders with permanent layoff. Cambria Steel accused forty-year veteran Joseph Yart of "agitation," but Yart "denied this charge and protested." Managers fired him. Age limits insured that Yart would have a tough time finding a new job. If he was a union man, a charge he denied, Joseph Yart would not be able to continue his "agitation." The Interchurch World Movement, a religious organization who conducted their own investigation of the strike, concluded, "Mr. Yart has been unable to find another job ever since and has been out of work now for the past eight months, as every place he goes to his age handicaps him in securing a job."¹⁰⁸ Cambria believed older men were Amalgamated Association leaders. Yart was not the only aging man to lose his job. Bernard Heeney met the same fate. "The oldest employee in the department," the assistant superintendent fired him for alleged union activity. This surprised Heeney. When the man asked why he was fired, the manager said, "I don't know -- we have orders here to take you off."¹⁰⁹

Mary Heaton Vorse, Abraham Epstein, and leading members of the American Federation of Labor, among others, popularized the idea of the "industrial scrap heap" during the 1920s to condemn employers' disregard for older men.¹¹⁰ Samuel Gompers may have first used the term

¹⁰⁷ Report of National Committee for Organizing Iron and Steel Workers, *Amalgamated Journal*, 24 July 1919, 8.

¹⁰⁸ The Interchurch World Movement, *Report on the Steel Strike of 1919* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 214.

¹⁰⁹ Interchurch World Movement, *Report*, 215.

¹¹⁰ For discussions of the "scrap heap" and the "scrapping" of men during the 1920s, see, for example, Mary

in 1911, and then Vorse used it in her survey of the 1919 Steel Strike and its aftermath, *Men and Steel* (1920). Two years later, Epstein utilized "The Scrap Heap" in his chapter on arbitrary dismissals in *Facing Old Age*. The "scrap heap" encapsulated numerous themes affecting aging working men. Hiring age limits, arbitrary dismissals, permanent layoff, and increasing work paces made masculinity a fragile concept. After over a decade of talk about "the scrap heap" in the labor press, a 1928 *Detroit Labor News* illustration summarized what lie ahead for men in industry. The "industrial world," black and gloomy, used up and discarded working men.



Figure 1. "The End of the Trail," *Detroit Labor News*, 6 July 1928

Heaton Vorse, *Men and Steel* (New York, 1920), 168-170; Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, ch. 2; "Work After 45," *American Federationist*, March 1929, 275; "Old-Age Pensions," *American Federationist*, November 1927, 1303; Wharton, "Age Limits," 808; Davis, "'Old Age' at Fifty," 1098.

After years of service, older men found themselves cast out, forced to walk a lonely road away from manhood. With a tattered coat, slumping shoulders, sullen eyes, and a worn brow, aging working-class men, the Federation argued, could no longer work and earn as men (Figure 1).

After the 1919 Steel Strike, Federation unions outside of steel began worrying about age discrimination. During 1921, older men who ran streetcars for Detroit United Railway complained about rumors of an impending dismissal. In only "a few weeks," the city government would take over operations, and, as part of the conversion, the city allegedly intended to fire the "old employes" and hire young men. The Detroit Federation of Labor (DFL) issued a stern proclamation: "it is rumored that the old employes now operating these lines are to be dismissed from the service and new and inexperienced men placed in charge of the operation . . . we . . . do hereby take up the situation and make a full investigation and see if it is not possible to have an understanding that these men who have for years performed this labor to the best interests of the public . . . may be retained." The mayor quickly insisted the rumor was false, and "the men now employed . . . have no grounds for fear."¹¹¹ But the DFL was clearly worried about age discrimination, as mere *rumors* led to an investigation.

Members of the American Federation of Labor in Detroit also probably had one eye on the automobile industry. During the 1910s, when mass production was still very new to the auto industry, the pioneering Ford Motor Company actively recruited young men. In 1916, Ford established the Henry Ford Trade School, where managers instructed teenage boys in mechanical engineering. Boys not only studied in the classroom; they worked on the assembly lines at the

¹¹¹ "Men Employed on Day-to-Day Lines Fear Losing Jobs," *Detroit Labor News*, 14 October 1921, 1; "Men Employed on Day-to-Day Lines Will Retain Jobs," *Detroit Labor News*, 28 October 1921, 1.

new Rouge plant, gaining first-hand knowledge of the latest machines and tools. They were officially students, but they completed the same factory labor as the regular employees. The typical student/worker earned \$7.20 a week -- much less than a "five dollar day." The creation of the school showed that Henry Ford favored the training of young males for jobs within his company; he readily used them in the factory. Harold L. Brock, a graduate of the school, wrote in his memoir about the jobs he learned to complete during the 1920s and 1930s: "My training included drafting, tool and die making, pattern making, foundry practice . . . I became knowledgeable in . . . manufacturing processes." Between the 1910s and 1940s, the trade school graduated 8,000 teenage boys.¹¹² Older men often cast an anxious eye towards these youngsters. A UAW veteran alleged that Ford replaced older men with the "high school boys" who earned "learner's wages."¹¹³

The Ford Motor Company had a "natural liking" for young men. In 1917, the firm organized laborers into four categories: Honor Roll, Class A, Class B, and Class C. The classifications all hinged on thrift, reliability, and sobriety (or the lack thereof). Ford deemed these virtues to be crucial if men were to be included in profit sharing plans, the Five Dollar Day, and promotion. Men in Class C were "problem" workers. These men drank and missed work. The upper tiers honored workers who practiced good habits; they were sober family men who

¹¹² Ford Motor Company, *A Tour of the Remarkable Ford Industries during the Days When the End Product Was the Matchless Model A, with 150 Photographs* (1929; Lockport, NY: Lincoln Publishing Company, 1961), 38; "Ford Trade School Expanding Rapidly," *Wall Street Journal*, 4 October 1926, 12; Harold L. Brock, *The Fords In My Past* (Warrendale, PA: Society of Automotive Engineers, 2000), 6; Peterson, *American Automobile Workers*, 63; Marquart, *Auto Worker's Journal*, 6.

¹¹³ Philip Bonosky, *Brother Bill McKie: Building the Union at Ford* (New York: International Publishers, 1953), 43.

saved their pay. To join the Honor Roll, however, men needed to be more than thrifty and ascetic. They needed to be 30-35 years old.¹¹⁴

Henry Ford endorsed young men as his ideal autoworkers, but he also valued the better judgment and familial commitments associated with older men. He wanted to combat absenteeism and labor turnover, which he probably believed was most prevalent among young men.¹¹⁵ The 30-35 year-old age bracket Ford associated with the "Honor Roll" men reflected his contradictory goals of attaining both youth and speed on the new assembly line and workforce stability. He wanted men who were young enough to endure the physicality of assembly line labor, yet he wanted men who were old enough to be reliable employees. Despite Ford's interest in dependable workers, the firm's labor policies consistently favored youth and brawn, not age and restraint.

By the late 1920s, the patterns of age discrimination at Ford extended throughout the industry. After researching his *Labor and Automobiles* (1929), Robert W. Dunn characterized the auto industry as "a young man's industry."¹¹⁶ He indicted Ford, Hudson, and Packard. In 1928, managers at Ford quietly dismissed many aging men who earned six dollars per day. Ford gave their jobs to young men at a lower pay rate. At Hudson Motors, superintendents laid off many older men during the 1928 model changeover. When production resumed, Hudson "hired for the new production thousands of young workers." At Packard, managers laid off veteran men

¹¹⁴ Ford's "natural liking" for young men is referenced in Allan Nevins and Frank Ernest Hill, *Ford: Expansion and Challenge, 1915-1933* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 534. On age and the Ford laborer classifications, see Meyer, *Five Dollar Day*, 145-146; for additional discussions of Ford's preference for younger men, see "Questions?" *Auto Workers News*, May 1928, 3; and "Missing: Two Ford Boobs," *Auto Workers News*, October 1928, 3.

¹¹⁵ Peterson, *American Automobile Workers*, 95-96.

¹¹⁶ Dunn, *Labor and Automobiles*, 72.

who earned 75 and 80 cents per hour. The company brought in young men who received 52 cents.¹¹⁷ Dunn's research notes, housed at the Walter P. Reuther Library in Detroit, documented patterns of ageism at other companies. At a factory in Flint, a man named Jones remarked: "Flint workers scrapped at 40." Elsewhere, a manager reported there was "no actual age limit in hiring but try to take young, for more agile."¹¹⁸ Age discrimination saturated the industry, making it "almost impossible for a man over 40 to get a job."¹¹⁹

Robert L. Cruden, Dunn's younger colleague, wrote essays and a novel (*Conveyor: A Novel* [1935]) about men's experiences in the auto industry during the late 1920s.¹²⁰ Cruden went to work for Packard on the assembly line in 1928 to support the family after his father lost his job. His writings provided a gritty look at ageism in the shops. While filling out paperwork at the Packard office, the eighteen year-old Cruden observed "that the older men were being turned away."¹²¹ He also commented on men's problems in other factories. When Henry Ford vowed in 1926 to end delinquency in Detroit by creating new jobs for young men, Cruden argued that the company only wanted to jettison older men: "The young men, new and former employees, were taken on. The old men, the men whose hair had whitened in the service of

¹¹⁷ Dunn, *Labor and Automobiles*, 71; "Young Workers in Hudson's," *Auto Workers News*, April 1928, 3.

¹¹⁸ Cards 2, 4, and 6, Box 1, "Young Workers" section, Robert W. Dunn Papers (hereafter Dunn Papers), Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University (hereafter Reuther Library).

¹¹⁹ Dunn, *Labor and Automobiles*, 72.

¹²⁰ Cruden published the book under the pseudonym "James Steele." See *Conveyor: A Novel* (New York: International Publishers, 1935). On Cruden, see Wixson, *Worker-Writer in America*, 157, 582.

¹²¹ Robert L. Cruden, "No Loitering: Get Out Production," *Nation*, 12 June 1929, 696; idem, "Ask the Man Who Works There," essay manuscript, 1928, 2, Box 2, Folder 18, Dunn Papers, Reuther Library; see also Clayton W. Fountain, *Union Guy* (New York: Viking Press, 1949), 19.

Ford, were refused employment . . . These old men were made to understand that they are nothing but old rusty tin cans on the garbage heap of society."¹²²

Managers sometimes created work situations for older men that often left them little choice but to quit. Bosses transferred aging men to departments where the work was more demanding in order to push them out. In October 1929, a man at Ford wrote to the Communist-led Auto Workers Union (AWU) about a series of transfers at the Rouge.¹²³ In an unnamed department, the work was relatively light. Many older men worked there. Then, managers began transferring the men to another department where jobs were more strenuous. Since many of them could not keep up, managers fired them. "In this way," the man wrote, "Ford is able to get rid of many of us [older men] in a nice way." At Chrysler, the AWU pointed out, a forty-five year-old man who worked in the inspection department lost his job because he could not work at accelerated paces. At Packard, management increased the body workers' job quota from six auto bodies to eight. The increased workload led to a bloodletting in the department; only the young and strong survived. "Old men fired," Robert Dunn noted.¹²⁴

¹²² Robert L. Cruden, "Ford's Flimflamery," *Labor Age*, July 1928, 16; Dunn, *Labor and Automobiles*, 72.

¹²³ On the Auto Workers Union, see Roger R. Keeran, "Communist Influence in the Automobile Industry, 1920-1933: Paving the Way for An Industrial Union," *Labor History*, 20:2 (Spring 1979), 189-226; idem, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions* (1980; New York: International Publishers, 1986), 28-59; Christopher H. Johnson, *Maurice Sugar: Law, Labor, and the Left in Detroit, 1912-1950* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 109-114; James Lorence, *Organizing the Unemployed: Community and Union Activists in the Industrial Heartland* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 21; Peterson, *American Automobile Workers*, 108-129; Steve Babson, with Ron Alpern, Dave Elsila, and John Revitte, *Working Detroit: The Making of a Union Town* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1986), 50; and Wood, "Paralysis of the Labor Movement," 66-77, 79-91.

¹²⁴ "Many Men Fired in 'B' Building," *Auto Workers News*, October 1929, 1; "A Dodge Worker Speaks on Cutting Down Overhead," *Auto Workers News*, June 1929, 1; Card 12, Box 1, "Speed-up and Productivity" section, Dunn Papers, Reuther Library.

When employers retooled departments to advance mass production, they sometimes used the hiatus to oust older men. Working men in Toledo, Ohio, argued that the Auto-Lite company retooled various departments to promote "efficiency" and release aging men. Reflecting on his experiences at Auto-Lite in 1928, Carl Leck, a former stockroom worker, told two historians that his bosses did not openly fire older men. However,

Some economy engineer says we [management] can do better to lay off all the men in the stockroom and move directly from the receiving dock up to final assembly and let them take care of it. We used to have at one time thirty men in that stockroom. When they wound up, they had one man. And these older men, that were too old at that time, where would they go for a job? They couldn't get a job.

Aging men constituted a significant part of the stockroom staff. Management effectively (and quietly) removed twenty-nine older, higher paid men from their payrolls. Officially, workers could not accuse management of blatant discrimination. However, they grasped management's goal. The interviewers asked, "Did the company try to get them [aging men] back in the operation there some way?" Leck responded, "No, no way."¹²⁵

When experienced (and generally older) men qualified for higher pay rates, employers sometimes moved quickly to lay them off. At Packard, Robert Cruden noted it was "a general rule" that older men received higher wages than young men. However, an aging body polisher explained to Cruden "how this works out" in practice. Once an older man reached the high seventy cents per hour rate, the foremen began scrutinizing the man's work. If any defects were noticed, the older worker would be fired. The aging polisher was in the midst of his own tug of

¹²⁵ Philip A. Korth and Margaret R. Beegle, *I Remember Like Today: The Auto-Lite Strike of 1934* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1988), 62-63.

war with the boss. "This old polisher's panic when his foreman found a spot on a body was sufficient proof for me that this was no fiction of his imagination," Cruden reported.¹²⁶

The visibility of gray hair could be a source of trouble. The AWU made a link between layoffs and men whose hair was gray in a 1929 article about Dodge. A union organizer noted: "Now Dodges, too, is beginning to lay off men on account of . . . gray hair." In one case, three aging men approached their boss to ask for a transfer. They worked the late shift and complained that managers would not transfer them to the day shift. Now, the superintendent targeted the men for dismissal; they brought themselves to his attention. They soon lost their jobs. The AWU lamented, "These three men find themselves laid off because of gray hair . . . , gotten in the service of the Dodge Motor Company."¹²⁷

If they wanted to remain employed, older men realized they needed to keep their age a secret. Clearly worried about employers' preferences for young men, some aging autoworkers, steelworkers, and machinists colored their hair in the hope of protecting their jobs. Robert W. Dunn pointed out that "Detroit workers have been known to dye their hair to disguise their age." Some men even "applied shoe polish to conceal gray hair."¹²⁸ Other observers of industry such as Stuart Chase and Warren B. Catlin talked about struggling machinists who "touch[ed] up their

¹²⁶ Cruden, "No Loitering," 697.

¹²⁷ "Human Scrap Pile Grows," *Auto Workers News*, July 1929, 3.

¹²⁸ Dunn, *Labor and Automobiles*, 72; Frank Marquart, *An Auto Worker's Journal: The UAW from Crusade to One-Party Union* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), 138; Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 146.

gray."¹²⁹ James J. Davis wrote about men in the steel industry who "darkened" their gray hair with "soot from the furnace."¹³⁰

Older men often lied about their age when they applied for work. At a factory in Pontiac during 1929, a manager asked one applicant where he was born, his age, and, oddly, "whether he was older or younger than his grandmother."¹³¹ The manager could not readily identify the man's age. An employment officer told Bun Grady, the struggling older man introduced to us by worker/writer Jack Conroy, to "get wise on that age deal. Never be a day over thirty-nine." Managers' frustrations with deceptive and reticent older men emerged in a handful of sources from the 1920s. Millicent Pond, a manager at the Scovill Manufacturing Company, remarked in 1929 "that the employment interviewer has the difficult problem of determining whether a man is telling the truth or not when he says he is 42, 47, or 50 years of age, over a range of individuals who look as if they were from 50 to 70."¹³²

Despite managers' preferences for young workers, older men never completely disappeared from the factory. Some concealed their age, while other men's brawn helped them remain attractive to employers. Still, employed aging men worried how long their employment would last. The Ford Motor Company hired the fifty year-old William McKie, a skilled metal worker (and veteran unionist) from Scotland, in 1927. (Known as "Big Bill," McKie's size, in

¹²⁹ Warren B. Catlin, *The Labor Problem in the United States and Great Britain* (New York, 1926), 88; Chase, "Laid Off at Forty," 340; Farnsworth Crowder, "The Chance of a Job After 40?" *Survey Graphic*, February 1938, 87.

¹³⁰ Davis, "'Old Age' at Fifty," 1096.

¹³¹ "Let It Sink In!" *Auto Workers News*, April 1929, 4; Steele [Cruden], *Conveyor*, 116.

¹³² Conroy, *Disinherited*, 138; Murray Webb Latimer, *Industrial Pensions in the United States and Canada* (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1932), 807.

addition to his skills, might explain why Ford gave him a job.) During his tenure as a Rouge worker during the interwar period, McKie noted that older men's employment was never secure. "Men over forty lived in daily fear of losing their jobs," his biographer wrote. "Men over fifty in production were knocked off day by day."¹³³

Mass production employers' employment policies slighted older men, threatening the economic bases and cultural meanings of working-class manhood in later life. Men worried greatly about the meanings of gender at work during the 1920s. Concerns over ageism emerged simultaneously with unionists' worries about women in the auto plants. Discussions of working "girls" (who, some union organizers argued, needed to relinquish their jobs and return to the home) appeared alongside discussions of age discrimination. In a 1927 letter to the *Auto Workers News*, a middle-aged man at Ford described Detroit as a "She-Town" because of the increasing prominence of women in industry.¹³⁴ (In reality, the number of working women in Detroit's automobile factories increased quite slowly during the interwar years, never exceeding 6 percent.)¹³⁵ Some working-class men blamed women for their troubles, but many more workers, unionists, and experts pointed to age discrimination as the main threat to work and the male breadwinner ideal.

Unionists and observers never spoke about women and age discrimination in the auto or steel industries. Sometimes, observers called attention to women's troubles with ageism in their

¹³³ Bonosky, *Brother Bill McKie*, 34-35. On McKie, see Wendell Phillips Addington, "Reds at the Rouge: Communist Party Activism at the Ford Rouge Plant, 1922-1952" (MA Thesis, Wayne State University, 1997), 16; Johnson, *Maurice Sugar*, 171; and Keeran, *Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*, 55.

¹³⁴ Wood, "Paralysis of the Labor Movement," 73-82; Winifred Wandersee, *Women's Work and Family Values, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

¹³⁵ Wood, "Paralysis of the Labor Movement," 75.

discussions of the garment industry.¹³⁶ However, women who sought employment certainly confronted managerial preferences for younger laborers. The 1930 census statistics suggest that, when auto manufacturers did hire women, they preferred young women under the age of 35. Of 19,858 women employed as "semiskilled" workers in auto factories and 3,690 listed as "unskilled," over 77 percent of the women in each category were in their teens, 20s, and early 30s (Tables 10-11). In addition to racism and sexism, working women confronted ageism. Observers, however, only discussed age discrimination as a threat to working-class manhood, building on the inaccurate assumption that the only women who wanted factory work were young women in pursuit of "pin money."¹³⁷

Table 10. Women employed as semiskilled workers in the auto industry, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
10 to 34	15,398	79.0
35 to 74	4,449	22.4

Total given in census (N) = **19,858**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *A Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 156-157 (Table 33).

¹³⁶ Jack Hardy, *The Clothing Workers: A Study of the Conditions and Struggles in the Needle Trades* (New York: International Publishers, 1935).

¹³⁷ "The Auto Industry and its Workers," *Labor Age*, April 1929, 3; *Buick Worker* clipping, Box 1, "Women and Wages" section, Dunn Papers, Reuther Library.

Table 11. Women employed as unskilled workers in the auto industry, 1930

Ages	Number	Percent
10 to 34	2,865	77.6
35 to 74	818	22.2

Total given in census (N) = **3,690**

Source: US Bureau of the Census, Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States, 156-157 (Table 33).

Hiring age limits, dismissals, and other forms of age discrimination were widely practiced in mass production between 1904 and 1929. Employers developed a new esteem for younger men. Throughout this period, the reorganization of the industrial workplace around youth and threatened the capacity of older men to ground masculinity in healthy bodies, work, and breadwinning. If an older man lost his job, he might not find another.

During the early twentieth century, "growing old" became a major source of anxiety about manhood. New mass production employers valued speed and youth, as assembly lines allowed managers to accelerate work paces and maximize production. Aging working-class men struggled with assembly line speeds and repetitive heavy work. In order to foster a young and strong workforce, employers utilized hiring age limits and arbitrary dismissals to keep older men out of the factory. Since masculinity depended on work and employment, "growing old" threatened manhood. While all men did not face age discrimination, they nonetheless worried extensively about the impact of "growing old" on their employability and their health. Working-class men -- in autos and steel, among other industries -- understood there were few protections

in later life: only a small minority of workers, for example, received pensions from their companies. Also, seniority hinged on employers' good will.

"The problem of the old man" led to a variety of responses. Chapter Two examines the ascendancy of the state pension idea during the 1920s. Alternatives for old age economic support existed: union, religious, and fraternal society old age homes, state-run poorhouses, industrial pensions, reliance on children, and liquidating personal assets, among other possible solutions. However, Americans increasingly believed the government should use pensions from the state to protect manhood in later life.

3.0 CHAPTER 2: GENDER AND THE STATE PENSION IDEA DURING THE 1920S

No greater tragedy exists in our civilization than the plight of the aged, worn-out worker who after a life of ceaseless effort and useful productivity must look forward for his declining years to a dismal poorhouse...

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1928)¹³⁸

During 1928 Franklin D. Roosevelt integrated older working-class men's troubles with work and breadwinning into his successful campaign for governor of New York. Informed by experts' writings, more and more politicians, reformers, and unionists feared that working-class men lost their economic authority in old age. Because employers invested little in aging workers, observers believed that older people were destined for the poorhouse: a stigmatized state institution that housed only the most indigent men and women. Discussions of old age poverty and the poorhouse during the 1920s highlighted intense fears about the destruction of the male breadwinner role and gender roles in marriage and the family.

"The problem of the old man" laid the groundwork for transformations in the welfare state. While several possibilities for economic support existed, reformers successfully promoted

¹³⁸ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, quoted in Abraham Epstein, "Facing Old Age," *Commonweal*, 11 December 1929, 163; see also "Governor Roosevelt of New York Sends Special Message to the Legislature on Provision for Old Age," *American Labor Legislation Review*, March 1929, 54.

the state pension idea as the best solution to aging men's worries about manhood. Because of older men's ongoing difficulties with work and the inadequacy of many alternatives, such as state-run poorhouses, private old age homes, industrial pensions, savings, and reliance on children, state pensions became the experts' (and workers') preferred way to uphold manhood and gender relations in old age. This discussion extended into politics, as states tentatively explored pension legislation. While the 1920s state pension movement failed to secure legislative success, it established the gendered ideological foundations of the 1935 Social Security Act's old age provisions. Well before the construction of the New Deal welfare state, social provision experts, unionists, workers, and politicians had by 1929 already concluded that any possible state pension system would be intended to uphold the manhood of the struggling aging male breadwinner.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ In the historiographies related to old age and the aged and the maternalist tradition in the pre-New Deal welfare state in the US, scholars locate the origins of Social Security in state-level Mothers' Aid "pensions" that proliferated across the United States in the 1910s, the precedent of Civil War veterans' benefits and serious questions of reliable (un-corrupt) public administration of benefits that could also be a source of political patronage, and the federal government interest in removing older workers from the depression-era labor market to create room for younger workers. This chapter argues that anxieties over aging and masculinity shaped the state pension ideologies that circumscribed the 1935 Social Security Act. For earlier interpretations, see Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900-1935* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); David Hackett Fischer, *Growing Old in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); William H. Graebner, *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution*; Ann Shola Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1880-1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994); John Myles, *Old Age in the Welfare State: The Political Economy of Public Pensions*, rev. ed., foreword by Jill S. Quadagno (1984; Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), esp. ch. 1. For an analysis of interwar pension politics that does highlight the importance of the state pension during the 1920s, see Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, 113-143.

3.1 ENVISIONING OLD AGE POVERTY

In Canonsburg, Pennsylvania, a steel mill town located southwest of Pittsburgh, an older working-class man committed suicide in 1926. The man worked for years at the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company. Throughout his thirty-year career, the man "had reared a family and given his children a good education, until it was necessary to continue his toil to provide for his wife and himself." The man knew he could depend on his children for support, but he was "too proud" to accept their "charity." One day at work, the man injured his back. For months, a company doctor attended him. The worker's condition improved, but he could never carry out the heavy labor he had once done. The aging fellow needed lighter work. He visited the superintendent to request a new job, but the manager told him "that his services were no longer required." Now facing permanent layoff, the man went into his basement and hung himself. His wife found the body. Rather than face the loss of his manhood, the man took his own life: "He had released society of a burden."¹⁴⁰

Throughout the 1920s, more and more firms refused to employ aging working men, causing many older men and women to struggle with finances as they aged. The discussion of the Canonsburg man, and others, underscored Americans' anxieties about the lack of resources older men and women could depend on. For instance, the man in Canonsburg would not turn to his children, he probably could not afford a private old age home (nor would he want to live in one), and the man did not have savings. (After all, he paid for his children's education.) Finally, he would not move to the dreaded poorhouse; these institutions, he probably thought, were more like prisons than homes. The Canonsburg man would have railed against the stigmatized state

¹⁴⁰ Sam T. Baker, "The Reward for Faithful Service," *Amalgamated Journal*, 4 November 1926, 21.

institutions. With nothing left, the man chose death. His widow now faced the daunting prospect of providing for herself. Without a steady income, she certainly would have to give up the home she had known for years. The widow would have to depend on her children for support. What could have prevented these tragedies? Anxieties about the destruction of manhood and family propelled experts' and workers' demands for state pensions.

The impetus behind the 1935 Social Security Act originated with the 1920s discourses about aging, gender, and poverty. While the New Era state pension movement did not achieve its goals, it defined the ideologies that shaped Social Security in the 1930s. The state pension movement, with its focus on aging working-class men, showed how welfare state advocates were beginning to concern themselves with bolstering an ebbing masculinity -- thereby moving away from an earlier "maternalist" orientation that focused on working-class women's struggles with poverty and child-rearing.¹⁴¹ The importance of "the problem of the old man" in interwar social welfare thought furthers our understanding of why 1930s welfare state politics slighted women's needs at home and at work.¹⁴² Given the problematic importance attached to youth in the workplace, the 1920s pension advocates believed state pensions would uphold the male breadwinner role as a foundation of masculinity for the oldest men. Because most of the

¹⁴¹ For another look at this shift with a focus on delinquent male breadwinners, see Michael Willrich, "Home Slackers: Men, the State, and Welfare in Modern America," *Journal of American History*, 87:2 (September 2000), 460-489.

¹⁴² See, for example, Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Linda Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1880-1945," *American Historical Review*, 97:1 (February 1992), esp. 19-22, 47-50.

alternatives provided no guarantees or bore the mark of stigmatization, state pensions became the favored way to address "the problem of the old man."

Experts and reformers made "the problem of the old man" a prominent social problem, but they did so with an ideology predicated on the defense of manhood. Experts wanted to prevent the destruction of manhood and family by building a system of state pensions, destroying the stigmatized poorhouse, and allowing older men and their wives to live without fears of dependency and poverty. For men, old age poverty bore the stigma of feminization. In contrast, experts hoped to reconstruct "old age" as a period of deserved rest for industrial "veterans" and to strengthening the family through state pensions. Institutions, outdoor relief, savings, and children's assistance would not suffice. Only state pensions, they insisted, protected aging men.

During the 1920s, discussions of aging men, women, and poverty began with the aftermath of the 1919 Steel Strike. In her investigation of the strike, *Men and Steel* (1920), labor journalist Mary Heaton Vorse encountered many older working-class men, who, from her perspective, underscored the urgent need for state pensions. Not only did working men lose the strike, many older men now faced permanent unemployment. She discovered that many aging men would never work again because of hiring age limits in the steel industry. Vorse painted a grinding portrait of old age poverty: wives worried silently in cramped homes, children now supported their down-and-out fathers, and aging patriarchs lamented the loss of their status as breadwinners. Vorse wrote, highlighting the problem of the ageism in the mills, "The old men were often not taken back."¹⁴³ They spoke with a man called Old Steve, who "had not been taken on again." The company rehired his sons, but they would not hire Steve. The man, Vorse

¹⁴³ Mary Heaton Vorse, *Men and Steel* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), 168.

asserted, "had been scrapped."¹⁴⁴ After talking with another older working-class man, Vorse wrote: "After a lifetime of work in this country, after raising children, contributing sons to the army of this country, there was no more work for him."¹⁴⁵

Old age poverty destroyed the family. In Braddock, Pennsylvania, Vorse visited an aging man named Shapiro with a local Catholic priest. She showed readers a kind old man, who had lost a long, almost heroic battle to maintain a respectable home. When Vorse and the priest arrived, Mrs. Shapiro asked right away, "What will we do, Father? They won't give him back his job." Vorse, Father Kazinci, and the Shapiros talked about recent events. Shapiro only wanted to work, to support his family as other men did. However, employers no longer wanted him. He told Vorse: "They won't take me back . . . They said, 'No work for you.'" He could only watch their daughter leave home each day to labor in a glass factory.¹⁴⁶ Vorse wrote, "One could see he had understood nothing. The industrial machine of America had caught him up."¹⁴⁷ Shapiro could do little to reclaim his lost manhood.

The social provision activist Abraham Epstein produced the first major national study of such older men's troubles in the 1920s. In *Facing Old Age: A Study of Old Age Dependency in the United States and Old Age Pensions* (1922), Epstein wrote about old age poverty as an ominous threat to working-class manhood. "In spite of superior wealth and accumulation of goods," he argued, "our national conscience is not in the least disturbed when the former creators of our wealth [working men] are forced to drag out their final days, physically exhausted,

¹⁴⁴ Vorse, *Men and Steel*, 172.

¹⁴⁵ Vorse, *Men and Steel*, 175.

¹⁴⁶ Vorse, *Men and Steel*, 170, 169.

¹⁴⁷ Vorse, *Men and Steel*, 170.

friendless and destitute, in the wretched confines of a poorhouse, or to receive some other degrading and humiliating form of pauper relief."¹⁴⁸ Epstein worried that working-class manhood depended on the whims of industrial employers who only craved speed and youth: "After a certain age has been attained, although the worker may be still be able to do fair work, if he is no longer able to maintain his former speed, he is likely to be eliminated from industry. The old man [is] relegated to the industrial scrap-heap as useless. . ." ¹⁴⁹

Epstein was an up-and-coming intellectual and activist of the late 1910s and 1920s. He emigrated from Russia to the United States in 1910 at the age of 18, and despite his humble background, earned a degree in Economics at the University of Pittsburgh in 1917. Epstein stayed in Pittsburgh for another year, completing an MA at Pitt and publishing his thesis, *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburgh*. Harvard University, the University of Minnesota, and Clark University offered him fellowships, but Epstein turned them down. Instead, he accepted a position as the research director for the Pennsylvania Old Age Pension Commission. Later, he held posts with the Fraternal Order of Eagles (FOE) and the American Association for Old Age Security. Epstein quickly gained respect as an authority on social provision and old age pensions. He lectured throughout the United States and cultivated relationships with lobbyists, academics, and politicians (including Jane Addams and Franklin D. Roosevelt). He also published numerous articles and books on aging and economic support.¹⁵⁰ According to Roy

¹⁴⁸ Abraham Epstein, *Facing Old Age: A Study of Old Age Dependency in the United States and Old Age Pensions* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), 1.

¹⁴⁹ Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 3, 4.

¹⁵⁰ Louis Leotta, "Abraham Epstein and the Movement for Old Age Security," *Labor History*, 16:3 (Summer 1975), 360-373; Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, 138-139.

Lubove, Abraham Epstein "contributed more to the old age pension movement than any single individual."¹⁵¹

Epstein highlighted old age as a time of degradation. Aging working-class men, he argued, were indeed "scrap": upon reaching their later years, they could become useless, discarded, and dependent on others' mercy. Epstein indicted employers for hiring and wage policies that denied older men employment and savings. He argued that "in industry, once the approach of old age becomes apparent, the worker is thrown upon his own resources."¹⁵² Epstein highlighted cases where men committed suicide or died heartbroken because of their anxiety and stress. Rather than admit their dependent state and enter a stigmatized state institution, some men took their own lives. Others fell ill with worry and died. Epstein used older men's deaths to underscore a dangerous future for working-class men. He thought these deaths were the beginning of a frightening new trend. As the US embraced mass production, Epstein feared that men might face a state of permanent dependency -- especially if age limits permeated industry and wages failed to provide savings.

Aging working men's economic destruction underpinned Epstein's book. *Facing Old Age* highlighted several male casualties -- men who lost their ongoing struggles to remain independent breadwinners. Epstein referred to an older man who took his own life; he suggested there were many other cases and that the problem would continue to unfold. Epstein reprinted the entirety of a Cleveland newspaper article: "Fear of losing his position because of his age is said by friends to have been the reason for a suicide leap today by Joseph H. . . . , 60 who hurled

¹⁵¹ Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, 143.

¹⁵² Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 3.

himself to death from the high level bridge to the street pavement 125 feet below."¹⁵³ Citing a New Jersey newspaper, Epstein discussed an aging man who fell ill because of anxiety. Faced with no jobs, savings, or relatives for support, two older brothers who lived together in Camden were about to be sent "to the almshouse at Blackwood." One of the men, Jacob, "heartbroken because he had to go to the almshouse," became very sick. He soon died. "As age crept upon them," the newspaper reported, "they found themselves unable to obtain work, but they eked out their slender savings until the final penny was gone. Arrangements were made to have them sent to the almshouse." When Jacob died soon after, "His brother went to the almshouse alone."¹⁵⁴ If these men had savings or a reliable pension from a company or the state, they would be able to enjoy their status as industrial veterans. They could enjoy a just and deserved reward after a lifetime of hard work.

While *Facing Old Age* dominated the field of social provision and aging during the early 1920s, Abraham Epstein was not the first to talk about "the problem of the old man." He cited earlier scholars such as Lee Welling Squier and Isaac Max Rubinow. Squier, who wrote a study of "old age dependency" and "the pension movement" during the 1910s, wrote that unemployment "is one of the misfortunes of the wage-earner in our country." As a result, older men could not "provide for old age." Squier worried that "thousands . . . of more or less skilled workmen are thrown out of employment, or are compelled to change occupation with decreasing opportunities for saving against the demands of old age."¹⁵⁵ Rubinow, an older acquaintance of

¹⁵³ Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 53. In 1923, the *Boston Daily Globe* reported that an aging man had committed suicide to avoid the poorhouse. He was seventy-eight, and he could no longer afford the cost of his home. See "Prefers Death to Poorhouse," *Boston Daily Globe*, 20 May 1923, 15.

¹⁵⁴ Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 52.

¹⁵⁵ Lee Welling Squier, *Old Age Dependency in the United States: A Complete Survey of the Pension*

Epstein, wrote about "The Old Man's Problem in Modern Industry" in his 1913 study, *Social Insurance, with Special Reference to American Conditions*. He argued, as Epstein would, that "modern civilization on its industrial side has created the very grave problem of superannuation--the problem of the jobless, incomeless, and propertyless old man of fifty."¹⁵⁶ While Epstein's forerunners established "the problem of the old man" as a social problem, Epstein's timing pushed his work to the fore.

Abraham Epstein organized his work around aging men's struggles, but his books and articles also discussed the impact of old age poverty on women. *Facing Old Age* certainly centered on "the problem of the old *man*," but Epstein often touched upon women's troubles with the economics of "growing old." In the process, his book highlights the gender biases in discussions of the aged during the early 1920s. Abraham Epstein constructed women in the role of the victimized housewife. Wives suffered because employers discriminated against husbands. Epstein's goal was to evoke public sympathy. Age discrimination affected not only men but also their wives, thereby undermining the sanctity of the family. He lamented the "break-up of the family unit in modern society." Working men and wives moved frequently, constantly looking for new jobs. As a result, he argued, men and women bore fewer children and could not count on dependents for support when they reached old age. "With increasing rapidity home-ties and family solidarity are being broken," Epstein wrote.¹⁵⁷ Industry degraded manhood and womanhood by undermining work and family.

Movement (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912), 35.

¹⁵⁶ Isaac M. Rubinow, *Social Insurance, with Special Reference to American Conditions* (New York: Henry Holt, 1913), 301-302.

¹⁵⁷ Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 6.

Women figured awkwardly in *Facing Old Age*. While Epstein discussed "men and women," he did not mean both as waged workers. In one sentence he might write, "Today, most men and women are dependent upon their daily toil for their daily bread." However, in the next he would state, "First, the wage-earner is confronted with the fact of being compelled to discontinue work much earlier in life than should be necessary . . . because *he* is unable to maintain the pace necessary in modern production."¹⁵⁸ "Growing old" concerned Epstein because it menaced men's economic authority. *Facing Old Age* proved to be a defining discussion of aging and social provision.

Beginning in 1923, the new American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL) took up "the problem of the old man." Building on Epstein's influential arguments, the AALL blamed age discrimination for older Americans' economic troubles. Frank E. Hering criticized Henry Ford and the rise of mass production industry as a root cause: "Mr. Ford . . . demands only the young, the healthy, the adaptable, the supple of limb." Hering lamented that "for the aged worker to find new employment is not an easy matter; for he is wanted nowhere." In industry, "growing old" meant the end of manhood. "Independence and prosperity in old age are most difficult achievements for the wage-earner," Hering wrote. "Because he is constantly subjected to forces over which he has no control, and his destinies are shaped by circumstances not of his own making."¹⁵⁹

Scholars, unionists, and reformers often held conventions to discuss "the problem of the old man," and they often cited mass production and the new "machine era" as the principal

¹⁵⁸ Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 2, 6. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁹ Frank E. Hering, "Awakening Interest in Old Age Protection," *American Labor Legislation Review*, June 1923, 140.

causes of old age poverty and dependency. During the late 1920s, leading members of the American Federation of Labor and various reform organizations often held meetings where they called attention to the problem of age discrimination and demanded pensions from the state for older men and women. In New York City during 1928, Isaac M. Rubinow (who then worked for the Jewish Welfare Society of Philadelphia), Thomas Kennedy of the United Mine Workers (UMW), James H. Maurer (of the Pennsylvania State Federation of Labor), and Edward B. Lyman of the New York Home for the Aged of the Protestant Episcopal Church, among others, spoke at a conference on the ways churches could help combat old age poverty. They concluded the "machine age is tending to make an increasing percentage of persons dependent, even before they have attained the beginning of old age." Lyman noted that age discrimination was a tragic injustice in an era when science and technology had so directly contributed to longer life spans and improved living conditions: "Because of modern medical hygiene, sanitation and mental development, science on one hand gives man a chance to live longer than his forefathers did, but on the other hand science, operating through industry and commerce, produces the factory hand, railroad worker and thousands of others who at 50 or 55 are branded too old for the job and left to shift with the 'has beens' and the 'never weres.'"¹⁶⁰

Because there were few economic protections for aging men, observers believed that manhood ended abruptly in later life. The jarring loss of manliness that accompanied sudden unemployment constituted a key reason why experts wrote about pensions with such urgency. Numerous essays in the *American Labor Legislation Review* argued that working men faced too many dangers. "The risks of sickness, accident, unemployment, and business failure are so

¹⁶⁰ "Workers Discarded Too Young, He Says," *New York Times*, 11 April 1928, 8.

great," John A. Lapp argued, "that a man is fortunate indeed who finds his way to safety amidst these shoals to the haven of economic security in old age." Lapp argued that many men would someday lose everything; the loss of a job, a medical condition, or an accident could suddenly rob men of the ability to work. They would be relegated to an impoverished old age: no property, work, savings, or pensions.¹⁶¹ Working men and experts argued that the problem of old age poverty took shape before a man ever reached old age. Old age poverty followed a lifetime of unsuccessful struggle and effort. Periods of unemployment, low wages, and superannuation made working-class men worry about what they would find in their twilight years. A steelworker in Kansas City, Missouri, argued "it is a deplorable fact that very few of us ever arrive at that period of our lives that we can retire from the daily grind."¹⁶² Men needed to keep working.

The AALL demanded that aging working-class men should be entitled to the breadwinner role in old age. The group argued against employer ageism because it threatened masculinity. Men mattered most to reformers. After a lifetime of "making" the wealth of the country, older men deserved a stable old age. Aging working men, John A. Lapp argued, were fighting a losing battle with industry: "Men are no longer able by self-reliance to insure themselves against the calamities which befall."¹⁶³ By highlighting old age poverty as a man's struggle, experts reaffirmed working-class manhood.

¹⁶¹ John A. Lapp, "The Growing Insistence Upon Pensions Instead of Institutional Care for Aged Dependents," *American Labor Legislation Review*, March 1925, 24.

¹⁶² RD Scrom, Report of Blue Valley Lodge, No. 2, MO, *Amalgamated Journal*, 12 March 1925, 11.

¹⁶³ Lapp, "Growing Insistence Upon Pensions," 24.

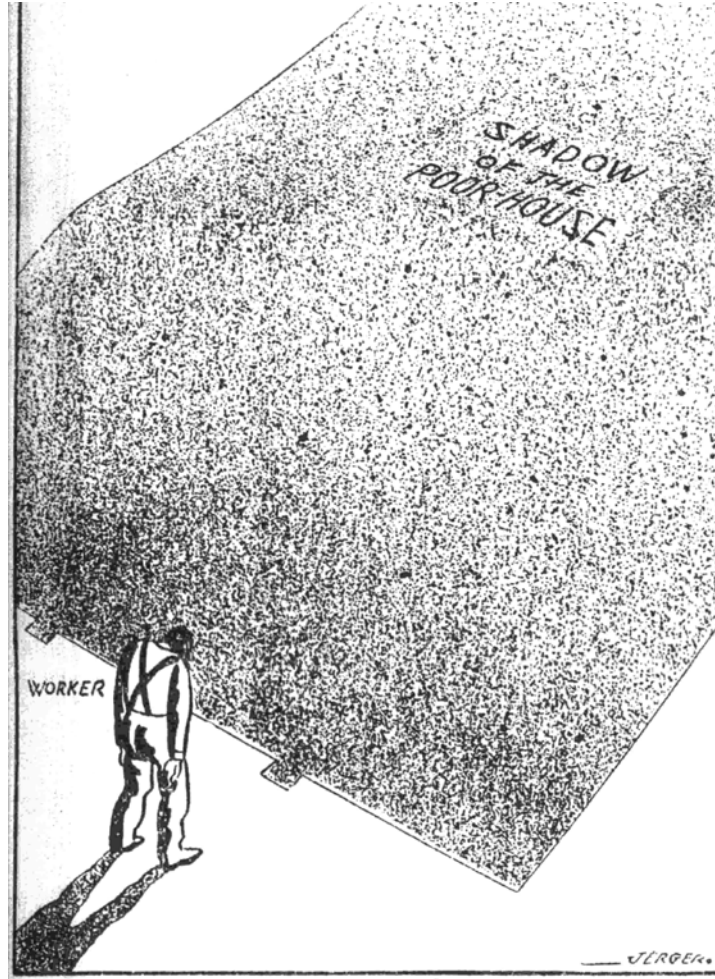


Figure 2. "A Real Haunted House," *American Labor Legislation Review*, June 1929, 153

In 1929, an illustration in the *American Labor Legislation Review* showed an older working man in his overalls, standing with his shoulders slumped in front of the shadow of the poorhouse. It loomed large before him, nearly touching his feet. Unless he received immediate aid, he would not be able to hold out for much longer (See Figure 2). In another, a series of

aging men stood in a long line as the employer's large hand arbitrarily drew a line at the age of forty.¹⁶⁴

During the late 1920s, Epstein published a new book and several major articles. His new work, delivered to a receptive audience of scholars, lobbyists, and politicians, furthered awareness of "growing old" as a threat to masculinity and reaffirmed the primacy of the aging male breadwinner in reform politics. Epstein published *The Challenge of the Aged* in 1928, a synthesis of two decade's worth of research on old age poverty. *The Challenge of the Aged* was a heavy hitting, sternly argued book. He cited study after study, passionately arguing once again that industrialization and age discrimination undermined manhood. Epstein thundered about the evils of the poorhouse, and the limited impact of the state pension movement.

The reception of the new book illustrated how Epstein defined the field. Jane Addams of Hull House in Chicago wrote a special introduction for *The Challenge of the Aged*.¹⁶⁵ At this time, Epstein cultivated relationships with major politicians such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Roosevelt certainly knew Epstein's books and essays, and he consulted with Epstein regarding pension legislation in New York.¹⁶⁶ Epstein, in fact, dedicated *The Challenge of the Aged* to Roosevelt. It was also very likely that Eleanor Roosevelt knew a great deal about Epstein's work. Epstein pointed toward state pensions as the way to resolve "the problem of the old man." Pensions, scholars argued, insured that "the independence of the veteran or his widow is

¹⁶⁴ "Drawn Blindly," *American Labor Legislation Review*, June 1930, 213.

¹⁶⁵ Jane Addams, "Introduction," in Epstein, *Challenge of the Aged*, xi.

¹⁶⁶ Leotta, "Abraham Epstein," 368-369; Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 80.

maintained."¹⁶⁷ To further underscore his prominence, workers themselves knew Epstein's work. In the *New York Times*, Epstein referred to letters he received from unemployed middle-aged men. In one example that Epstein mentioned, a weary older man reported that hiring age limits had consistently kept him out of work.¹⁶⁸

In addition to experts' writings, a grassroots pension movement took shape in the United States. The Fraternal Order of Eagles (FOE), which claimed nearly half a million members by 1923, lobbied extensively on behalf of state old age pensions for working men. They worked to highlight old age as a serious problem that primarily affected men. The FOE organization vowed to uphold the independence of the patriarchal family in old age. Frank E. Hering -- the chairman of the Fraternity's pension commission -- wrote, "It is unjust and cruel to separate and send to the poorhouse a man and his wife after thirty or forty industrious years together, just because industry has no further use for them." After all, "the Fraternity is built basically upon the home and is dedicated to promoting the welfare and integrity of that institution."¹⁶⁹ Hering and the FOE boasted of their efforts to address "the problem of the old man." In addition to organizing 2,100 clubs throughout the US, the FOE lobbied politicians and sent letters to newspapers. "Perhaps no social cause in the United States ever had more effective championship," Hering argued.¹⁷⁰

Epstein, the AALL, and the FOE laid the groundwork for the ways Americans thought about pensions during the interwar period. Pensions for the aged were envisioned as ways to

¹⁶⁷ Epstein, *Challenge of the Aged*, 229.

¹⁶⁸ Abraham Epstein, "Old Age Pensions," *New York Times*, 13 February 1928, 18.

¹⁶⁹ Hering, "Awakening Interest," 143-144.

¹⁷⁰ Hering, "Awakening Interest," 144.

reconcile gender and "growing old." "The problem of the old man" was made urgent by the lack of resources for older men and women. It was unappealing for men to fall back on their children or institutionalization. Men did not want to admit "dependence," which was unmanly. They wanted independence: the ability to maintain their own homes, provided for and presided over by themselves. The state, activists argued, needed to take up the problem of the old age economic support.

3.2 SAVINGS AND FAMILIES

Experts attacked "the problem of the old man" on two levels. First, they lamented the lack of economic resources men and their wives could depend on. Families' lack of savings, employment, and assets, as well as the limited scope of workplace pensions insured that many older men would struggle. Second, critics bemoaned the lack of state resources for older men and women. Workers, wives, and experts were moving away from "voluntarism." Because of the urgency experts attached to "the problem of the old man," Americans increasingly believed that older laborers could not resolve their problems on their own.¹⁷¹ They needed the state. John R. Commons and John B. Andrews's remarks about older workers' problems in 1916 proved to be prophetic: "Failing health, inability to find employment, lack of means, often absence of

¹⁷¹ Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, 116-117. In labor and working-class history, scholars generally argue that workers first "turned towards the state" during the Great Depression. My work suggests that this began during the 1920s, if not earlier. See Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

friends willing or able to help him -- such is the prospect which confronts, in the great majority of cases, the aged worker."¹⁷²

Working-class men's problems with savings were a common refrain in discussions of state pensions. While most would not secure it, working-class men wanted a "competence": enough savings, earned through labor, to support a man and his wife in old age. In Washington, Pennsylvania, steelworker Bill G. Boswell wrote that all working men wanted "[a] competence against old age. In other words, the position of labor is this: A worker who works so many hours a day regularly, for such a number of years regularly, at such and such a steady useful job, is entitled to receive in return, his political and religious independence. All the necessaries and a fair share of the luxuries of life, reasonable opportunities for his family, a fair proportion of recreation, and an independent old age."¹⁷³

Men worried that most industrial employers would never provide the kind of employment and wages that were necessary for savings. Otto P. Deluse, president of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, argued that industry's refusal to provide sufficient earnings and savings justified arguments on behalf of state pensions.¹⁷⁴ A man in Tennessee wrote that aging workers "have all worked hard and have not got wages enough for their work." RD Scrom, a steelworker in Kansas City, criticized the ways industry denied men long-term economic stability. He argued that at the age of 55, 30 men in 100 were "dependent." Ten years later, 54 men would be

¹⁷² John R. Commons and John B. Andrews, *Principles of Labor Legislation* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1916), 398.

¹⁷³ Bill G. Boswell, Report of Washington Lodge, No. 5, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 17 April 1919, 17.

¹⁷⁴ Otto P. Deluse, "Old Age Pensions," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 15 July 1925, 8.

dependent. Scrom concluded that a man had the "odds against him."¹⁷⁵ Despite a lifetime of hard work, "very few of us ever arrive at that period of our lives that we can retire from the daily grind."¹⁷⁶ Men would not hold onto the male breadwinner role, as economic survival was tenuous. A man could not expect to be "independent in his declining years after long years of servitude to his master 'Industry.'"¹⁷⁷

Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd encountered men and their wives who worried about savings. High prices and rents made it difficult for working-class families to build their net worth.¹⁷⁸ On average, industrial workers made less than \$2,000 annually, making it difficult to build substantial savings.¹⁷⁹ A woman in Muncie, Indiana, whose husband was a forty-six year old machinist noted, "I worry about what we'll do when he gets older and isn't wanted at the factories and I am unable to go to work . . . we can't seem to save any money for that time." Another wife, whose husband was a pattern maker, told interviewers that her household was "not saving a penny, but we are saving [for] our boys." This wife and husband could not save for themselves; they spent a large portion of their earnings on their sons' education.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁵ JG Hansell, Report of Knoxville No. 1, Tenn., *Amalgamated Journal*, 5 December 1918, 3; RD Scrom, Report of Blue Valley Lodge, No. 2, MO, *Amalgamated Journal*, 12 January 1928, 11.

¹⁷⁶ RD Scrom, Report of Blue Valley Lodge, No. 2, MO, *Amalgamated Journal*, 12 March 1925, 11.

¹⁷⁷ Scrom, Report of Blue Valley Lodge (1928), 11.

¹⁷⁸ Frank E. Hering, "Awakening Interest in Old Age Protection," *American Labor Legislation Review*, June 1923, 140; Abraham Epstein, "Old Age Pensions," *American Labor Legislation Review*, December 1922, 225; "Worker Paying for Old-Age Relief," *New York Times*, 19 September 1929, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Deluse, "Old Age Pensions," 8.

¹⁸⁰ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in American Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1929), 34-35.

Sickness undermined many older working-class men's ability to work. Experts first talked seriously about this problem during the Progressive Era. In New York City during the 1910s, social workers knew an aging man who struggled with asthma. And now that he was getting older, his body was failing him. Earlier, he could secure work as a mason and a plasterer, but not anymore. "It is pathetic," a social worker wrote, "to see his various signs advertising his trade, because of course [*sic*] he can't be very competent now because of his failing strength and poor breathing, and, besides, the present-day demand is for younger men, who will work quickly. . . ."¹⁸¹ During the 1920s, a survey of older men's employability in Massachusetts revealed that illness constituted the main reason why men could not work in their later years. Of 2,195 men surveyed over the age of 65, the state noted that "chronic illness," rheumatism, and "old age," among other problems, sidelined the majority. Of those men who no longer sought work, "old age" was cited as the main reason for their retirement.¹⁸²

Illness and disease menaced older peoples' savings. Working-class men and women could lose their savings if they became ill. Doctor and pharmacists' bills destroyed bank accounts. Abraham Epstein concluded this was a common problem: "Even if a workman is fortunate enough to receive a fairly high wage, and by economy and self-denial succeeds in setting aside a small part of his earnings, it not infrequently happens that serious illness besets the family and the entire savings are wiped out after the payment of the doctor and druggist's bills."¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Mabel Louise Nassau, *Old Age Poverty in Greenwich Village* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1915) 29.

¹⁸² "Extent, Distribution, and Causes of Old Age Dependency," *Monthly Labor Review*, April 1930, 14-15.

¹⁸³ Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 142.

Unemployment further hindered men's abilities to save. Studies of employment revealed substantial unemployment. Unemployment sometimes reached 10 percent during the 1920s. In 1924-1925, unemployment reached 13 percent.¹⁸⁴ In Muncie, Indiana, only 38 percent of households worked steadily for the first 8 months of 1924. Technological and seasonal unemployment were problems created by industry. Between 1920 and 1929, technological change eliminated over 3 million jobs. Over 1 million unemployed workers were not reabsorbed into the economy.¹⁸⁵ Abraham Epstein wrote about an unemployed man in New York City who could not find a new job -- even after he repeatedly applied for assistance at an employment agency. The group could not place the struggling man in a new occupation.¹⁸⁶

Working men and women did not have a lot of money in the bank as they approached old age. At the age of 65, a man in the 1920s might live 10 more years. A man might need \$8,000 in assets to cover the rest of his life. However, studies showed that most men did not have the assets to maintain a subsistence income. For example, studies conducted by the Massachusetts Commission on Pensions and the pro-business National Civic Federation discovered that 59.2 and 52.4 percent of the persons they studied owned property valued at less than \$5,000.¹⁸⁷ Most men would not have sufficient assets to live on if they could not find work, secure a pension, rely on children, or depend on charity.

¹⁸⁴ Irving Bernstein, *The Lean Years: A History of the American Worker, 1920-1933* (1960; reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 59.

¹⁸⁵ Bernstein, *Lean Years*, 60.

¹⁸⁶ Epstein, "Old Age Pensions," 18.

¹⁸⁷ Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, "The Problem of the Industrially Old Worker," in *Labor's Risks and Social Insurance* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1938), 360-361.

Working men and their wives did not want to depend on their children. Men, experts noted, worried about dependence. Parents *and* children struggled to get by in a mass consumer economy, and older parents did not want to burden their kids' budgets with extra mouths to feed. "We can't expect our children to support us," a working-class housewife in Muncie proclaimed.¹⁸⁸ Men and women wanted to maintain their own households in old age. For men, this was paramount. An independent household provided by the male breadwinner was a major component of masculinity. For instance, social workers in 1920s New York City wanted a poor older couple to move in with their children. The man and woman sternly refused. According to *Survey*, the couple "would be better off in the homes of their children, but the man's aversion to confinement and a woman's love for things domestic are holding them to their own small homes, where they can feel responsibility in at least one aspect of their seemingly useless lives."¹⁸⁹ The man and woman wanted to live on their own terms -- poverty or not.

Attitudes about family were changing during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, contributing to aging men and women's desires for independent households. Instead of extended families living under one roof, men and women now emphasized the smaller (and more independent) nuclear family. SJ Kleinberg points out that most "older people . . . did not reside with their children." In Pittsburgh, one old couple, descending into extreme poverty, clung to their home. Ultimately, however, they lost the house. The older man was forced to enter a charity hospital.¹⁹⁰ Depending on family would not resolve "the problem of the old man." Older

¹⁸⁸ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 34. See also "Worker Paying for Old-Age Relief," 14.

¹⁸⁹ Sonia Kay and Irma Rittenhouse, "Why Are the Aged Poor?" *Survey*, 1 September 1930, 471.

¹⁹⁰ SJ Kleinberg, *The Shadow of the Mills: Working-Class Families in Pittsburgh, 1870-1907* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 251, 252.

men insisted on maintaining their own households, even in the face of unemployment and sickness. Furthermore, if they lacked resources, working-class sons and daughters would struggle to support aged parents. Moving in with children implied the addition of a new burden on the younger generation's family.

Some prominent citizens naively encouraged older working-class men to build their own homes, arguing that home ownership constituted the "best form of old-age pension." George A. Martin, president of the Railroad Cooperative Building and Loan Association, told the *New York Times* that the "beginning of each man's provision for his sunset years should be a home of his own." If men could buy their own houses in their younger years, he concluded, they could garnish greater savings in old age. They could benefit from living "rent free" in later life -- a time when aging men and women would need their savings the most. Despite a passion for homeownership, Martin failed to explain how older men and women, especially of working class backgrounds, could acquire the capital needed to buy a house.¹⁹¹ Men and woman certainly wanted their own homes, but New Era economic realities (particularly age discrimination in industry) undermined many working-class men and women's abilities to save.

3.3 INDUSTRIAL PENSIONS

Industrial pensions provided another means of possible support. Before the Great Depression, industrial pensions were concentrated in railroads, steel, public utilities, and oil.¹⁹² The

¹⁹¹ "A Man's Home Called Best Old-Age Pension," *New York Times*, 7 April 1929, 22.

¹⁹² Klein, *For All These Rights*, 57-63.

institution of pension plans mostly occurred during the height of the Progressive Era, especially in years between 1911 and 1920. Pension scholar Murray Webb Latimer counted 227 plans. During the twenties, however, the expansion of industrial pensions slowed.¹⁹³ Most men and women would not work at a pensioning firm. Men and women in commercial agriculture and domestic service, for instance, never saw a workplace pension. And others, such as autoworkers, would not earn pensions until the 1950s. In 1927, a mere 16 percent of the men employed in manufacturing, mining, office work, and transportation could expect a pension from their employers. Overall, only 100,000 Americans (6 percent) received a workplace pension out of an estimated 1.8 million "dependent aged" men and women over the age of 65.¹⁹⁴

Furthermore, industrial pensions were problematic in more ways than their limited coverage. While corporate pension programs could be interpreted as an example of employer altruism on behalf of the working class, they functioned in several ways as part of employers' efforts to regulate and control the early-twentieth century industrial workplace. In the era of rationalization, employers used pension plans to dictate the tone of labor-management relations, offset industrial unionism, and to remove outmoded (older) men. Companies such as steel firms, who instituted several high-profile pension plans in the early 1900s, hoped their pensions would give management a way to better administer the workforce. An employer told pension scholar Gorton James that his firm used pensions to keep workers under control. If workers complained or caused trouble, they jeopardized their pension eligibility. The manager noted he could he

¹⁹³ Murray Webb Latimer, *Industrial Pensions in the United States and Canada* (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1932), 41-42.

¹⁹⁴ "Problem of Old-Age Pensions in Industry," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1927, 518.

"could not get away with" his policies without the "aid" of the pension.¹⁹⁵ Some aging men at the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company's coal mining division insisted the company "has put a rope around our necks. We are now over forty-five and we can't say anything."¹⁹⁶ If they spoke out against company policies, the men risked the loss of their pensions.

Taking a hard line against mass production industries such as steel, Gorton James pointed out that companies who featured a pension program did not often pay out to qualified workmen. While humane treatment of the aged and rewarding long years of service represented the pleasant public face of corporate pensions, most firms never delivered on their promises on a consistent basis. A man who labored for a pensioning firm from the ages of 45 to age 65 would ideally receive his benefits. However, this was rare. If a worker lost his job because of a firing or a layoff, he would receive nothing--no matter how close to meeting the requirements. "The worker," James argued, "does not receive a penny" even if he fulfilled "95 per cent of the time required."¹⁹⁷

Pension plans were loaded with rules regarding length of service. Layoffs, strikes, seasonal unemployment, and technological unemployment were common, and men were often denied benefits. It was unlikely that a man could put in the time required -- a reality that most working men faced. Lay-offs or firings robbed the older man of his pension, since companies

¹⁹⁵ Gorton James, "The Problem of the Old Man," *Survey*, 16 September 1921, 673, 674. See also Klein, *For All These Rights*, 61.

¹⁹⁶ Ben M. Selekman and Mary Van Kleeck, *Employes' Representation in Coal Mines: A Study of the Industrial Representation Plan of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1924), 198-199.

¹⁹⁷ James, "Problem of the Old Man," 673.

generally controlled their pension funds with strict rules regarding length of service.¹⁹⁸ An observer of industry sarcastically summarized that a man could receive his pension

[i]f you remain with this company throughout your productive lifetime; if you do not die before the retirement age; if you are not discharged, or laid off for an extended period; if you are not refused a pension as a matter of discipline; if the company is in business; and if the company does not decide to abandon the plan, you receive a pension at the age of _____, subject to the contingency of its discontinuance or reduction after it has been entered upon.¹⁹⁹

Regulations often mandated at least 20 years of uninterrupted service, and by 1930, as experts such as Abraham Epstein pointed out, only 3.4 percent of working-class men lasted 20 years with a pensioning firm.²⁰⁰

Steel workers, for example, lamented that so few of them ever received pensions. At US Steel, the largest American steel company, unskilled and semiskilled workers constituted 75 percent of the men on the payroll, but only 20 percent of them received pensions.²⁰¹ Also, the number of pensions at the firm declined after 1915. Too many men were qualifying for eligibility. In 1915, 1.6 percent of the employees collected pensions. This number continued to decline. In 1919, only 1.2 percent of the workers received benefits.²⁰² During 1915, US Steel revised its policies. Earlier, US Steel allowed workers to collect with 20 years of seniority and

¹⁹⁸ James, "Problem of the Old Man," 673-674; Klein, *For All These Rights*, 59.

¹⁹⁹ Quoted in Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 195.

²⁰⁰ See Abraham Epstein, "Old Age Pensions," *New York Times*, 13 February 1928, 18. Statistic reported in Harry A. Millis and Royal E. Montgomery, "The Problem of the Industrially Old Worker," in *Labor's Risks and Social Insurance* (New York, 1938), 370.

²⁰¹ Klein, *For All These Rights*, 59.

²⁰² Rees, "Managing the Mills," 174.

the age of 60. In 1915, the company raised the age to 65 and raised the service requirement to 25 years.²⁰³ Thus, men would have to hold on even longer to receive their benefits. It was so unusual for older men to receive their pensions that individual retirements sometimes made the pages of the *Amalgamated Journal*. In 1924, James Sayers, a "ruffer" with over forty-five

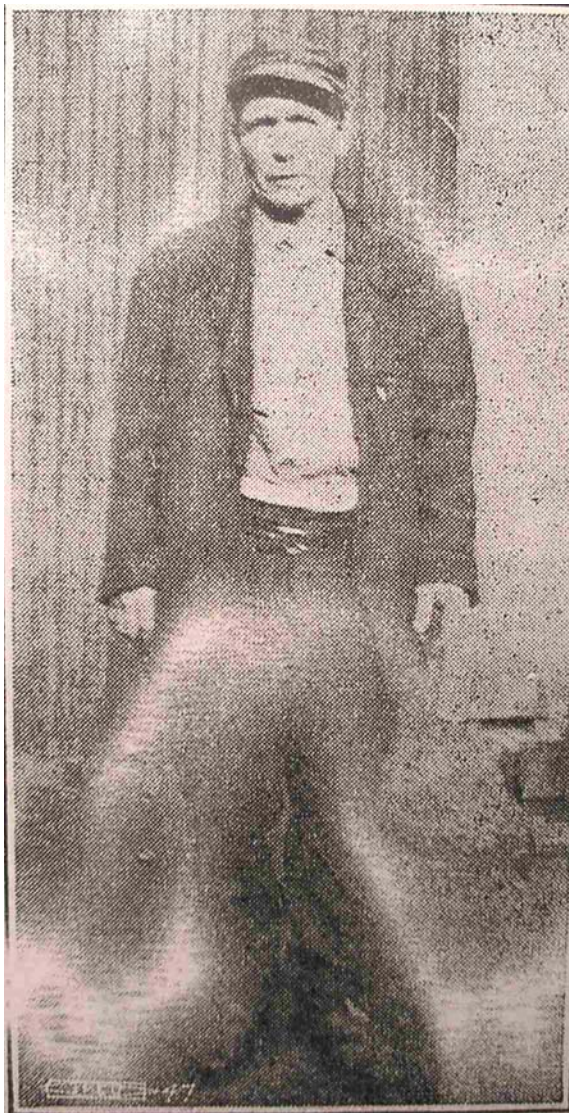


Figure 3. "James Sayers Retired After 45 Years' Service," *Amalgamated Journal*, 25 September 1924, 5.

²⁰³ Rees, "Managing the Mills," 173.

years of experience in Canadian and American steel mills, received a rare pension from the Steel Company of Canada in Hamilton, Ontario (See Figure 3).

For working men who actually received a pension from their firm, the amount of money was typically small. At US Steel, men received, on average, 25 percent of their monthly earnings as workers. For example, a man who received 60 dollars per month in wages walked out the door upon retirement with an income of 15 dollars per month.²⁰⁴ At another company, men who earned over 83 dollars per month retired with a pension of 25 dollars.²⁰⁵ While company pensions provided *some* form of economic support, they forced retired men and women to enact major lifestyle changes. An older couple on a pension might very likely need to give up their house (if they owned one) and reduce expenditures.

Despite the imperfections of company plans, men appreciated the pension concept. They clearly recognized the need for economic support in later life. As early as the 1910s, James D. Rose argues that men at the US Steel facility in Duquesne "expected to retire" with company pensions.²⁰⁶ In 1929, steelworker John A. Powell wrote that he had "the right to expect from my employer, economic security" when he could no longer work in old age.²⁰⁷ Because of difficult rules, however, men struggled to keep their pensions. If a man quit his job or struck, he jeopardized his eligibility. Instead, some men tried to enhance their work situation without quitting or striking. For instance, Andy Chervenak who worked for US Steel in Duquesne

²⁰⁴ Charles A. Gulick, *Labor Policy of the United States Steel Corporation* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1924), 177.

²⁰⁵ AW MacDonald, "The Problem of Pensions," *Personnel*, May 1929, 15.

²⁰⁶ James D. Rose, *Duquesne and the Rise of Steel Unionism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 31.

²⁰⁷ John A. Powell, "Through the Eyes of the Worker," *Amalgamated Journal*, 26 September 1929, 3.

transferred from the open hearth to the conditioning department. Other men transferred to different US Steel mills. William J. Smith worked in Duquesne, Homestead, and Clairton between 1913 and 1931 to protect his pension.²⁰⁸ Men wanted industry pensions, despite the imperfections. They tried to protect them.

3.4 THE POORHOUSE

Institutionalization provided another means of possible support for aging men and women. However, state-run institutions, known as "poorhouses," "poor farms," and "almshouses," were the most problematic and undesirable source of support. Only after all other means had been exhausted or were completely unavailable might an older man or woman seek residence at a state-run poorhouse or poor farm. While the number of poorhouse residents increased during the 1920s, especially among older men, the number of aging men and women who entered state-run institutions was small. By 1925, over 2,183 state-run institutions throughout the country served an "inmate" population of only 85,889, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Department of Labor.²⁰⁹ The state institution was generally under-funded, poorly staffed, and offered few services. As a symbol, the poorhouse captured central themes in the discourses on aging, gender, and work: the destruction of marriage and family; the unmanliness of dependence; the degradation of femininity; and the failure of industry to provide men and families with

²⁰⁸ Rose, *Duquesne*, 50.

²⁰⁹ See "Shameful Waste and Inhumanity of American Poorhouses Shown in Government Report," *American Labor Legislation Review*, December 1925, 360. For discussions of men's numerical prominence in the state-run institutions, see Epstein, *Challenge of the Aged*, 37-38.

adequate funds for old age. Otto P. Deluse condemned poorhouses as places of "degradation" and "cruelty," dismissing them as "antiquated."²¹⁰ The US Bureau of Labor Statistics lamented the "dilapidation, inadequacy, and even indecency" it found in state-run institutions; in the 1920s, the Bureau argued there was "no sadder chapter in American social history than the callous neglect in dehumanized poorhouses."²¹¹

Men despised the poorhouse. The state-run institutions bore the imprint of stigmatization, since the homes housed (in addition to the aged) "Paupers, insane, idiots, feeble-minded, blind, deaf mutes, drunkards, drug addicts, sufferers from chronic diseases, criminals, epileptics, children, prostitutes, mothers of illegitimate children."²¹² Abraham Epstein described poorhouses as, put simply, "far from inviting." Men and women despised poorhouses; a report from Nevada noted that older men and women preferred starvation.²¹³

Studies conducted in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Indiana showed that most poorhouse residents were male and working class. The 1923 Federal Census of Paupers found 2 men for every 1 woman in poorhouses. In Massachusetts, 2/3 of almshouse "inmates" were men. Furthermore, of the 2,798 men in Massachusetts' institutions, over 2,108 (77.5 percent) worked previously in manufacturing. In Pennsylvania and Indiana, over 75 percent of poorhouse

²¹⁰ Deluse, "Old Age Pensions," 8.

²¹¹ Quoted in Lubove, *Struggle for Social Security*, 133-134.

²¹² "Poorhouses: 'The Shame of the States,'" *American Labor Legislation Review*, September 1926, 244.

²¹³ "Official Report Tells Why Old Age Pensions Are Needed," *American Labor Legislation Review*, September 1925, 265; Epstein, *Facing Old Age*, 53

residents were men.²¹⁴ The poorhouse symbolized male vulnerability; there was some basis for men's worries. More and more men seemed destined for state-run institutions. "Thus after a lifetime of toil in a modern factory," Epstein wrote, "with physical vigor gone, children and relatives either scattered or dead, the aged wage-earner . . . can hardly escape falling dependent."²¹⁵

Anxieties about masculinity and independence fueled discussions of the poorhouse. In 1926, Hugo the Third complained that unions, then in decline, "allow our old men to go to the county home, commonly called the poorhouse."²¹⁶ Older men could lose their jobs and need help from a state institution. James M. Lynch, president of the International Typographical Union, wrote in 1925 that poorhouses loomed as a symbol of male suffering. The poorhouse brought "human grief, humiliation and degradation."²¹⁷ Experts, however, linked their fears of male vulnerability to the weakness of the family. Experts believed institutionalization broke up families by sending older fathers (and mothers) away. "To tear a veteran of industry away from wife or children or cronies," John B. Andrews noted, "after a lifetime of honest toil and commit him to the uncertain care of strangers in a strange place is so inhuman an aspect of our industrial civilization that it is certain to be everywhere remedied."²¹⁸

²¹⁴ Massachusetts Commission on Pensions, *Report on Old Age Pensions* (Boston: Commission on Pensions, 1925), Table 9, p. 87; Abraham Epstein, *The Challenge of the Aged* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928), 37-38, 45-46.

²¹⁵ Epstein, *Challenged of the Aged*, 59.

²¹⁶ Hugo the Third, Report of Crescent Lodge No. 8, WV, *Amalgamated Journal*, 7 October 1926, 20.

²¹⁷ "Pensions are Superior to Poorhouses," *American Labor Legislation Review*, September 1925, 263.

²¹⁸ "Old Age Pension Legislation Found Economical and Humane," *American Labor Legislation Review*, December 1924, 287.

Observers worried the vulnerability of older men and women signaled the decline of the family. The majority of poorhouse residents, they noted, were single, widowed, and/or without children. According to the 1923 census report on "paupers," 53.7 percent of the male poorhouse population was unmarried. The majority of women were also single (42.1 percent). Men and women who went to the poorhouse did not, by and large, have relatives who could help them. A 1919 report from the Pennsylvania Old Age Pension Commission noted, "Having no children of their own, their parents dead, and in many cases, with few relatives to be called upon, these paupers seek the institution as the last resort for shelter and nourishment."²¹⁹ The majority of these widows were wives of men who worked in industry. Of 843 widows in Massachusetts poorhouses, 540 (83.5 percent) were formerly married to industrial workers.²²⁰

Institutionalization, experts argued, also broke up older married couples because of sex segregation at many homes. In Pennsylvania during 1923, the chairman of the Pennsylvania Old Age Pension Commission, John H. Maurer, visited a poor farm in Berkshire County. In the *American Labor Legislation Review*, Maurer wrote that he met a poor older couple seeking admittance. He described to the reform community a dramatic story of the state's insensitivity towards the gender sensibilities of everyday men and women. The husband and wife, whose names were John and Mary, told the superintendent they "have a permit to enter the poor farm." After making introductions, the administrator told John, "You go to the building over there, and Mary, you go to that building over there." John was shocked. "What!" he cried. "After living together under the same roof for fifty years are we now to going to be separated?" The

²¹⁹ Epstein, *Challenge of the Aged*, 39-40.

²²⁰ Massachusetts Commission on Pensions, *Report on Old Age Pensions*, table 11, p. 89.

superintendent coolly told them, "Those are the rules. We cannot mix up the sexes in these institutions."²²¹ Maurer reconstructed the incident as a tragic example of how poorhouses jeopardized the sanctity of marriage. In a 1927 letter to the *New York Times*, a man argued that it "is doubtful if the separation of death is more trying, or even as trying, as the compulsory separation on entering the poorhouse." Another man concurred: "I can conceive of no sadder fate than that of the old couple who have faced life's problems together, and who have known no greater happiness than the joy of their mutual companionship, being forced to separate at the time when they have no one but each other: the man to wither away in an institution for men and the woman to grieve out her heart in a home for women."²²²

Anxieties about the destruction of femininity informed another gender component of poorhouse critiques. Discussions of poor grandmothers and older wives whose husbands were out of work, ill, or institutionalized appeared in the *American Labor Legislation Review* and *The Survey*. The degradation of aged women provided powerful ammunition for critics to use against employers and politicians. How could employers rob older men of their jobs, thus stealing bread from the mouths of fathers *and mothers*? And how could the state force older men and women into poor and inadequate institutions--and then separate them from one another? Experts sometimes went out of their way to talk about frightened older women who committed suicide. When Elizabeth Woods of Massachusetts faced the prospect of moving to an "old ladies' home," she "poured illuminating gas in her mouth" and killed herself.²²³

²²¹ "The Tragedy of Old Age," *American Labor Legislation Review*, December 1923, 261.

²²² John Gray, "National Old Age Pensions," *New York Times*, 29 May 1927, 12; George W. Wickersham, "A Home for the Aged," *New York Times*, 1 December 1928, 10.

²²³ "Old Age Pension Legislation," *American Labor Legislation Review*, June 1928, 169.

The press also discussed suicides that involved both husband and wife, underscoring men and women's opposition to the poorhouse system. In 1927, a New Jersey woman discovered that her neighbors (a couple in their eighties, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick O'Rourke) had committed suicide. When she went to check on the couple as she did each morning, they refused to come to the door. The woman could see their figures through the window: the husband was sitting in his chair, while the eighty-six year-old wife was on the couch. Despite repeated knocking, no one answered the door. The woman ran to get a policeman. After battering their way in, the policeman discovered that the couple had turned on the gas in the oven and killed themselves. The house was in complete disarray, since neither Mr. nor Mrs. O'Rourke could handle household tasks. Earlier, the couple's niece had visited them and suggested that the couple should move into the nearby Arthy Pitney Home for the Aged. The older couple, however, "stubbornly refused." The police were "convinced" that couple's suicide was a response to the "thought of being sent to an old persons' home."²²⁴

Suicide, however, was the most extreme way that older men and women resisted institutionalization. Most older men did not take their own lives; the majority simply tried to avoid the poorhouse in whatever ways were available. In a 1923 study of homelessness in Chicago, sociologist Nels Anderson noted that many older men refused to enter institutions. "Many old men in the tramp class are not able to work and are too independent to go to the almshouse," he wrote, after working and living in the "hobo world" himself. "It is pitiable to see

²²⁴ "Aged Couple Die To Escape Charity," *New York Times*, 27 May 1927, 25. For other discussions, see "Hangs Herself Amid Rejected Stories," *New York Times*, 21 September 1922, 16; "Told By Mail of Suicides," *New York Times*, 28 August 1929, 16; "Tells of Problems In Aiding the Aged," *New York Times*, 6 December 1929, 25.

an old man tottering along the streets living a hand-to-mouth existence."²²⁵ Jack Conroy's Bun Grady struggled to remain independent in the brutal world of mass production industry. In the face of rapidly declining job opportunities, Grady pieced together his subsistence with episodic factory work and rescue missions. While he stayed at missions and accepted meals from charity groups, Grady did not talk about poorhouses. He either disliked the idea or did not know where he might find an institution.²²⁶ Conroy implied the poorhouse was not an option.

Impoverished older working-class men struggled to reconstruct manliness amidst injury, hiring age limits, and superannuation. They refused to admit defeat and seek the aid of the state institution. During the 1920s, Al Carr, Bob Critchlow, and Bill Lewis lived together in a shanty along the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh. The men were former steelworkers who could no longer work due to injuries and age limits. Carr was once a man of "iron biceps," who would have "spat out his lager in laughter if he had been told he would give up steel rolling." Over his career, however, a series of events pushed him toward dependency. Carr lost his wife, his eleven children married and moved away, and he became "unable to operate a machine" because of an injury to his hands.²²⁷ Carr's life fit neatly within experts' conceptualizations of old age poverty: the loss of an industrial job, the disintegration of the family, and the lack of some other means of support. Old age poverty threatened to take away breadwinner status, independence, and patriarch status as bases for his manliness.

²²⁵ Nels Anderson, *The Hobo: The Sociology of the Homeless Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), 69. On Nels Anderson and his experiences with homeless men, see Frank Tobias Higbie, *Indispensable Outcasts: Hobo Workers and Community in the American Midwest, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 74.

²²⁶ Jack Conroy, *The Disinherited: A Novel of the 1930s* (1933; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 106, 134-139, 146-149, 187.

²²⁷ "Old-Timers of Steel Mills Are River Beachcombers," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 26 June 1929, 17.

However, Al Carr and his friends reconstructed their manhood, economically and symbolically, by working odd jobs, dredging scrap iron, and building their own residence along the river. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* sketched their journey from the unmanliness of poverty to a patchwork brand of manliness. They were now urban pioneers and rugged individualists -- scratching a life out of the hostile urban wilderness. "Broke, unable to moil [*sic*] as in the roistering days of the past," the paper noted, "Carr, Lewis and Critchlow built their home of flotsam beside the railroad tracks where fuel was handy, in a spot in view of the Homestead mills."²²⁸ Once devastated, the aging males were now independent. They patched over their battered masculinities.

3.5 PRIVATE OLD AGE HOMES

In addition to the despised state institutions, a variety of organizations operated old age homes. Private home operators tried to make the home concept more acceptable to aging men and women. They wanted the public to see their institutions as *homes* -- not impersonal and inhumane prisons or hospitals where the destitute went to die. During the 1920s, old age homes operated by private, nationality, fraternal, and religious organizations, and unions received some attention in the press. Reformers, workers, and unionists all wanted alternatives to poorhouses. Men and women, who struggled for many years to stay afloat in industrial society, did not want to live in poorhouses. Men wanted to retain roles as patriarchs, living in their own residences

²²⁸ "Old-Timers of Steel Mills Are River Beachcombers," 17; Horace B. Davis, *Labor and Steel* (New York: International Publishers, 1933), 14. On manliness and the frontier idea, see, for example, Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 148-155.

with their wives. Organizations softened the old age home image by emphasizing family. For a variety of reasons, however, private organizations did not disentangle the problems of aging and gender for older Americans. Because of their small budgets and limited facilities, the limited populations they served, and the awkward relationships that were established between staff and "inmates," old age homes did not resolve "the problem of the old man."

The organizations that operated old age homes targeted very specific populations -- generally their own members or clients. Fraternal homes, for instance, catered to dues-paying, senior members of a particular order, such as the Knights of Pythias, the Masons, and the Odd Fellows. Exclusivity defined the 1920s old age home. Many of the religious homes cared for aged ministers, their wives, and/or widows. The Baptists, Congregationalists, and Episcopalians, organized numerous homes for older ministers and their spouses.²²⁹ The union old age homes did not provide support to the majority of workers, focusing instead on the "tried and true men of organized labor."²³⁰ These small institutions mirrored craft jurisdictions, excluding unskilled workers from the working-class masses. Furthermore, union homes also placed specific requirements on which union men could join. The United Brotherhood of Carpenters required thirty years of membership and sixty-five years of age.²³¹ If a working man joined the union late

²²⁹ "Homes for the Aged, Maintained by Religious Organizations," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1929, 16-17.

²³⁰ Thomas G. Gillis, Report of West Pittsburgh Lodge No. 70, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 8 November 1928, 21.

²³¹ "Trade-union Old-age Pensions and Homes for the Aged and Tubercular," *Monthly Labor Review*, February 1928, 7.

or experienced trouble in his early sixties, he would not be eligible. Finally, many aged men and women often could not enter private homes due to lengthy waiting lists.²³²

To gain admittance to most homes, older men had to conform to specific criteria that would have affronted a working man's dignity. Men might have bristled when confronted with medical exams, questions about their morals, probing inquiries into their health, and questions regarding their work history. Admittance to the homes asked older males to forgo their independence and pride. Administrators wanted to help the "deserving" poor; but they did not want to assist those who needed *too much* help. One home preferred applicants who "have respectably sustained a struggle with disease or misfortune, till such a refuge as the home will be appreciated and enjoyed by them."²³³ At most fraternal organization homes, "Almost without exception it is required that the applicant be of good moral character, of temperate habits." In addition to policing applicants' morals and economic backgrounds, the homes worried about health. It was expensive, after all, to provide constant care to "inmates" who suffered from dementia or immobility. Many fraternal homes favored applicants who were "free from mental, infectious, or contagious diseases."²³⁴ At the Knights of Pythias' home in Illinois, "Persons unable to dress and care for themselves are usually specifically excluded," according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.²³⁵

To promote family life, most of the private old age homes admitted married couples and widows. In nationality group homes, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics noted that "married

²³² Wickersham, "Home for the Aged," 10.

²³³ "Private Benevolent Homes for the Aged," *Monthly Labor Review*, April 1929, 10.

²³⁴ "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1929, 4.

²³⁵ "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," 4.

couples are accepted." Most fraternal homes featured similar policies. "In the majority of cases," wives were admitted with husbands. In homes operated by religious groups, however, homes for widows were the most prominent. Overall, most homes "admit not only individuals of either sex but also take in married couples."²³⁶ Maintaining the family was a major concern. The officials at the Scottish Old People's Home in Riverside, Illinois, argued: "The separation of aged married couples is one of the tragedies of life."²³⁷ (But to live in the Riverside home both husband and wife needed to meet the rigid health and admittance criteria.) It was more common for men and women to apply for admittance if they were widowed and alone.

Most old age homes asked applicants to donate their property and/or pay a fee. Administrators used the capital to fund the facilities. Fraternal orders' homes frequently asked men to relinquish their property holdings, generally avoiding cash fees. At least forty fraternal homes required property donations. Private benevolent organizations and nationality groups, however, usually required cash fees. Fees varied widely. The Bureau of Labor Statistics found the lowest fee was \$70, while the highest reached \$5,076.²³⁸ These requirements were problematic. Men, who valued their independence as breadwinners, would have resented giving up the home they had built up throughout their lives. For poor men, property requirements and fees would have been troubling. If a home asked a poor man for a \$300 fee, how could he pay

²³⁶ "Old People's Homes Maintained by Nationality Groups," *Monthly Labor Review*, April 1929, 4; "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," 4; "Homes for the Aged, Maintained by Religious Organizations," 17.

²³⁷ "Old People's Homes Maintained by Nationality Groups," 4.

²³⁸ "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," 7; "Private Benevolent Homes for the Aged," 10; "Old People's Homes Maintained by Nationality Groups," 4.

it? What if a man possessed no property? Giving up most of their assets would have irritated men; they surely valued the estates they possessed.

Many of the old age homes maintained minimum age requirements, something many working-class men might have been familiar with from the factory. The minimum age requirement might have been an irritating reminder of a serious reality in working-class life: age functioned as a barrier. In the 1920s old age homes, each type frequently required applicants to meet age requirements. Some homes went as low as 50, while most only accepted applicants at 60, 65, or 70.²³⁹ If a home's age requirement was 65 or 70, a struggling man in his early 60s would have been denied support because he failed to meet the age criteria.

Many of the homes required labor. Home administrators believed that occupied hands and minds would help the residents remain mentally sharp and active; work would prevent senility, offset physical decline, and promote intellectual engagement.²⁴⁰ First, residents were often required to maintain their rooms: to keep them, as the Railroad Employees of America home put it, "neat and tidy when his physical condition will permit, attending to it the first thing in the morning after a thorough airing."²⁴¹ For retired men, however, this may have been an unmanly act. Did these men, perhaps widowed, previously have wives who completed domestic labor? To be obligated to labor in a domestic capacity may have been unsettling.

In addition to taking care of one's room, some organizations required men and women to complete a range of other tasks. Residents helped in kitchens, set tables, washed dishes, worked

²³⁹ "Private Benevolent Homes for the Aged," 19; "Old People's Homes Maintained by Nationality Groups," 4; "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," 4; "Homes for the Aged, Maintained by Religious Organizations," 17; "Trade-Union Old-Age Pensions and Homes for the Aged and Tubercular," 7.

²⁴⁰ "Problem of Idleness in Old People's Homes," *Monthly Labor Review*, December 1929, 13.

²⁴¹ "Trade-Union Old-Age Pensions and Homes for the Aged and Tubercular," 17.

in gardens, tended animals, and completed maintenance chores. Various old age homes demarcated between men and women's work. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics noted, "Usually, where tasks are assigned, the attempt is made to make use of the aptitudes . . . of the residents. This is especially apt to be the case with the male members of the home family." If a man made shoes previously, his home might put him to work fixing shoes. If an older man was a carpenter, administrators might ask him to help with maintenance and repairs. Various old people's homes believed men would be happiest if they could retain the identities they knew previously. Administrators asked older men to put up shelving, fix doors, make tables and chairs, paint walls, and maintain machinery, as well as work in gardens, guard stockrooms, maintain lawns, and take care of livestock. Women, on the other hand, washed dishes, cooked, swept floors, cared for plants, sewed, dusted, and set tables for meals.²⁴²

Often, however, homes did not uphold the boundaries between "men's" and "women's" work. At one fraternal organization home, older men could be seen "firing the boilers and keeping the basements clean." They also completed "a quantity of carpenter work and painting." However, men also prepared "fruits for canning and vegetables for the tables . . . mending and darning and making of all new material into sheets, pillow cases, table linen, etc., assisting in office errands for hospital, washing of dishes and dining room work, cleaning of parlors very day, washing windows, etc." These men did not enjoy what they viewed as women's work. The home matron noted, "these are not our happy and contented residents."²⁴³

²⁴² "Problem of Idleness in Old People's Homes," 15, 16; "Homes for the Aged, Maintained by Religious Organizations," 21.

²⁴³ "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," 8.

Men might have bristled at the feminine image of old age homes. Women were prominent at many homes, particularly in religious and private institutions. For men, the extensive rules not only signaled the end of their independence, but the large numbers of women might have verified worries about feminization in old age. "In general," the *Monthly Labor Review* reported, "old ladies seem to be better provided for, in the way of homes for their declining years, than do men." Private homes catered to women in particular. Only a minority were dedicated to older men's care: "Of the 350 homes reporting, 195 take women only, whereas only 22 restrict admission to men only."²⁴⁴

If aging men went to a private old age home, they had to accept a new mother figure into their lives. A "home matron" conducted day-to-day functions. Matrons oversaw the "inmates" activities, tended to the residents' welfare, prepared meals, and supervised the maintenance and cleanliness of the facility. Matrons were in charge. "It should be remembered," the US Bureau of Labor Statistics noted, "that the old people are, for all practical purposes, in the power of the matron." The matron's power might have been difficult for men to accept. The *Monthly Labor Review* noted, "Some of the old people are subject to delusions of persecution, and fancy all sorts of wrongs and neglect."²⁴⁵ The older residents of one home were reportedly very "fearful" of their matron.²⁴⁶ For men, they probably resented submission to a woman who now governed their lives. Men were obligated to obey the matron. They would now be children again, subject to a woman's authority.

²⁴⁴ "Private Benevolent Homes for the Aged," 10.

²⁴⁵ "Administration and Conditions of Old People's Homes," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1929, 16-17.

²⁴⁶ "Administration and Conditions of Old People's Homes," 17.

The overarching reason why the old age homes would not sufficiently meet the burgeoning "problem of the old man" could be found in the generally limited populations the homes served. Of the different types of homes the *Monthly Labor Review* identified, there were only 1,200 -- this included roughly 200 or more of the highly criticized state poorhouses, as well as a small number of homes for soldiers and state employees. Of this number, the five key alternatives (the various nationality, union, fraternal, religious, and private homes) constituted the majority. Most of the homes catered to their target populations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only 80,000 men and women were served by private homes. Religious homes (especially Roman Catholic) and private homes made up the majority of the groups who offered old age homes. There were 475 religious homes and 350 private homes in the US. Fraternal organizations operated 111 homes, nationality groups' homes ran 39 homes, and trade unions offered only 5 homes (centered in the carpenters', printers', and railroad workers' organizations).²⁴⁷

Finally, the old age homes did not appeal to working men and women's understandings of gender. Rigid rules and authority figures who intruded on personal and financial independence and the overall feminized stigma of institutionalization would have been worrisome for aging working-class men. Institutionalization in a private facility, despite the attempts to challenge the stigmas associated with state homes, was still an unpopular solution to older men and women's problems with economic support. Working-class men and their wives preferred to maintain their

²⁴⁷ "Administration and Conditions of Old People's Homes," 1; "Care of the Aged in the United States," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1929, 1; "Old People's Homes Maintained by Nationality Groups," 1-2; "Private Benevolent Homes for the Aged," 7-8; "Trade-Union Old-Age Pensions and Homes for the Aged and Tubercular," 7, 13, 15, 19; "Homes for the Aged, Operated by Fraternal Organizations," 3, 5; "Homes for the Aged, Maintained by Religious Organizations," 12, 13.

own residences with their own funds, and institutionalization was pursued only when all other resources had been exhausted or denied. Older men and women resisted the stigmas of institutionalization.

The various avenues of support did not resolve "the problem of the old man." Old age homes and poorhouses bore the stigmas of dependence, as dire conditions and house matrons symbolized degradation and submission. Private old age homes, moreover, only served very specific populations of eligible men and women. Industrial wages failed to provide the savings needed. Unemployment, strikes, and firings liquidated men's savings. Even if they worked in a pensioning industry, most men would not receive benefits. The likelihood of receiving a pension was slim. Reliance on children was unacceptable. Sons and daughters had their own families; aging parents, especially if they were poor, would be burdens. Older men and women wanted their own households. The state pension idea offered the most promise. Pensions could protect a man's independence and the stability of his family.

3.6 THE STATE PENSION LAWS OF THE 1920S

By 1929, experts, politicians, newspaper editors, union leaders, workers, and wives emphasized the social and economic benefits of state pension programs. After a decade of intense discussion about age discrimination and old age poverty, more and more Americans viewed state pensions as the principle way to solve "the problem of the old man." Books, articles, lobbying, and organizing insured that proposed pension programs remained in the press. At the 1924 Pennsylvania Conference on Old Age Assistance, for example, members of the labor movement and the reform community concluded that pensions were the only way to protect older

men. Isaac M. Rubinow (director of the Jewish Welfare Society of Philadelphia), Thomas Kennedy (District No. 7 president of the United Mine Workers of America), John F. O'Toole (Pennsylvania FOE), and John B. Andrews (AALL) agreed that the individual states needed to push pensions through their legislatures.²⁴⁸ By decade's end, influential politicians such as Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York supported state pension programs. Even the anti-statist AFL supported state pensions, passing a resolution in favor of state pensions at its 1929 Toronto convention.²⁴⁹ But little came about as a result -- at least during the 1920s.

Pensions, those proposed and on the books, were beset with problems. Throughout the 1920s, pension legislation languished in state legislatures. Even where they passed, some state courts declared them unconstitutional. Also, no states with pensions were obligated to *fund* them. Finally, those who did fund pensions did not provide adequate benefits. In 1923, only four state pensions existed. The Alaska territory pensioned aged men and women in 1906, and Montana and Pennsylvania followed suit in 1923. Nevada was next, authorizing state pension provisions in 1925. These early pensions were laden with residency, property, and age requirements. In Montana and Pennsylvania, applicants needed to be 70 years old and 15-year residents. To receive a dollar per day, applicants could not be "beggars," have prison records (for the past 15 years), have children who might care for them, could not own more than \$3,000 in property (Pennsylvania), or earn more than \$300 in income (Montana).²⁵⁰ Pennsylvania's plan, however, never materialized. The Dauphin County court deemed it unconstitutional in

²⁴⁸ "Old Age Pension Legislation Found Economical and Humane," *American Labor Legislation Review*, December 1924, 286.

²⁴⁹ "Modern Retirement," *Amalgamated Journal*, 7 November 1929, 19; Bernstein, *Lean Years*, 238.

²⁵⁰ "Legislative Action on Old-Age Pensions, 1923," *Monthly Labor Review*, November 1923, 182.

1924, affirming their decision in 1925. Pennsylvania would not allocate *state* funds for the maintenance of *private* groups or individuals.²⁵¹

After 1924, the number of state pension laws increased slowly until the Great Depression, when the number of pensions began to increase more significantly. Between 1924 and 1929, pension plans appeared in Wisconsin (1925), Kentucky (1926), Colorado (1927), Maryland (1927), California (1929), Minnesota (1929), Utah (1929), and Wyoming (1929). But only eleven states featured pensions by 1929.²⁵² And the most industrialized states -- such as New Jersey, Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio -- did not pass pension laws. State pensions did not take hold in the industrial heartland, despite experts' focus on industrialized states. Pension programs barely reached anyone. Of a total 738 counties covered by pension laws, only 293 actually paid any benefits. These programs only served 102,527 older Americans.²⁵³ In terms of legislative success, the state pension movement achieved disappointing results.

Table 12. Passage of State Pension Laws, 1923-1931

Year	State
1923	Montana *Pennsylvania
1925	Nevada

²⁵¹ Abraham Epstein, "Present Status of Old-Age Pension Legislation in the United States," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 1924, 31; "Old Age Pension Law of Pennsylvania Held Unconstitutional," *Monthly Labor Review*, May 1925, 199.

²⁵² "Experience Under State Old-Age Pension Laws in 1932," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1933, 253; Bernstein, *Lean Years*, 238.

²⁵³ "Experience Under State Old-Age Pension Laws," 253.

	Wisconsin
1926	Kentucky
1927	Colorado
	Maryland
1929	California
	Minnesota
	Utah
	Wyoming
1930	Massachusetts
	New York
1931	Delaware
	Idaho
	New Hampshire
	New Jersey
	West Virginia

* Pennsylvania's law was declared unconstitutional in 1924.
Source: "Experience Under State Old-Age Pension Laws in 1932," *Monthly Labor Review*, August 1933,
253.

Why were states so slow to pass state pension laws during the New Era? Abraham Epstein blamed "greedy interests" and "propaganda" -- especially the pro-business National

Civic Federation -- as obstacles to pension legislation.²⁵⁴ In reality, however, politicians' worries about high costs injured pension legislation the most. In 1928, for instance, the New York state pension plan was initially voted down. Politicians in the Albany legislature argued that old age pensions were "too costly" of a burden to put on the state.²⁵⁵

The pension idea, however, certainly took hold among working-class men and women. "The only practical remedy" for old age poverty, a man from New York City wrote, "is a national pension."²⁵⁶ In "Middletown," a woman noted that her working-class husband "hopes and prays they get the state pension through pretty soon."²⁵⁷ Sam T. Baker, the steelworker who wrote about the Canonsburg suicide in 1926, argued that politicians must not "turn a cold shoulder upon them [older working men]." Rather, men needed to "make an organization than can compel the passage of a law to pension these 'Old-timers' so that he can retire to his little cottage and, with the mate who has struggled by his side, live in happiness and pleasant memories of his past successful efforts."²⁵⁸ In 1927 Alex Flowers, another steelworker from Pennsylvania, reminded Amalgamated Association members that "it is impossible to lay anything by for old age." The AA, he argued, should "insist the cause be put before the public for vote."²⁵⁹ Steel industry scholar Horace B. Davis agreed. He argued, "For all steel workers, there is only one satisfactory kind of pension -- a steady money pension guaranteed by the

²⁵⁴ Abraham Epstein, "Old Age Pensions," *American Labor Legislation Review*, December 1922, 227.

²⁵⁵ Leotta, "Abraham Epstein," 368.

²⁵⁶ Gray, "National Old Age Pensions, 12.

²⁵⁷ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown*, 34.

²⁵⁸ Baker, "Reward for Faithful Service," 21.

²⁵⁹ Alex Flowers, Report of Chartiers Valley, No. 71, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 28 April 1927, 17.

government."²⁶⁰ Men appreciated the pension idea and they wanted the states to implement them.

During the 1920s, the state pension idea became the most popular way to address "the problem of the old man." Old age homes (state and private), savings, industrial pensions, reliance on children would not suffice; they were too unreliable or inconsistent with ideals of manhood. Since manliness depended on the male breadwinner ideal and personal independence, workers, wives, experts, and politicians believed that state old age pensions would provide the best form of economic support in later life. While state pension legislation languished in legislatures until the onset of the Great Depression, the popularity of the state pension idea had certainly taken hold. Among working people, experts, and politicians, many concluded that state pensions were the best solution to men's worries about manhood in old age.

During the 1930s, "the problem of the old man" was further aggravated by high unemployment, ongoing age discrimination, and new fears about middle-class men's access to white-collar jobs. Chapter 3 looks at how widening anxieties about "the problem of the old man" pushed forward the Social Security Act, as well as a renewed emphasis on protecting aging men's ties to the workplace.

²⁶⁰ Davis, *Labor and Steel*, 14.

4.0 CHAPTER 3 : AGING MEN AND THE "CRISIS" OF MASCULINITY DURING THE 1930S

He experiences a sense of deep frustration because in his own estimation he fails to fulfill what is the central duty of his life, the very touchstone of his manhood -- the role of family provider.

Mirra Komarovsky (1940)²⁶¹

In a 1940 study of men's relationships with their wives and children during the Great Depression, sociologist Mirra Komarovsky documented how persistent unemployment had shattered the meanings of manhood. With so many men out of work, the scholar found extensive patterns of gender inversion in American households. Many wives assumed control of family finances, losing respect for their troubled husbands. Children ignored their fathers -- traditionally the authority figures within the home. Men felt isolated and depressed, unused to remaining within domestic space during daylight hours. "The man appears bewildered and humiliated," Komarovsky wrote. "It is as if the ground had gone out from under his feet."²⁶² Men's anxieties

²⁶¹ Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and His Family -- The Effect of Unemployment Upon the Status of the Man in Fifty-Nine Families* (1940; reprint, New York: Octagon Books, 1973), 74.

²⁶² Komarovsky, *Unemployed Man*, 74. For discussions of the "crisis" of masculinity during the 1930s, see Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 191; Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 246-249; Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press,

permeated American culture during the 1930s. Men vocally opposed women's employment and worried about their sons' sexual choices.²⁶³ The period witnessed what historians have described as a "crisis" of masculinity. The expression of manhood through work and breadwinning seemed to have been wiped away by constant joblessness.

Embedded within this "crisis" of masculinity was concern for the ways aging worsened men's troubles with unemployment. Unemployment scholars, for example, often encountered older men who could not work because of hiring age limits and speedups. Concerns about the impact of "growing old" on manhood, which began during the 1900s, 1910s, and 1920s, reached a crescendo during the 1930s. The older unemployed man was the famous "forgotten man," and experts, politicians, unionists, and workers labored to protect manhood in later life. The problem of ageism worsened during the depression, as "too old at 40" became something that kept more and more older men out of work. In 1935, the federal government passed the Social Security Act, but due to the program's limited scope government pensions fell short of their purpose. Experts discussed how men could strengthen their health and thus protect their employability. Companies marketed products, advice, and insurance plans that promised economic steadiness and health to aging working men. Finally, older men organized -- Townsend Clubs, the Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and Forty Plus Clubs -- to improve their access to jobs and pensions. Historians' view of the aged during the 1930s focuses mainly on aging

1980); Margaret McFadden, "Anything Goes: Gender and Knowledge in the Comic Popular Culture of the 1930s" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996); Holly Marie Allen, "Fallen Women and Forgotten Men: Gendered Concepts of Community, Home, and Nation, 1932-1945" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1996).

²⁶³ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), ch. 9; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996); Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 66-99; George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

Americans and pension politics.²⁶⁴ However, a wider view of the 1930s shows that older men used numerous strategies to deal with the loss of manhood.

4.1 THE OLDER MAN AS "THE FORGOTTEN MAN"

In *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (1990), Lizabeth Cohen deftly touched upon how older men's struggles with employment were a major component of the decade's "crisis of masculinity." While her study was not specifically concerned with older men's problems, Cohen's research unearthed several complaints about aging and ageism. She noted that hiring age limits were a key source of anxiety among working men. "During the depression," Cohen argued, "unemployment hit particularly hard at middle-aged men, those between thirty-five and fifty-five, just at the time in their lives when family responsibilities were greatest." She found older working-class men talking about the "fatal forty"; men complained they were "too old to get work." Cohen suggests that men's struggles with ageism were an important part of the "crisis" of masculinity.²⁶⁵

As historians have long pointed out, the economic and social dislocations that accompanied the Great Depression were extensive and widespread. In 1930, 16 percent of

²⁶⁴ See, for instance, Roy Lubove, *The Struggle for Social Security, 1900-1935* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968); W. Andrew Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land: The American Experience since 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978); William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Steven B. Burg, "The Gray Crusade: The Townsend Movement, Old Age Politics, and the Development of Social Security (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin at Madison, 1999); Robert S. McElvaine, *Down and Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1983); and Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

²⁶⁵ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 246.

workers in the United States were unemployed. By late 1932 and early 1933, the number had climbed to roughly 25 percent. These numbers remained high for the rest of the 1930s.²⁶⁶ In Chicago, 50 percent of the men working in 1927 were not employed in 1933. Further, those working in Chicago factories received only 25 percent of what they earned during the New Era.²⁶⁷ The depression undermined manhood on a broad scale. "With nearly one in four men out of work," Michael Kimmel concluded, "the workplace could no longer be considered a reliable arena for the demonstration and proof of one's manhood."²⁶⁸ This was especially worrisome for older men, whose ties to the industrial workplace had been weakening since the turn of the century.

In the US, men grappled with the loss of manhood in a variety of ways. Some fell back on familiar themes, blaming the presence of women in the labor market as a major reason why men could not find work.²⁶⁹ Men insisted that job opportunities should be reserved for themselves, re-embracing a comforting male breadwinner norm. One author proclaimed, "Would we not all be happier if we could return to the philosophy of my grandmother's day when the average woman took it for granted that she must content herself with the best lot provided by

²⁶⁶ Alice Kessler-Harris, "Providers: Gender Ideology in the 1930s," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, ed. Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart, fifth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 420; idem, *Out To Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 250; and Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 193.

²⁶⁷ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 217.

²⁶⁸ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 193.

²⁶⁹ For nineteenth-century examples, see Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); in the twentieth century, see Kessler-Harris, "Providers," 420; idem, *Out to Work*, 251-254; Lois Scharf, *To Work and To Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*.

her husband?"²⁷⁰ Men also embraced rigid boundaries between homosexual and heterosexual practices, turning away from social or sexual behaviors that might be interpreted as effeminate. In New York City, for example, politicians pushed gay men out of Times Square bars and theaters and into "the closet." To further promote gender normalcy, men worked hard to pass along heterosexuality to their young sons during the 1930s.²⁷¹

In this era of declining economic welfare, men explored a variety of new political outlets. From the Left and Right, men looked for avenues that would allow them to assert masculinity in political and social arenas. Unemployed Councils, led by Communist activists, offered class struggle as a way for men in the United States to exercise power over their essentially powerless situation. Men in Chicago, Detroit, Pittsburgh, and New York, among other cities, demonstrated for jobs, an end to evictions, and greater aid to the unemployed.²⁷² On the Right, men in the US turned towards Father Charles Coughlin and the violent Black Legion -- mirroring European fascist movements' reassertion of male supremacy.²⁷³ "In gender terms," the sociologist RW Connell argues, "fascism was a naked reassertion of male supremacy."²⁷⁴ Working-class men in the US struck for improved working conditions, union representation, and increased wages in 1933-1934 and 1936-1937. Activist workers of the depression decade showed an increased

²⁷⁰ Kessler-Harris, *Out To Work*, 253.

²⁷¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, ch. 12; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 203-205, 209-210.

²⁷² Daniel J. Leab, "United We Eat: The Creation and Organization of the Unemployed Councils in 1930," *Labor History*, 8 (Fall 1967), 300-315; Alex Baskin, "The Ford Hunger March -- 1932," *Labor History*, 13 (Summer 1972), 331-360; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 262-267; Lorence, *Organizing the Unemployed*, 20-46.

²⁷³ On Father Coughlin, see Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*, 227-234. On the Black Legion, see Stephen H. Norwood, *Strikebreaking and Intimidation: Mercenaries and Masculinity in Twentieth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 196-200.

²⁷⁴ RW Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 193.

interest in Left politics. These activists led major strikes that rocked towns and cities such as Ambridge, Detroit, Flint, Toledo, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Aliquippa, and Akron. Working-class men supported the Committee of Industrial Organizations and voted for the New Deal. In 1936, Franklin D. Roosevelt won his re-election bid with strong worker support.²⁷⁵

"The problem of the old man" seemed to symbolize larger anxieties about manhood during the Great Depression. Statistical studies demonstrated that the older working man was over-represented among the unemployed population. In a 1934 state of Massachusetts study of unemployment, researchers discovered that the state's unemployed were disproportionately older. While the average number of unemployed in Massachusetts was 25 percent, the numbers of aged men (ages 60-69) out of work substantially higher. The percentage of unemployed older men in the state was 29 percent. In Philadelphia, a 1931 survey disclosed that of 67,150 "employable workers," 34.4 percent of employable men over 66 years old were out of work. On the other hand, only 22.9 percent of men between 26 to 55 years old were unemployed. In Detroit, an estimated 12 percent of men between the ages of 25 and 40 were out of work. For men over 40, the number was twice that amount.²⁷⁶

To their credit, some companies protected older working men when the economic crisis began -- especially if they had strong ties to the local community. During their return trip to Muncie, Indiana, Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd noted that "Plant X" -- an older

²⁷⁵ Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 256; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 286, 290; Bernstein, *Turbulent Years*; Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture during the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1996).

²⁷⁶ Massachusetts study quoted in Achenbaum, *Old Age in the New Land*, 128; Philadelphia study quoted in Abraham Epstein, *Insecurity: A Challenge to America*, introduction by Frances Perkins (New York: Harrison Smith and Robert Haas, 1933), 495; the Detroit statistics can be found in James J. Lorence, *Organizing the Unemployed: Community and Union Activists in the Industrial Heartland* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 6.

manufacturing company -- deliberately retained its older men. When the firm's prospects improved in 1935, the company rehired its aging workers first.²⁷⁷ The Lynds contrasted this employer with a new auto factory in Muncie, where the workers were "overwhelmingly in their twenties and thirties -- the pick of the crop."²⁷⁸ But not all mass production firms discriminated against aging men. At Studebaker, a "unique" auto manufacturer in Detroit, the percentages of employed older men actually increased during the depression. In 1927, only 7.8 percent of the men were between 46 and 50 years old. By 1940, the number had jumped to 15.2 percent. For men aged 56-60, the number increased from 3 percent to 8.2 percent (Table 13). The average man at Studebaker worked there for 13 years or more, which was almost double the industry average of 7 years.²⁷⁹ Leo Wolman and Gustav Peck concluded that "many companies . . . retain whatever jobs there are for men growing old in their service."²⁸⁰

Table 13. Age distribution of men at Studebaker, 1927 and 1940 (Percentages)

Ages	1927	1940
Under 41	70.2	41.3
41 and up	29.8	58.6

* Actual numbers not given in the source.

Source: Glenn Griswold, "Humanized Employee Relations: Studebaker an Example," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 4:3 (September 1940), 492.

²⁷⁷ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), 52.

²⁷⁸ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*, 52.

²⁷⁹ Griswold, "Humanized Employee Relations," 492.

²⁸⁰ Leo Wolman and Gustav Peck, "Labor Groups in the Social Structure," in *Recent Social Trends in the United States: Report of the President's Research Committee on Social Trends*, with a foreword by Herbert Hoover (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1933), 810.

Yet, despite some firms' efforts to retain older workers, workers and observers complained that older men dominated the unemployed ranks. In Hamilton, Ontario, a steelworker wrote in 1930: "In looking over the unemployed, we find they [aging men] greatly outnumber all the others." He continued, "There is hardly one large industry in the United States or Canada today, which will hire a man who is 50."²⁸¹ In a 1933 article about the homeless in *The Nation*, journalist James Rorty lamented that so many homeless working-class men seemed to be over 45: "For every boy tramp there are no fewer than six homeless men of forty-five years or more."²⁸² While traveling throughout the United States during 1934, Lorena Hickock wrote to Harry L. Hopkins in Washington, DC, that older men constituted "A WHOLE STRANDED GENERATION."²⁸³ With a more moderate and somber tone, Hopkins himself concluded that the typical unemployed worker was an aging working-class man. "[H]e had been more often than not an unskilled or semi-skilled worker in the manufacturing or mechanical industries," Hopkins wrote. "He had had some ten years' experience at what he considered to be his usual occupation." He worried most about the oldest men. Men in their sixties and seventies, for instance, who "through hardship, discouragement and sickness as well as advancing years, [have] gone into an occupational oblivion from which they will never be rescued by private industry."²⁸⁴

²⁸¹ Report of Irondale Lodge No. 9, Ont., *Amalgamated Journal*, 25 September 1930, 21.

²⁸² James Rorty, "Counting the Homeless," *Nation*, 21 June 1933, 693.

²⁸³ Lorena Hickock to Harry L. Hopkins, 17 April 1934, in *One Third of A Nation: Lorena Hickock Reports on the Great Depression*, ed. Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 227, 233 (all capitals in original); Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 246.

²⁸⁴ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 165.

Hiring age limits in industry set the stage for this "occupational oblivion." They constituted an overriding obstacle to re-employment. While age limits already existed during the 1910s and 1920s, more and more men seemed to be confronting them during the depression. Available data is incomplete, but a variety of sources indicate that the percentage of firms with age limits ranged from roughly 30 percent to over 40 percent.²⁸⁵ Also, workers and experts complained that employers were lowering their age limits to less than the usual forty years. "Many employers," Leo Wolman and Gustav Peck concluded, "impose hiring age limits as low as 40 and some as low as 35."²⁸⁶ In steel, men complained about employers who lowered their age limits from 45 to 35 years. "An age limit of 45, which was established in many place [sic] before the depression, is said to have been lowered now by as much as 10 years," an Ohio man wrote in 1933. "Industrial employers refuse to hire men over 35. And this at a time when family need is greater and active working life is supposed to be longer than ever before."²⁸⁷ In 1938, a struggling salesman surveyed hiring policies in Minneapolis and St. Paul. He discovered that "none of the firms would hire persons who were more than forty years old." Worse, some companies refused to hire men over 35 -- or even 25. A Brooklyn, New York, man feared that "on every hand" men between 30 and 40 could no longer find work. Another man noted that

²⁸⁵ "Age Limits on Employment by American Manufacturers," *Monthly Labor Review*, May 1929, 1024; "Employment of the Older Worker," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1930, 542-543; Wolman and Peck, "Labor Groups," 811; Murray Webb Latimer, *Industrial Pensions Systems in the United States and Canada* (New York: Industrial Relations Counselors, 1932), 800.

²⁸⁶ Wolman and Peck, "Labor Groups," 811.

²⁸⁷ Report of Recovery Lodge No. 144, OH, *Amalgamated Journal*, 2 November 1933, 12.

working men in their forties were already quite used to lying about their age to prospective employers.²⁸⁸

Scholars who studied unemployment discovered that age limits contributed to the weakening of aging men's status in the home. Mirra Komarovsky described a middle-aged Mr. Johnson as "weary, and older than his 40 years." His wife lamented "it wasn't so easy these days to work when you are past forty the way they were." A Mr. Adams blamed his ailing health and weakening body, saying "that he could certainly get a job if he were not so old and sick."²⁸⁹ In Chicago, Ruth Shoule Cavan and Katherine Howland Ranck met the Jacobs family, whose aging patriarch could not re-claim his status as the family breadwinner. His wife and daughters told Cavan and Ranck he "was probably too old" to find work."²⁹⁰ Another aging man tersely asked Komarovsky, "What is a man supposed to do? Go to the kitchen and turn on the gas?" An older man from Chicago complained, "There ought to be a place where you could gas old people or hang them up." In Cleveland, an unemployed Polish man told social workers, "Factory no want older men; men of forty-five not wanted."²⁹¹

Since age limits existed in numerous industries, they hurt unemployed aging men who needed a new career. If an aging man lost a job in the auto industry and wanted to try steel, for instance, he probably would not find many opportunities. In Middletown, Ohio, many aging

²⁸⁸ James M. Mead, "Our Older People," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 1 March 1938, 319, 320; BC Seiple, "Tragedy of the Aging Worker," *American Labor Legislation Review*, September 1930, 307.

²⁸⁹ Komarovsky, *Unemployed Man*, 8-9, 31.

²⁹⁰ Cavan and Ranck, *Family and the Depression*, 58.

²⁹¹ Komarovsky, *Unemployed Man*, 119; Cavan and Ranck, *Family and the Depression*, 61, 87; National Federation of Sentiments, *Case Studies of Unemployment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1931), 357.

unemployed men "don't find a welcome when they go to other plants to work." In Ecorse, Michigan, a steelworker wrote to the *Amalgamated Journal* in 1933 about older men's troubles there. "In these days," he remarked, "corporations only hire young men, full of life, vigor and vitality." Men in New Castle, Pennsylvania, warned others: "Think it over, men. When you reach the age of about 45 or 50, what will become of you if you get out of a job. They will tell you that you are too old. There are millions of young men competing for your jobs."²⁹²

For those who remained at work, employment seemed more and more precarious, especially since managers used speedups to accelerate production. Employers increased line speeds during the 1930s to maximize workers' output during the limited number of hours they would be paid to work.²⁹³ Speedup led to unemployment. It robbed men of steady work, as employers overloaded them with production orders for only short periods of time. Sociologist E. Wight Bakke spoke with a man in New Haven, Connecticut, who told them that his boss used young workers to set piece rates. When managers increased the work pace in the factory, an aging man named George struggled to keep up. The foreman soon told George "he has been falling behind in production so they will have to let him go till work picks up." Bakke's interview subject told him, "Well maybe work picks up . . . , but usually it doesn't. The shop takes on new blood and the old fellow is on his uppers."²⁹⁴ Another man was more direct,

²⁹² While discussions of older men's problems in *Amalgamated Journal* consistently appeared during the 1920s, these articles proliferated during the early 1930s. See, for example, Aaron, Report of Michigan Steel Lodge No. 4, Mich., *Amalgamated Journal*, 21 September 1933, 7; "New Castle, PA," *Amalgamated Journal*, 7 December 1933, 14; and Thomas A. Gillis, Report of West Pittsburgh Lodge No. 70, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 13 November 1930, 4.

²⁹³ Edsforth and Asher, with Boryczka, "The Speedup," 83.

²⁹⁴ E. Wight Bakke, *The Unemployed Worker: A Study of the Task of Making A Living Without A Job* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), 79.

simply telling the visiting scholar that "This world is no place for men over forty-five."²⁹⁵ During the 1933 Briggs strike in Detroit, leaders called attention to aging men's problems with speed. "The men," strikers asserted, "are forced by the threat of dismissal to work so fast at heavy labor that the older men are unable to work the full number of hours that they are expected to and are sent home because of this fact."²⁹⁶

Older working-class men struggled to slow down the pace of the assembly line, often trying to enlist younger men's cooperation. Aging men often viewed young workers with unease. Clarence Lischer, who worked in Flint at Fisher Body No. 1, recalled a young worker who could complete his job with great speed. When he finished his task, the teenager (dubbed a "speed demon") had time to relax. Lischer disliked the lad: "well that don't look good you know." These "pushers" could easily "foul things up." Older men in Flint often "reminded" their young counterparts to work at a moderate pace.²⁹⁷ When an "enthusiastic boy" went to work in the screw machine department of "a large manufacturing plant," his older colleagues told him, "Well, don't work so damn fast . . . it's healthier." In order to protect their jobs, older working men knew it was best for the entire department to work as slowly as possible. Otherwise, management would lower the wage, intensify the pace, and layoff older men.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Bakke, *Unemployed Worker*, 80.

²⁹⁶ "Strikers Give Explanations of Their Actions," *Detroit News*, 29 January 1933, 2; "Crisis Comes Today In Ford Shut-Down," *New York Times*, 30 January 1933, 3.

²⁹⁷ Kenneth B. West, "'On the Line': Rank and File Reminiscences of Working Conditions and the General Motors Sit-Down Strike of 1936-37," *Michigan Historical Review*, 12 (Spring 1986), 70.

²⁹⁸ Stanley B. Mathewson, *Restriction of Output Among Unorganized Workers* (New York: Viking Press, 1931), 15-16.

Working men and experts complained that whenever jobs opened up, the positions always seemed to go to younger workers. Older men believed their employers were, in effect, using the Great Depression to permanently oust them from their jobs. In 1934, the Massachusetts General Court ordered an investigation of age discrimination in the state. Testimony from workers suggested that employers often rehired only young workers. In textile factories, men with twenty-five years of experience complained that their employers preferred to hire men under the age of forty.²⁹⁹ Steelworkers complained that employers would hire a group of men only to lay off the oldest men when work slowed down.³⁰⁰ "Even if conditions would improve," a steelworker noted, "many mill men would still be idle, because of their age."³⁰¹ An aging unemployed man in Flint, who worked previously with his son at Buick, complained that his supervisor recalled his son when worked picked up but not him.³⁰² An out-of-work steelworker in New Castle, Pennsylvania, complained that when his mill would start up again, managers would only take back the young men: "They won't call me back to work at the strip mill, I'm too old. Maybe my two boys . . . will be called."³⁰³ In the Texas oil fields, Lorena Hickock discovered that oil refineries would not hire men over the age of thirty-five.³⁰⁴

Anxieties about the status of the male breadwinner were not confined to industrial workers. The Great Depression also injured the employability of the middle-class man,

²⁹⁹ Farnsworth Crowder, "The Chance of A Job After 40?" *Survey Graphic*, February 1938, 88.

³⁰⁰ Michael Skertic, Report of Star of Bethlehem Lodge No. 182, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 6 September 1934, 17.

³⁰¹ Fred Caswell, Report of Altoona Lodge No. 104, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 2 April 1931, 15.

³⁰² West, "On the Line," 70.

³⁰³ Harold J. Ruttenberg, "The Big Morgue," *Survey Graphic*, April 1939, 267.

³⁰⁴ Lorena Hickock to Harry L. Hopkins, 9 September 1934, in *One Third of A Nation*, 332.

contributing to our view of the period as a widespread "crisis" of masculinity. In a study of office work in Los Angeles between the 1890s and 1930s, Clark Davis argues, "White-collar unemployment attracted considerable attention, for it seemed a new problem and one that aroused many status anxieties."³⁰⁵ Before the 1930s, male office workers enjoyed relative status and privilege. However, although unemployment rates for white-collar workers were lower than for industrial workers, the new problem of white-collar unemployment nonetheless challenged their security. Statistics showed that while the national unemployment rate hit 15 percent in 1937, the number of office workers that were out of work reached 8.8 percent.³⁰⁶ But in Los Angeles, where the economy depended on service sectors and commercial interests, staffers were particularly hard hit.³⁰⁷ In addition to receiving letters from working men in industry, the "majority" of letters sent to the National Recovery Administration (NRA) in Los Angeles were from male office workers. "Please, please give this consideration," one unemployed executive wrote, "what I want is a job and I will not fall down on you no matter what it is." A relief worker was shocked by middle-class men's condition. He saw many dethroned executives, "able-bodied, well-educated men of the finest sort who came into his office and simply cried because they could not find a job."³⁰⁸

Throughout the United States, male office workers in their forties and fifties constituted a major element of the unemployed ranks. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, a struggling staffer in the oil

³⁰⁵ Clark Davis, *Company Men: White-Collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 199.

³⁰⁶ Davis, *Company Men*, 199.

³⁰⁷ Davis, *Company Men*, 199.

³⁰⁸ Davis, *Company Men*, 199.

industry, approaching the age of forty, wrote to the President about his experiences with age limits. He worried that when his job would be refilled "it will be with a younger man." His other friends told him "40 is almost a deadline, which prevents entrance into company employment."³⁰⁹ In the Sunday section of the *Los Angeles Times*, John Steven McGroarty argued that aging male office workers stood alongside aging men from industrial work in the ranks of the unemployed. "The white-collar man, the artisan, and the other classes of men, are not wanted after they are even forty-five years of age," McGroarty wrote. "They are ditched by employers just when they are most capable and useful."³¹⁰

As men and women struggled with the economic fallout of the depression, the institutions that previously supported them collapsed. Churches, mutual aid societies, company welfare programs, corporate pensions, and savings were not broad enough to address widespread poverty and unemployment. In response, working men and women turned towards a number of new possibilities. First, they began to turn towards the state for aid and intervention in the economy.³¹¹ In addition to the state, aging men explored other ways to protect manhood in old age. Men explored such organizations as Townsend Clubs, the Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and Forty Plus Clubs. Furthermore, the struggling older man pursued solutions in the consumer marketplace. Marketers offered products, pension programs, and advice that promised to protect manhood from the dangers of aging during the depression.

³⁰⁹ Tell T. White to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 9 September 1936, in *The People and the President: America's Conversation with FDR*, ed. Lawrence W. Levine and Cornelia R. Levine (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 156.

³¹⁰ John Steven McGroarty, "Here Is An Idea To Think Over," *Los Angeles Times Sunday Magazine*, 19 November 1933.

³¹¹ The erosion of workers' support networks is documented in Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear*; Bernstein, *Lean Years*.

4.2 THE WELFARE STATE

During the Great Depression, working men and women turned towards the state for assistance as they never had before. Self-reliance failed to protect Americans from the depression. Individual effort, they realized, could not produce needed jobs, nor could personal savings tide one over until the depression passed. During the 1930s, men and women thought of the state as a vital agent in society and the economy. Working men and women wanted the government to regulate the economy and the workplace, protect the legality of unionization, and provide subsistence during times of unemployment, disability, and old age. Americans supported and depended on programs such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the National Labor Relations Act (popularly known as the Wagner Act).³¹² In sum, the 1930s witnessed the ascendancy and institutionalization of the modern welfare state in the United States.³¹³

Building upon the state pension ideologies established during the 1920s, politicians and experts believed that Social Security could sustain the ebbing masculinity of the oldest male breadwinners.³¹⁴ Ongoing problems such as age discrimination, technological change, and

³¹² Senator Robert F. Wagner (New York) sponsored the National Labor Relations Act in 1935.

³¹³ Despite biases along the lines of race, age, and gender, many Americans nonetheless favored government intervention in the economy. In the US, the literatures that relate to the shift towards the welfare state are voluminous. See, for example, Klein, *For All These Rights*; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; idem, *A Consumer's Republic*; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*; Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*; Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*; Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Allen, "Fallen Women and Forgotten Men"; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1992); Ann Shola Orloff, *The Politics of Pensions: A Comparative Analysis of Britain, Canada, and the United States, 1880-1940* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).

³¹⁴ On the relationships between gender ideology and the welfare state during the 1930s, see Linda Gordon, "Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1880-1945," *American Historical Review*, 97:1 (February 1992), esp. 19-22, 47-50; Mettler, *Dividing Citizens*; Alice

unemployment underscored the need for state intervention on older men's behalf. When Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law during 1935, he acknowledged "the problem of the old man" as a major catalyst for social provision:

Today a hope of many years' standing is in large part fulfilled. The civilization of the past hundred years, with its startling industrial changes, has tended more and more to make life insecure. Young people have come to wonder what would be their lot in old age. The man with a job has wondered how long the job would last . . . we have tried to frame a law which will give some measure of protection to the average citizen and to his family against poverty-ridden old age.³¹⁵

Building on the President's argument, Social Security Board Chairman John G. Winant summarized in 1937 how older men's troubles made Social Security a vital program. His assessment harkened back to the 1920s writings of Abraham Epstein and Isaac M. Rubinow. "The worker is no longer a free agent," he argued. In an industrial society, working men depended on wages for their livelihood. However, employers could not provide adequate wages with any regularity. Winant continued, "He counts for little against the gigantic and impersonal forces that surround him, the fierce play of industrial competition, the might and speed of machines that dwarf his single manpower into insignificance." As the Great Depression emphasized with frightening seriousness, working-class men lived at the mercy of industrial cycles and employer policies. Industry could not provide men with the security they needed:

Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*, 148-167; and Deutsch, "From Ballots to Breadlines," 461-465.

³¹⁵ "Presidential Statement Upon Signing the Social Security Act, 14 August 1935" (Item 107), in *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt, with a Special Introduction and Explanatory Notes by President Roosevelt: Volume IV: The Court Disapproves, 1935* (1938; New York: Random House, 1969), 324.

"His working life is liable to be hedged about by insecurity and his future clouded with uncertainty and fear. For him social insurance is a real and pressing necessity."³¹⁶

Social Security proponents, however, wanted to make sure that their program promoted a "distinctly American" vision of manhood and social provision. The AFL, for instance, charged that government programs (such as unemployment insurance) too closely resembled European "handouts," forcing the noble working man into a state of "cowardly submission," as Alice Kessler-Harris points out.³¹⁷ Politicians in Washington, DC also wanted to respond to persistent demands for pensions from hundreds of thousands of Francis Townsend supporters and weaken the appeal of the Townsend movement.³¹⁸ Taxes levied on workers' wages funded the Social Security program. To achieve "security," the Social Security Board argued in 1936 that security began with a man's individual effort in the labor market. Government could only set the stage for the man's work to take place. Then, once work was no longer possible, the state would provide the worker with funds "he" himself had earned. "It grants him an opportunity and imposes upon him the obligation to find security for himself," the Board proclaimed in 1936. "It [the Social Security Act] recognizes work and a wage as the best security which the worker can

³¹⁶ John G. Winant, "Social Security Begins," *Survey Graphic*, January 1937, 7. Similar themes can be found in Ewan Clague, "Social Work and Social Security," *Survey*, January 1937, 5-6; Delbert Clarke, "Era of Social Security Begins for the Worker," *New York Times*, 31 December 1939, 50; Wagner, "Average Man's Hope Under Security Bill"; Eveline M. Burns, *The American Social Security System* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 8-9; Twentieth Century Fund, Inc., *More Security for Old Age: A Report and A Program* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund Inc., 1937), 9-11; Victor Christgau, "Old Age and Survivors Insurance after Twenty Years" (1955), in *Sourcebook on Labor*, ed. Neil W. Chamberlain (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958), 978-979; Wilbur J. Cohen, "Social Security Objectives and Achievements" (1955), in *Sourcebook on Labor*, 977; Arthur J. Altmeyer, "Credo with Respect to Social Security" (1953), in *Sourcebook on Labor*, 995; and Hyman Blumberg, "Personal Responsibility for Old Age" (1948), in *Sourcebook on Labor*, 996. On the shift from producerist rhetoric to consumer rhetoric in working-class history, see Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

³¹⁷ Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 85.

³¹⁸ Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 130; Burg, "Gray Crusade," 355, 357, 359.

find for himself."³¹⁹ Politicians stressed that Social Security built upon the working man's personal earnings, created with his own labor. "The worker's living comes from his job," the Social Security Board concluded. "[Y]et his life is likely to outlast the skills which he can market."³²⁰ When this moment came, Social Security would help older men retain the manhood they had already earned.

Craft unions supported the Social Security Act, believing the program was a major step forward for older working-class men. Since the 1920s, craft unionists believed that pensions from the state were needed to uphold the male breadwinner role in later life, especially since employer ageism barred older men from the factory floor. In 1938, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) celebrated the Social Security Act because the program promised incomes to older men who had no other family or friends to depend on, provided relief to older men and women who lived with struggling sons and daughters, and promised younger men a pension when they reached the age of sixty-five.³²¹

The men who *belonged* to craft unions, however, worried that Social Security would not provide the solution they had long lobbied for. During the early 1930s, men in the Amalgamated Association (AA) praised state pension programs. Men liked state pensions and they were eager for a larger program from the federal government. "If the old timers can hang on until the old age pension gets functioning, there'll be a change in our looks and features," a steelworker from

³¹⁹ Social Security Board, "Foreword: Security for a People," in *First Annual Report of the Social Security Board* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1937), v, vi.

³²⁰ Social Security Board, "Foreword," vi.

³²¹ "More Security For Old People," *American Federationist*, January 1938, 64-71.

Youngstown, Ohio, remarked during 1933.³²² Working men worried that Social Security's starting age -- sixty-five years old -- did little to help the struggling middle-aged man. "The age at which the pension starts is too high," George Smith, who probably had experience with ageism, noted in 1936. "What is one to do who at 55 is out of a job because he is considered to old and must wait 10 years for his pension to start?"³²³

Social Security was popular, despite its flaws. Gallup polls from the late 1930s indicated that Americans agreed that old age pensions were necessary, and they approved of the program's funding structure. During 1938 and 1939, over 90 percent of Americans "believed" in government old age pensions. But most Americans (79 percent, as reported in September 1938) believed that old age pensions should be reserved for only those who were most in need. Also, a majority of Americans approved the direct Social Security tax on workers' wages to fund the program: a January 1938 poll showed that 73 percent agreed that it was best for workers' themselves to pay for the program. Furthermore, 85 percent agreed that employers should not pay the entire amount of the Social Security tax.³²⁴

The Social Security Act did not resolve "the problem of the old man." First, Social Security did not begin until 1940. (The Roosevelt Administration amended the original 1942 starting date.) Second, the program's bias towards men in industry slighted men who worked in other occupations. Social Security favored men in industrialized states such as New York,

³²² JFC, Report of Fairview Lodge No. 40, Ohio, *Amalgamated Journal*, 14 December 1933, 11. JFC made a similar remark the week before. See his report of 7 December 1933, 18.

³²³ George Smith, Report of Canonsburg Lodge No. 79, PA, *Amalgamated Journal*, 17 December 1936, 20.

³²⁴ "American Institute of Public Opinion -- Surveys, 1938-1939," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, October 1939, 592; "American Institute of Public Opinion -- Surveys, 1935-1938," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, July 1938, 382.

Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, California, Michigan, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. Men in other states, such as African-American men in South, who despite the Great Migration of the 1910s and 1920s, worked predominantly in agricultural occupations, were generally excluded. Over 92 percent of eligible men were white (Table 14).³²⁵ Unless men worked in the industrial regions of the Midwest and Northeast, they probably would not qualify for pension benefits. While some working women would qualify to receive Social Security benefits, men received the lion's share of the assistance. Of 30.2 million eligible workers in 1938, 72.5 percent (21.9 million) were men; 27.5 percent (8.3 million) were women (Table 15).

Table 14. Social Security coverage by race, 1938

Grouping	Percent
White	92.4
Black	6.8
"Other races"	0.8

N = **30,154,024**

Source: Federal Security Agency, *Fourth Annual Report of the Social Security Board* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1940), 24.

Table 15. Social Security coverage by gender, 1938

Grouping	Percent
Men	72.5
Women	27.5

³²⁵ On the great migration, see James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Richard Thomas, *Life For Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1914-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); and Victoria W. Wolcott, "Remaking Respectability: African-American Women and the Politics of Identity in Interwar Detroit" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995).

N = 30,154,024

Source: Federal Security Agency, Fourth Annual Report of the Social Security Board, 24.

The 1935 Social Security Act's "gendered imagination," which favored the male industrial worker, actually worked *against* the interests of aging working-class men. Young men would qualify for higher payments than their older co-workers because younger men would put more time (and earnings) into the system.³²⁶ In order to receive funds, older men would need to navigate a complicated labyrinth of rules. First, men had to be 65 years old. Second, men would need to earn, beginning in January 1936, a large sum of \$2,000 or more before they reached their 65th birthday. Third, he would need to have earned wages on 5 different days prior to his 65th birthday. However, these workdays needed to be from 5 different years.³²⁷ This would have been problematic for men during the Great Depression, especially since older men were more likely than younger men to be unemployed. If a man had been out of work since the depression began, he would be deemed ineligible for Social Security when the program would start paying benefits in 1942. Many men in their 40s, 50s, and 60s were struggling to secure work of any kind during the 1930s.

Social Security failed to provide earnings comparable to those found in employment. For aging men, factory wages paid out far more than funds from the government. Ideally, Social Security worked better as a safety net for economically devastated men. Once a man reached his sixty-fifth birthday, he would collect -- at most -- 85 dollars per month. If a man worked steadily

³²⁶ Henry E. Jackson, "Our New Social Security Act," *Review of Reviews*, October 1935, 26.

³²⁷ Jackson, "Our New Social Security Act," 26.

and earned a substantial sum (such as 200 dollars per month), this would be a weighty loss of income.³²⁸ Even after the 1939 amendments to the Social Security Act, which increased benefits and broadened eligibility, old age insurance represented a monetary step backward. If Joe Johnson, a (hypothetical) clerk, earned \$50 per month between 1936 and 1939 and retired in 1939, he would receive only 20 dollars per month. To earn 10 more dollars, he needed to wait for his younger wife to retire at 65. These provisos were actually improvements over what he would have earned under the original 1935 Social Security Act. Then, Joe would have received a single lump sum of only 63 dollars.³²⁹

Since Social Security did not begin until 1940, and the apparatus of rules hindered the number of men who were eligible, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) became the main site where older men utilized the state for assistance during the depression decade. The agency created public works projects and gave relief (in the form of paid work) to unemployed men. Young and older men worked for the WPA. However, since it was easier for young men to find jobs, aging men depended on public works to a greater extent. In 1939, more than half of the 167,000 men on the WPA in New York City, for example, were over 40.³³⁰

Aging men struggled to use the WPA to prove their worth in the labor market. In 1937, Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins noted that older men always outperformed younger men. Grades of "excellent" work usually went to men over the age of 47, while the grade of "inferior" typically went to men under the age of 41. Perkins concluded, "In general . . . [t]he older men

³²⁸ Jackson, "Our New Social Security Act," 26.

³²⁹ John J. Corson, "Advances in Old Age Security," *Survey Midmonthly*, September 1939, 268.

³³⁰"Half On WPA Rolls in City Over 40 Years Old," *New York Times*, 16 February 1939, 3; Benjamin Colby, "Jobless Over 45 Handicapped," *New York Times*, 6 December 1936, 12; Barbara Blumberg, *The New Deal and the Unemployed* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1979), 137; Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 252.

tended to produce more than the younger men."³³¹ Aware that older men needed work in this period before Social Security was up and running, Perkins advocated greater job access for aging men and an end to hiring age limits in industry.³³²

While the Roosevelt Administration envisioned New Deal programs as ways to uphold manly dignity and preserve women's dependence, the success of their "gendered imagination" varied within individual New Deal programs. Both Social Security and the Works Progress Administration, for example, favored struggling male breadwinners, but the Works Progress Administration most effectively provided economic aid (and financial support for the male breadwinner ideal) to men during the 1930s. The welfare state proved to be a patchy and uneven avenue for the preservation of manhood.³³³ Social Security was intended to protect manhood from the dangers of "growing old" during the Great Depression; but as historians have pointed out, the program actually widened opportunities for younger men in the labor market.³³⁴ The program favored young men and hastened the departure of older men from their jobs. Social Security hurt older men, since employment offered a consistently higher income and pensions offered less.

³³¹ "Best Workers of WPA Average 47 in Age, Says Miss Perkins in Plea for Older Men," *New York Times*, 8 November 1937, 1.

³³² "Perkins Asks Work For Those Over 45," *New York Times*, 7 September 1937, 2.

³³³ On the "gendered imagination" of social provision advocates and members of the Roosevelt Administration, see Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 5-6.

³³⁴ William Graebner, *A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution, 1885-1978* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 117-118.

4.3 CONSUMPTION AND HEALTH ADVICE

The turn towards the public welfare state, however, constitutes only one of the ways that Americans responded to the economic fallout and social dislocations of the depression. In addition to demanding new safety nets, men and women turned towards the consumer marketplace and organization to find solutions.³³⁵ Companies, for instance, played upon Americans' anxieties to sell products and advice. Marketers promised that private pension plans, foods, diets, and health advice would help aging men retain the male breadwinner role in the face of unemployment. The New Deal was not enough. Because New Deal programs often helped only select groups of Americans, and then offered only partial assistance, aging men were forced to utilize several strategies to protect their manhood. Because of Social Security's limited scope, for instance, especially in the 1930s, older men knew that a combined approach of social provision, consumption, and organization was necessary to protect masculinity from "Old Man Depression."

Throughout the Great Depression, older men looked for ways to protect their employability and secure their manhood. Numerous experts, companies, and organizations were ready to help them to do so. Experts urged men to buy products and follow health advice, as well as to purchase private pensions in the hope of acquiring economic stability (and a stable

³³⁵ Most discussions of consumption and politics focus on the political conflicts that have emerged as a result of the importance of "pocketbook politics" to Americans during the twentieth century, as well as the ways consumer politics reflect broader conflicts over race, class, and gender. This section suggests that consumption can also be examined as one of several strategies employed by working people in response to their struggles in the workplace. On consumption and politics during the Great Depression, see Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), esp. ch. 1; and Lawrence B. Glickman, "The Strike in the Temple of Consumption: Consumer Activism and Twentieth-Century American Political Culture," *Journal of American History*, 88 (June 2001), 99-128.

sense of manhood) in old age. If middle-aged men could avoid sickness and fatigue, experts argued, then they would greatly improve their chances of avoiding layoff and unemployment. Men themselves purchased a variety of products to feel and look younger, thus bolstering their vulnerable masculinity. Diets, foods, and private pension schemes, many men believed, shored up masculinity in the face of the depression.

Experts in the health sciences worried that older men's health was too fragile -- especially since the onset of the economic crisis -- and thus threatened the ability to work. Against the backdrop of a frightening economic crisis, health and medical experts renewed their interest in the aging male body's limitations.³³⁶ Vulnerable bodies, for instance, stood in the way of work and, ultimately, survival. The Great Depression left no man unscathed: workers, artists, executives, and farmers all faced the prospects of economic disaster and declining health. Some scholars highlighted sexual impotence, for example, to underscore the enduring negative effects of unemployment. One middle-aged man was emotionally devastated by his bout with joblessness and it led to sexual problems. "It is awful to be discarded at 40," the man told Mirra Komarovsky. "A man is not a man without work." Marginalized in the labor market, he also felt marginalized in the bedroom. The man believed he and his wife "were too old" for sexual intercourse. "It is possible that his failure" contributed to anxieties about intimacy.³³⁷

For aging males, experts emphasized programs of health and wellness (especially for men like themselves who worked in corporate offices). The heart became a popular topic of discussion. To remain employable, experts urged older middle-class men to take good care of

³³⁶ For discussions of aging and health advice during the 1910s and 1920s, see Hirshbein, "Transformation of Old Age," chs. 1-2.

³³⁷ Komarovsky, *Unemployed Man*, 133.

their hearts. Aging men needed their blood to flow strongly and freely. If not, their bodies quickly declined and died. Arteriosclerosis, one expert insisted, "might be defined as the essential element in the process that makes people grow old." A weak heart could not deliver blood to a man's hair, skin, and brain. As a result, arteriosclerosis led to gray hair, wrinkled skin, and the onset of senility. Aging men needed to be careful. If not, death claimed them: "At the beginning a man will not admit to himself that his virility is impaired; he will continue to brag about his great strength when he is trying to hide the fact that his strength is not what it used to be. He refused to attach any importance to a slight tightness in his chest on climbing stairs, or a feeling of breathlessness when he goes out into the cold air."³³⁸

The pharmaceutical industry asked aging men to see their doctors. Even if a middle-aged man's health was good today, experts warned him that tomorrow could be different. In a series of advertisements, the ER Squibb & Sons Company talked about aging men who were, at least today, enjoying fair health. "Like most men at fifty," an advertisement stated, "you feel that you're right at the top of your swing. You want to go on getting the most out of life -- from healthy sport, from business, from pleasant companionship." But diabetes, heart trouble, kidney trouble, and high blood pressure led older men to the grave. Men needed to avoid taking chances; life was too precarious. Aging men, ER Squibb argued, needed to have regular check-ups. If the older man stayed healthy, he could remain employed. And someday, when the depression ended, he might continue enjoying golf, climbing, and travel.³³⁹

³³⁸ Laurence E. Hines, "Heart Disease After Middle Age," *Hygeia*, August 1935, 711-712.

³³⁹ "Following Through . . . After Fifty," *Hygeia*, July 1937, 579; "After Fifty the Hills Get Higher," *Hygeia*, May 1937, 387; "To Be Continued . . . After Fifty?" *Hygeia*, November 1937, 964; "And Life Can Begin Again at Fifty," *Hygeia*, December 1937, 1058.

To prevent catastrophes, experts in the health sciences reminded men that good health began in youth. Instead of trying to become healthier in later life, when it might be too late, experts reminded men that they should begin taking care of health and wellness in their early years. Samuel Morrison lamented that 40 marked a serious moment in men's health history. After 40, diseases became more serious, more frequent, and more difficult to control. "Youth seems to be invulnerable," he wrote. But after 40, "the accumulation of repeated mild illnesses begins to present symptoms which are more disturbing, less intermittent, and for the first time very significant as far as the host's general health is concerned." Morrison reminded young males that as men aged, their ability to fight off "cells, bacteria, toxins, and other destructive agents" declined. To protect themselves as they aged, young men needed to listen to their doctors, stay away from alcohol and fatty foods, avoid smoking, eat slowly, and stay active. "Consistent care in youth, adolescence and maturity up to 40 will make it unnecessary to treat old age during middle life," Samuel Morrison noted.³⁴⁰ Experts worried greatly about men's health, especially since the Great Depression menaced in the background.

To remain vital to the companies they worked for, experts advised older men to retain good health and tidy appearances. Diet, weight, and dress were just as important, if not more, for the older man as opposed to the young man. In the midst of a depression, men needed to be ready for a desperate struggle to remain employed. Men slowed down in later life; they could little afford to be out of shape or to appear ruffled. To protect their jobs, the magazine reminded readers to stay fit and attractive. "The man of advancing years must guard against increasing weight," an article in *Hygeia* noted in 1933. "Neatness and cleanliness are just as

³⁴⁰ Samuel Morrison, "Does Illness Begin at Forty?" *Hygeia*, January 1936, 7.

important in the later years of life as in the courting days," the article continued. "[U]ntidiness must be guarded against by all." No employer, the article implied, wanted to keep a sloppy ne'er-do-well on the payroll. Finally, *Hygeia* urged older men to modify their diets: "The diet must be adjusted, of course, to the needs of the individual." Stay away from fats, experts urged. Too much fat, cigarettes, and coffee damaged the aging man's body. Sick old men would not be able to remain vigorous and ready for the "hazards" of the depression.³⁴¹

Various companies promised to help aging men look more attractive -- and younger. Perhaps playing upon men's worries about looking "old," the Shick Shaver firm argued that its new electric razors helped older men look younger and more "natural." Shick told consumers in 1937 that conventional straight razors left an aging man's face "tough, calloused and scaly." As a result, a middle-aged man looked older than his years. The electric razor, however, would correct this artificial aging. "Continuous use of a Schick Shaver," a 1937 advertisement proclaimed, "gets rid of most of this old skin." Shick argued that its product removed the look of aging "and a new, more youthful skin takes its place."³⁴² Since so many aging men were struggling at work, the Shick Shaver company probably hoped they could use older workers' anxieties to sell razors.

During the mid-1930s, popular magazines advertised advice books and diets that promised to reinvigorate aging men's health. Books promised older men that their advice could help them remain vigorous, mentally sharp, and competitive. Anxious men might have been drawn to advertisements for Robert G. Jackson's *How To Always Be Well*. The seventy-six year-

³⁴¹ John R. Hamilton, "Forty -- Looking Forward," *Hygeia*, August 1933, 734, 684.

³⁴² "To A Man Who Looks Older Than He Is," *Nation's Business*, May 1937, 113.

old Jackson appealed to aging men who felt as though the Great Depression had sapped them of their strength:

If you're like most people you probably feel that the last five depression years have taken at least ten off your life. You've probably been going at a terrific pace and under a terrific tension, mentally and physically . . . seemingly butting your head against a stone wall. You've probably lost much of your pep and vim -- tire easily -- have to drive yourself to keep going -- and feel twice your actual age. If you're forty or over life may have lost all of its zest. You may even feel that Old Man Depression has taken so much out of you that you'll never regain the ground you've lost.³⁴³

Jackson promised older men that his blend of positive thinking, diet, exercise, and sleeping could help aging workers regain their vim and vigor. He emphasized how he saved himself from the loss of manhood. Jackson claimed he was near death at fifty: he struggled with a "worn-out" heart, glaucoma, high blood pressure, and arthritis. With hard work and stern dedication to a strict health regime, Jackson boasted he remade himself into a model of male perfection -- even in his 60s and 70s. An insurance company, he claimed, rated his body as better than a 35 year-old. He walked 10 miles every day. He lectured, toured, wrote, and conducted business. Jackson also claimed to never take vacations or get tired. Jackson exemplified the kind of man who could survive the worst of the Great Depression. He was tough, healthy, and smart. He could survive unemployment and whatever else "Old Man Depression" might throw at him. Jackson's ad read, "Today, at 76, Dr. Jackson has a 35 year old body and repeatedly demonstrates that he can do anything the average 22 year old can do and do

³⁴³ "Have You Been Killing Yourself the Last 5 Years?" *Newsweek*, 22 September 1934, 5.

it better Today, he can run up five flights of stairs without even breathing hard. His philosophy can bring you like benefits just as it has brought them to thousands."³⁴⁴

If aging men could not afford Jackson's book, or if they did not want to read, they could always eat Fleischmann's Yeast. In 1938 advertisements, Fleischmann's Yeast argued that digestion problems exacerbated the "feeling of age." As men and women aged, their "gastric juices" weakened, hindering the process of digestion. As a result, older men felt ill -- thus weakening their work performance. Fleischmann's insisted that its product hastened proper digestion and introduced needed vitamins into a man's diet. The company urged its customers to eat yeast three times each day. The company alleged its yeast helped men and women fight off colds and increase vitality. Fleischmann's argued it could help aging men protect themselves from the ravages of the Great Depression.

Harry Halbert, a man who worked in real estate, testified, "I don't need to tell anyone what the depression did to the real estate and building business. It did its worst to me!" He felt weak and sick during his frightening bout with unemployment. But a friend urged him to try Fleischmann's: "Soon my appetite picked up, and I'd wake up in the morning feeling fresh and rested. After a few months, I felt up to putting the pieces of my business life together again and I'd got a job back in my old business."³⁴⁵ A man who worked in advertising claimed similar results. After eating the yeast, Eddy McLaughlin noted, "With my new health I feel a whole lot better about my job, too."³⁴⁶ Thanks to Fleischmann's Yeast, numerous men claimed that the

³⁴⁴ "Have You Been Killing Yourself," 5; "If You KNEW You Were Dying," *Newsweek*, 13 October 1934, 31.

³⁴⁵ "Life Begins at 40," *New York Times Magazine*, 13 March 1938, 16.

³⁴⁶ "Life Begins at 40," *New York Times Magazine*, 6 March 1938, 20. See also "Life Begins at 40," *New York Times Magazine*, 20 March 1938, 16.

product eased their nerves and helped them feel healthy again -- fully able to work and compete during the lean years of the depression.

Experts urged aging men to adapt to workplace pressures any way they could; older men needed to work much harder and *smarter* than their young counterparts. In various articles, health sciences experts focused on the struggling male office worker. Older men needed to be extra careful with their energy and workloads: prepare during slack times to work rigorously in peak times; give up demands for perfection; enlist other workers to help with work that may be physically difficult; copy the methods of young men; be willing to improve their skills; and avoid the loss of mental "energy" by worrying. But most importantly, aging men needed to avoid singling themselves out as outmoded, redundant staffers. The older male office worker would ideally enhance his expertise and efficiency. If he kept moving and working, the rolling stone would gather no moss.³⁴⁷

Some experts told aging men to think about layoffs not as a period of unemployment, but as a chance to "try" a new career. If a man lost his job, experts insisted that he simply needed to try something else. Walter B. Pitkin, a professor of journalism at Columbia University, wrote in 1937 that, despite the depression, there *were* other jobs. Older men, however, needed to be creative to find them. "Most people," Pitkin noted, "when left to their own devices, mill around in a tiny corral like penned steers. . . . Instead of getting out and sniffing new terrains they sit at home, read the same papers, think in the same old rut. If they were wise, they'd 'wake up and live,' get out and look for the unusual jobs that can be done." Aging men needed to stop looking for work in high-powered job sectors; government, the military, political parties, and corporate

³⁴⁷ Hamilton, "Forty," 734.

work were not ideal. Instead, aging men could best work as gardeners, watchmen, crane operators, truck drivers, cashiers, chippers, tour guides, and teachers.³⁴⁸

Life insurance companies also claimed to offer logical solutions to older men's anxieties about earnings and savings. Companies such as Phoenix Mutual, based in Hartford, Connecticut, promised older working men in offices and factories that its pension programs insured a stable economic existence in later life.³⁴⁹ These insurance companies hoped to profit from the popularity of the Townsend Movement among aging men and women. If a man was willing to devote a certain amount of money from his pay every month to a Phoenix Mutual Retirement Income Plan, then Phoenix Mutual promised 200 dollars a month (the amount Francis Townsend hoped to secure for aging men and women) beginning at age 55.³⁵⁰ A 1935 advertisement in *Newsweek* promised, "If you want to retire someday, and are willing to lay aside a portion of your income every month, you can have freedom from money worries."³⁵¹ For anxious working men in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, the Phoenix Mutual scheme would have been too good to be true. Phoenix Mutual promised a stable old age, despite the depression.

Phoenix Mutual almost denied the reality of a depression. "It makes no difference if you're carefully laid plans for saving have been upset during the past few years," advertisements claimed. "It makes no difference if you are worth half as much today as you were then. Now, by

³⁴⁸ "After 40: Walter B. Pitkin Sounds a Hopeful Note in 'Careers After Forty,'" *Literary Digest*, 27 March 1937, 26, 27.

³⁴⁹ For an excellent overview of private insurance systems before the New Deal, with a focus on life insurance, see Klein, *For All These Rights*, 16-52.

³⁵⁰ In the *New York Times Magazine*, Phoenix Mutual published an advertisement alongside an article about the Townsend Movement. See 8 March 1936, 25.

³⁵¹ "How A Man of 40 Can Retire 15 Years from Today," *Newsweek*, 28 September 1935, 1. None of the ads from 1935 and 1936 specified how much savings a man had to devote to the plan. To learn more details, consumers had to send a clipping to the company in Hartford, Connecticut.

following a simple, definite Retirement Income Plan, you can arrange to quit work forever fifteen years from today with an income guaranteed to you for life." Phoenix Mutual insisted that it offered an "investment that pays, depression or no depression."³⁵² The company offered a way to escape the economic crisis. In 1936, a young man exclaimed that he "didn't dream [he] would ever have enough money to retire." But Phoenix Mutual told the young lad he certainly would. By joining the program, Phoenix Mutual promised the young man the good life in old age -- despite the menacing depression of his present.³⁵³

To sell its plan, Phoenix Mutual promised lavish retirement lifestyles. With Phoenix Mutual behind them, men could enjoy the fruits of their life-long labors and wise investments. Throughout 1935 and 1936, advertisements showed aging men who enjoyed the good life: cruises, restaurants, golf, seaside relaxation, campfires, and suburban homes. The retired man, comfortable with a small fortune in the bank, coolly smoked his pipe with a contented smile on his face. Phoenix Mutual offered anxious older men a better future -- which they clearly believed would resonate among men. They claimed that investors lived well. "For me, life really began at 55 when I got my first retirement check," one caption read. "I have no cares or worries," an older man proclaimed. "I'm just taking life easy."³⁵⁴ During the depression, men would have leapt at the chance to "take life easy." Phoenix Mutual promised to erase "the problem of the old man."

³⁵² "How a Man of 40 Can Retire In 15 Years," *Newsweek*, 26 September 1936, 1; "You Don't Have To Be Rich To Retire at 55 on \$200 a Month," *Newsweek*, 2 November 1935, 1.

³⁵³ "I Earn \$55 a Week. . . . And I'll Retire At 60 on \$100 A Month," *Newsweek*, 21 September 1935, 1.

³⁵⁴ "Began at 40. . . Retired At 55," *Newsweek*, 24 October 1936, 1; "How A Man of 40 Can Retire 15 Years From Today," 1. Similar themes appeared in ads for other insurance companies. See, for example, John Hancock Mutual advertisement, *Newsweek*, 13 October 1934, 43.

The ads and health discussions in middle-class magazines provide a different view of Americans' approaches to the anxieties of the depression decade. While many working men and women turned towards the New Deal welfare state to resolve their struggles with twentieth-century capitalism, companies and experts believed that many Americans would also look to consumption. In the marketplace, companies offered improved health, strengthened bodies, fiscal stability, and increased longevity -- which aging men would need if they were going to retain their manhood during the depression.

By pursuing ways to protect their employability, aging men reaffirmed work as the basis of manhood. While the economic foundations for modern retirement took shape during the 1930s, aging men cultivated a new fervor for work. The Great Depression robbed men of their jobs; and when the depression ended, men wanted to remain employed more than ever. Jobs were precious. Men also preferred the higher wages offered by employment since pensions offered much less than what men earned in the workplace. Work promised greater pay; pensions offered less. For many men, retirement symbolized a major loss of income and status.

4.4 ORGANIZING

During the Great Depression, aging men utilized various forms of organization to make political demands. Through organizations such as the Townsend Clubs, CIO unions, and Forty Plus Clubs, disaffected older men hoped to reclaim their ebbing manhood from "Old Man Depression." While these organizations reflected different class backgrounds or, as in the case of the Townsend movement, combined men and women of different social classes, men utilized

them to struggle for greater access to jobs, seniority, and for pensions when they could no longer work in the office or factory.

The cross-class Townsend movement was the brainchild of Dr. Francis Everett Townsend, a struggling former medical doctor who lived in Long Beach, California. Inspired by the sight of impoverished women on the streets of Long Beach, Townsend devised a plan whereby the federal government would pay each sixty year-old man and woman 200 dollars per month. Each recipient would be required to spend this entire sum within the month, thus contributing to the overall economic recovery. To receive the funds, each aging man and woman would have to retire fully from the labor market. Retirement would, in turn, create jobs for younger unemployed workers, who themselves were struggling with unemployment. The movement became wildly popular during 1934 and 1935. By 1936, the Townsend movement boasted a huge membership of between 1.5 and 2 million men and women.³⁵⁵

Both men and women supported the Townsend movement; however, the group communicated a rhetoric of manliness in some appeals to supporters. In this respect, the group positioned itself as a way to combat the decade's masculinity crisis. For example, in the *Modern Crusader*, a Townsend Movement publication, an unknown poet wrote, "Legislators 'agin' [*sic*] the Townsend plan,/Will find it hard work/When they try to shirk/The goal it brings to the working man."³⁵⁶ The language of manliness is curious, given the prominence of women at all levels of the Townsend Clubs. In a Massachusetts club, a young woman served as the local president. Her daughter read aloud bulletins from Francis Townsend's California headquarters.

³⁵⁵ Herbert Harris, "Dr. Townsend's Marching Soldiers," *Reader's Digest*, April 1936, 95-96; "Townsend Talks of His Plan and Hopes," *New York Times Magazine*, 29 December 1935, 3.

³⁵⁶ "Crusader Comment," *Modern Crusader*, 26 October 1934, 12.

Another young woman provided musical entertainment. There were large numbers of women and men at the meetings, where "the men sit at one side, the women at the other." The men and women remained silent: "They have a far away look in their eyes as if they were obeying the biblical injunction: 'Your old men shall dream dreams.'"³⁵⁷

Despite women's prominence in the group, the Townsend movement posed itself as a group for men of different social classes. Men responded. The promise of \$200 per month appealed to disaffected workers, shopkeepers, salesmen, and executives. In the *New York Times Magazine*, reporter Duncan Aikman noted that farmers, small business owners, and laborers constituted the ranks of the "Townsend soldiers." They were usually native-born American men, the "old Yankee stock."³⁵⁸ Some reporters represented the typical Townsendite as an aging man, of varying class backgrounds, who wanted to retain his manhood. The depression, however, stood in the way. "Mr. X is over 60. He has a wife about the same age. Most likely Mr. X is a farmer, small-town storekeeper, clerk, or mechanic," Russell Porter wrote in the *New York Times Magazine*. "He has been thrifty and industrious all his life, but the depression caught him at a bad age. He lost his job, his home, or his savings, and he did not have the strength or wit of a younger man to regain them."³⁵⁹ Porter noted that many Townsendites disliked Social Security because the program did not provide adequate funds: "He complains that New Deal social security means little . . . to him. If he is employed he would have to work 20 years before he

³⁵⁷ Russell Porter, "Looking For Utopia Along the Townsend Trail," *New York Times Magazine*, 5 February 1939, 4; idem, "Disciples of the Pension," *Reader's Digest*, April 1939, 44-45; Berg, "Gray Crusade," 241.

³⁵⁸ Duncan Aikman, "Townsendism: Old Time Religion," *New York Times Magazine*, 8 March 1936, 25.

³⁵⁹ Porter, "Looking For Utopia," 13; idem, "Disciples of the Pension," 43.

could receive substantial insurance payments."³⁶⁰ What did men want? The Townsend man wanted a "good, big Federal pension, paid to him as a matter of right."³⁶¹ Another Townsend man wrote to the *Modern Crusader*: "I am 57 years old and have helped to make the country what it is . . . I think the world owes us [older men and their wives] a living."³⁶²

Men used the Townsend Clubs to combat the assault on the male breadwinner role posed by the Great Depression. In addition, men who supported the Townsend program might have also supported two other prominent organizing platforms. Aging working-class men from second-generation immigrant working-class communities might have supported new CIO unions (such as the UAW) as part of their efforts to stabilize their jobs.³⁶³ Middle-class men, on the other hand, supported new "Forty-Plus Clubs." In an effort to protect fragile manhood, aging men looked to numerous organizations.

Working-class men viewed unionization as a promising solution to "the problem of the old man." New unions promised a renewed manliness, for younger and older men, through class struggle and organization. The CIO argued that aging men's struggles underscored the need for unionization.³⁶⁴ Numerous unionists who worked with the CIO envisioned labor unions as ways

³⁶⁰ Porter, "Looking For Utopia," 13; idem, "Disciples of the Pension," 46.

³⁶¹ Porter, "Looking For Utopia," 13; idem, "Disciples of the Pension," 46.

³⁶² Quoted in Berg, "Gray Crusade," 240.

³⁶³ Support for CIO unionization was strongest in cities with large second-generation ethnic populations such as Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburgh's Steel Valley. See Cohen, *Making a New Deal*; Zieger, *CIO*, 60-61; Eric Davin, "Blue Collar Democracy: Ethnic Workers and Class Politics in Pittsburgh's Steel Valley, 1914-1948" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1999); Peter Friedlander, *The Emergence of a UAW Local, 1936-1939: A Study in Class and Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1975).

³⁶⁴ On CIO unionism during the 1930s, see Irving Bernstein, *Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970); Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle*; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987);

protect working-class manhood from the troubles that accompanied aging in the shops. "The system puts a premium on youth," J. Raymond Walsh argued. "Life in the industry ends before fifty. The companies deny having such a policy of discharge, but the fact is clear to anyone who stands at a factory gate when shifts are changing." He asserted that men were powerless against employers' demands for youth. Walsh lamented, "Having done their ten-fifteen-or twenty-year stint for the industry they are pushed out, industrially aged, while still in middle life. The individual worker has no means of combating this scrapping."³⁶⁵ Only "industrial unionism in action" could help aging men. As a member of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) told an audience at the Duquesne Light plant in Springdale, Pennsylvania, "They don't scrap the older men at our works."³⁶⁶ If manhood would be preserved, men needed active guardians.

Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *Black Detroit and the Rise of the UAW* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Fine, *Sit-Down*; BJ Widick, *Detroit: City of Race and Class Violence* (1972; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989); Keeran, *Communist Party and the Auto Workers' Unions*; Friedlander, *Emergence of a UAW Local*; Babson, *Building the Union*; Steve Meyer, "Stalin Over Wisconsin": *The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); James D. Rose, *Duquesne and the Rise of Steel Unionism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Robin DG Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1990); Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930-1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Nancy Gabin, *Feminism and the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Daniel Nelson, *American Rubber Workers and Organized Labor, 1900-1941* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Staughton Lynd, ed., "We Are All Leaders": *The Alternative Unionism of the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996).

³⁶⁵ J. Raymond Walsh, *CIO: Industrial Unionism in Action* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1937), 106; Benjamin Stolberg, *The Story of the CIO* (New York: Viking Press, 1938), 156; Irving Howe and BJ Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York: Random House, 1949), 23, 29, 31; Levinson, *Labor on the March*, 150. See also Nat Weinberg, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 20 March 1963 and 30 April 1963, transcript, 9, Reuther Library; and Morris Field, "Seniority, Major Item in Auto Contracts," *United Automobile Worker*, 26 February 1938, 6.

³⁶⁶ "Duquesne's Employees Hear Truth," *People's Press*, 31 October 1936, 5.

As the CIO struggled to organize the auto industry, the status of the aging male worker became a key point of contention among workers, managers, and organizers. During the 1937 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearings, aging men at Ford told of dismissals and demotions following discussions with UAW organizers and meetings with NLRB officials. One older man, who visited with Frank B. Owen of the NLRB, was demoted when he showed up for work soon after. Downgraded from a skilled to an unskilled job, the aging man (who worked at Ford for 26 years) could not do the necessary heavy lifting. He quit. Another 52 year-old man lost his job after receiving a note printed on UAW stationary. The men all worried they were "too old to find another job."³⁶⁷

Seniority became a central union demand during the 1930s. To protect working-class manhood from the threat of age discrimination, the United Automobile Workers union insisted that working-class men needed formal seniority clauses as a form of insulation.³⁶⁸ For example,

³⁶⁷ "Old Workers Tell Of Ford Discharge," *New York Times*, 20 July 1937, 5; *In the Matter of Ford Motor Company and International Union, United Automobile Workers of America*, 22 December 1937, in National Labor Relations Board, *Decisions and Orders of the National Labor Relations Board: Volume IV* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938), 670-671.

³⁶⁸ Labor historians' interest in seniority has been somewhat sporadic. For valuable discussions of seniority, see David Montgomery and Ronald Schatz, "Facing Layoffs," in *Workers' Control in America*, 140-143; Milkman, *Gender at Work*; Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*; Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History*, 73:3 (December 1986), 675; Eric Arnesen, "'Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down': The Race Question and the American Railroad Brotherhoods, 1880-1920," *American Historical Review*, 99:5 (December 1994), 1601; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 103-104; Cohen, *Making a New Deal*, 320-321; Widick, *Detroit*, 74, 112; Fine, *Automobile Under the Blue Eagle*, 222, 250-258; Nelson Lichtenstein, "Conflict Over Workers' Control: The Automobile Industry in World War II," in *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 285-286. In the auto industry, formal seniority rules did not exist. See Carl Swanson, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 8 August 1960, transcript, 3, Reuther Library; James M. Cleveland, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 3 October 1961, transcript, 3, Reuther Library; Bud Simons, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 6 September 1960, transcript, 2, Reuther Library; Kenneth F. Bannon, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 28 February 1963, transcript, 5, Reuther Library; Jack Wilse, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 24 July 1961, transcript, 4, Reuther Library; Walter Schilling, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 26 April 1961, transcript, 4, Reuther Library; Louis Adkins, interview with Jack W. Skeels, 16 August 1961, transcript, 4, Reuther Library; Raymond Vess, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 12 October 1961, transcript, 7, Reuther Library; RJ Thomas, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 26 March

at Packard Motors in 1939, the UAW insisted that the company was increasing its efforts to move aging men out of their jobs. Union stewards at Packard argued that the company deployed a number of tactics to get the "old men out of the way." For instance, management transferred a number of aging men to the gun-welding department -- a spot on the line known for "back-breaking" labor. Even young men, the union argued, found this work difficult. But the company expected older men to learn quickly and to work even faster. When they failed to maintain their quotas, foremen fired them. In another department, management moved aging men from stationary bench jobs, forcing them to work on a new conveyor. Again, the older workers could not keep up with the line speed and were released.³⁶⁹ The UAW argued that only unionization and seniority could protect the vulnerability of men's identities as workers. "The UAW-CIO is the only true friend the old men have," stewards insisted. "Three long years of militant, progressive unionism is the best insurance that the cause of the old men is in capable hands. Seniority protection and humane conditions of work are twin-pillars of the UAW." The union was established on "the protection of the autoworker in his declining years."³⁷⁰ For the next fifty years, veterans of the UAW sit-down strikes in Flint and Detroit argued that "job security for older workers" was one of the major achievements brought about by the union.³⁷¹

1963, transcript, 1, Reuther Library; Charles K. Beckman, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 25 July 1961, transcript, 5, Reuther Library; Norman Bully, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 12 October 1961, transcript, 2, Reuther Library; Peterson, *American Automobile Workers*, 53; Babson, *Working Detroit*, 67, 87; Zieger, *CIO*, 47.

³⁶⁹ "Packard Problem No. 1: Too Old At Forty?" Union Newspaper Clipping, Packard Local 190, 14 June 1939, Box 1, Folder "Age And Employment," Brown Papers, Reuther Library.

³⁷⁰ "Once . . . Watches and Orchids Now . . . Speed-up & Layoffs," union newspaper clipping, Packard Local 190, 14 June 1939, Box 1, Folder "Age and Employment," Brown Papers, Reuther Library. For a similar example at Dodge during this period, see John W. Anderson, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 17 February 1960, transcript, 42, Reuther Library.

³⁷¹ Frank Marquart, "Plain Talk," *Voice of Local 212*, 28 March 1947, 2; "All AC Workers Should Belong to the UAW-CIO," *AC Sparkler*, 3 July 1947, 7; "General Motors, Chrysler, Briggs Workers Observe 20th

Steelworkers also supported seniority. Like men in the auto industry, steelworkers eagerly wanted their new unions to provide greater job security. In steel, men typically agreed that workers with the longest service should receive "the breaks."³⁷² While the CIO and seniority was new, men believed their situations had improved.³⁷³ Before the SWOC, men lived at the mercy of employer hiring, firing, and promotion policies. After SWOC forced US Steel to recognize the union, and won the April 1937 strike in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, men won greater job stability and a political voice in the factory and community. Years later, former Jones & Laughlin (J&L) steelworker Joe Periello recalled how the SWOC's successes helped steelworkers "feel like men."³⁷⁴ Seniority allowed working men to protect their manhood. Clinton S. Golden and Harold J. Rутtenberg described how steelworkers, because of new seniority clauses, were no longer "wantonly" dismissed or tossed aside when "too old to work."³⁷⁵

The UAW viewed seniority as an important way to affirm that work and employment were male. Working-class men throughout the US, including the auto industry, worried intensely about women's employment during the Great Depression.³⁷⁶ Even though women's

Anniversary of Sitdown Strikes," *United Automobile Worker*, March 1957, 2; Elmer Yenney, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 27 April 1961, transcript, 23, Reuther Library; JA Beni, interview by Jack W. Skeels, 4 March 1963, transcript, 5, Reuther Library; Marquart, *Auto Worker's Journal*, 138; West, "On the Line," 78.

³⁷² Clinton S. Golden and Harold J. Rутtenberg, *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1942), 127.

³⁷³ Golden and Rутtenberg, *Dynamics of Industrial Democracy*, 121.

³⁷⁴ Joe Periello, interview with the author, 11 June 2000, tape 2, side 1, quoted in Gregory Wood, "'It Made Us Feel Like Men': Gender, Power, and the CIO in Pittsburgh's Steel Valley, 1910-1937," Paper presented at The Working-Class History Seminar, University of Pittsburgh-Carnegie Mellon University, 19 April 2001.

³⁷⁵ Golden and Rутtenberg, *Dynamics of Industrial Democracy*, 121.

³⁷⁶ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 251-254; Milkman, *Gender at Work*, 28, 31-33, 40; Gabin, *Feminism in*

employment in auto manufacturing was numerically small throughout the interwar years, men insisted that most jobs should be reserved for themselves. In 1939, delegates at the UAW convention in Cleveland resolved that contract negotiators would demand that management upheld distinctions between "men's" and "women's" jobs by maintaining separate seniority lists.³⁷⁷ Worries about "growing old" in the factory certainly contributed to men's anxieties about gender. In the midst of persistent speedups and employer ageism, aging seemed to threaten masculinity in fundamental ways. Once a working-class man reached the age of forty, it became increasingly difficult to acquire and retain employment. Due in large part to the problem of age, men struggled to retain identities as workers and breadwinners. Depression-era anxieties about the employment of women in the auto industry were part of a broader pattern of working-class men's uncertainties about masculinity and aging that extended back to the 1910s and 1920s.

While aging working-class men in factories looked to new CIO unions to protect their vulnerable manhood, male office workers and professionals explored other forms of self-organization to combat age discrimination, hiring age limits, and chronic unemployment. Perhaps the most significant form of male office workers' self-organization during the Great Depression took place during the late 1930s. The Forty Plus Club was the brainchild of Roland Darling, a struggling advertising man and former newspaper editor from Massachusetts. When he lived in Bar Harbor, Maine, he knew many resort and hotel workers who were struggling. He helped them organize a self-help group that "worked well enough"; some men found work. While living in Boston during 1938, he "met one unemployed man after another, all desperately

the Labor Movement, 33-38.

³⁷⁷ Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 35-36.

in need work." Working men's struggles with manhood inspired Darling: "Here were men whose previous measure of success had led them to acquire homes, encourage their children to expect college educations, and in general set up standards of living which were now going to smash."³⁷⁸ Darling wanted to form an organization that would combat employer biases against middle-aged men. Aging male office workers and service workers heard the "persistent refrain" of "We make 40 our deadline in taking on new people." Furthermore, older men in the office had to contend with employers who were in the habit of firing 2 of 3 staffers and "piling three jobs" on the third.³⁷⁹

Darling organized the first Forty Plus Club in Boston ("Forty Plus of New England") in 1938. He borrowed the name "Forty Plus" from another organization that was also trying to find ways to place unemployed middle-aged male office workers, the Sales Executives' Club of New York City.³⁸⁰ The group started small, featuring only 13 members. Five found work during the first summer. Within the next few months, over 100 men joined the Boston group. After the Boston Forty Plus Club appeared in 1938, anxious executives in other cities formed their own organizations. In addition to other clubs in New England (such as Hartford and Springfield, Massachusetts), unemployed professional men started organizations in Buffalo, Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, New York City, Philadelphia, Kansas City, Missouri, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Syracuse. In the South, clubs materialized in Miami, Greenville,

³⁷⁸ Giles, "Hired After Forty," 2-3.

³⁷⁹ Giles, "Hired After Forty," 2.

³⁸⁰ Ray Giles, "Men Over Forty Preferred," *Reader's Digest*, March 1938, 97-100; "Forty Plus Clubs," *Monthly Labor Review*, April 1940, 804; "Urge Jobs for Men Over 40," *Business Week*, 16 July 1938, 24.

South Carolina, Tulsa, and Savannah. The group was also international; men in Montreal, Toronto, and London, England, formed Forty Plus Clubs.³⁸¹

Roland Darling envisioned the Forty Plus Club as a practical organization that would help aging men find employment. The club functioned as a central site where men came together to "sell" one another. Members of Forty Plus contacted employers (as they were assigned) to convince them to fill vacancies with a member. Commentators emphasized that it was best for men to help other men find work via Forty Plus. Rather go in for a job interview alone, aging men would ideally benefit from the institutional support of the club. Employers were not dealing with one man; they were dealing with many. For middle-aged men, Forty Plus gave them a feeling of power that was eluding them. "Members found that selling another man to an employer, instead of yourself, has many advantages," Ray Giles observed. "It kills off the nervousness, the over-anxiety, the apologetic attitude or the artificial boldness which afflicts men trying to get a badly needed job."³⁸²

Male professionals celebrated the Forty Plus Clubs. They were places where middle-class men -- salesmen, bankers, managers, and professors -- reasserted their manhood. "Association and mutual helpfulness," Ray Giles wrote, "gave them the priceless grit to go on making call after call, in spite of discouragement. Their . . . tasks kept them busy everyday, and that helped sustain morale and self-respect." He continued, "The club is hard-boiled, makes no pleas for sympathy."³⁸³ In a 1941 letter to the *New York Times*, Lucien Dix (probably a member)

³⁸¹ "Forty Plus Clubs," 805-806; "Jobless Over 40 Organize A Club," *New York Times*, 20 January 1939, 32.

³⁸² Giles, "Hired After Forty," 2.

³⁸³ Giles, "Hired After Forty," 2.

celebrated their honorable efforts to reclaim jobs in the professional world over the past two years. The Forty Plus Clubs' members were not burned out "forgotten men," aging men with slouched shoulders and battered bodies. Rather, the men of Forty Plus were an "unusually attractive" group, vigorously collaborating "together in a voluntary association to sell their wares." They were, indeed, men. In fact, Dix argued that the Forty Plus Clubs' struggle in New York and Boston was comparable to English men's heroic war against the Nazis on the Continent: "I see in these men mutually striving with courage and patience for victory over the depression their brethren of Britain facing as gallantly a much more evil foe."³⁸⁴

Forty-plus clubs certainly were places where struggling staffers and professionals could feel manly again. Instead of walking aimlessly around the streets or languishing in breadlines, middle-class men could join their local Forty Plus organization. They might have found solace with other men who shared their plight. These men probably benefited from talking about the problem of hiring age limits in the office, as well as exploring strategies to reclaim employment. The Great Depression, as they liked to point out, may have bloodied the members of Forty Plus, but they were unbowed.³⁸⁵ Every club designated tasks for their members that gave them a sense of purpose. They were not *unemployed*; the men of Forty Plus were working at a *new job* (albeit without a salary). Everyday, members called and met with employers about possible job openings and placements, wrote and revised resumes and cover letters for out-of-work executives, and gave speeches to community groups about the Forty Plus program.³⁸⁶ The clubs'

³⁸⁴ Lucien Dix, "Forty-Plus and Still Useful," *New York Times*, 28 March 1941, 22.

³⁸⁵ Dix, "Forty Plus," 22.

³⁸⁶ Ray Giles, "Hired After Forty -- Boston Style," *Reader's Digest*, December 1938, 3-4.

activities reconstructed the high-stakes atmosphere of the white-collar office. Failure or dereliction of duty was not tolerated. If a member skipped meetings or failed to execute his assigned tasks, then he would be "dismissed" and replaced by a new man.³⁸⁷

The leaders of the Forty Plus Clubs envisioned their organization as a place where manly work was done. They did not want their clubs to be seen as social or recreational sites. Forty Plus was about working -- period. In a 1938 article about Forty Plus in the *Reader's Digest*, Ray Giles noted, "Strictly taboo are social gossip, religious arguments, off-color stories, or political discussion."³⁸⁸ Unemployed aging executives and professionals wanted the Forty Plus Clubs to be sites where they could exercise their manhood. They were supposed to do work that led to full employment -- the pillar of masculinity. And as unemployed men in the midst of a depression, the members of Forty Plus shied away from any similarity to women's social club activity. Forty Plus wanted no part of gossip or frivolity.

While they were limited in scope, Forty Plus Clubs enjoyed tangible successes. Across the US, the groups placed significant numbers of its own members in new positions. In 1939, Forty Plus in Chicago had placed 115 middle-aged executives into new jobs. In Kansas City, Missouri, 45 members moved on to new jobs. In Pittsburgh, 41 of 175 aging executives found full-time work.³⁸⁹ Between 1938 and 1941, the Forty Plus Club in New York City found work for as many as 275 businessmen. In 1941, the New York club boasted that it reached a "low water mark." Due to its success, only seventy men were on the active Forty Plus membership

³⁸⁷ Giles, "Hired After Forty," 4. The Forty Plus Clubs did not admit any man who wanted to join. Rather, the group featured waiting lists and only replaced men only as its members found work.

³⁸⁸ Giles, "Hired After Forty," 4.

³⁸⁹ "Forty Plus Clubs," 805.

list.³⁹⁰ In terms of the organization's broader impact, the Forty Plus Clubs envisioned their work as a challenge against age discrimination in twentieth-century employment. The clubs' broader purpose was "to create appreciation for the value of the mature experience and seasoned judgment of executives over 40."³⁹¹ In addition to Forty Plus, numerous smaller organizations existed in New York City and Boston. To combat "Fortyphobia," aging professional men formed "Life Begins at 40 Leagues," "The Job Hunters League," and "The Foundation for Americans of Mature Age," among other groups.³⁹²

Anxieties about "growing old" fueled the "crisis" of masculinity during the Great Depression. In experts' analyses of men and unemployment, they discovered that hiring age limits and speedups undermined older men's ties to the workplace. The decade's "forgotten man" was in many ways an older man, struggling with employers who favored youth and agility. But the aging working-class man was no longer the sole central figure of "the problem of the old man" discourse. The economic crisis struck the middle-aged executive. Older men in offices also faced hiring age limits and chronic unemployment. The severity of aging working- and middle-class men's struggles with hiring age limits and speed-ups contributed to the 1930s as a period of masculinity crisis.

Historians often cite Americans' turn towards the welfare state as the main way that men and women came to grips with the Great Depression. However, older men utilized a more varied

³⁹⁰ "Job Club Rejoices at Low Membership," *New York Times*, 26 January 1941, 40; "Recent Activities of New York Forty Plus Club," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 1940, 623.

³⁹¹ "Jobless Over 40 Organize A Club," 32.

³⁹² "Fathers and Sons Engage in Job War," *New York Times*, 5 June 1938, 43; "Urge Jobs for Men Over 40," 24.

approach to bolster their ebbing manhood. In addition to favoring Social Security, older men also worked on strengthening their health -- seen as key to preserving their toehold in the labor market. Men read advice books, ate new foods, watched their diets, and exercised to keep their bodies working at optimum efficiency. Aging men, working and middle class, also organized collectively to combat age discrimination. Working-class men in basic industries such as the automobile industry, for instance, flocked to the CIO banner. Executives in cities such as Boston, New York, and Chicago organized new Forty Plus Clubs -- which they utilized to fight for jobs in corporate offices. Men also organized to demand greater access to pensions from the state, supporting the Townsend movement.

During the New Deal era, aging men reaffirmed work and the male breadwinner role as key components of masculinity. Social Security, which promised only moderate sums to a select group of eligible persons, did not alleviate older men's anxieties. Furthermore, the program did not begin until 1940. Instead, the depression taught aging men that working was too precious to ever leave. He needed work to support himself and his family -- the "touchstone" of manhood, as Mirra Komarovsky pointed out. World War II also reopened the factory and the office for aging men, as many young men went off to war in the Pacific, North Africa, and Europe. Older Americans found new job opportunities.³⁹³

Chapter Four explores men's uncertainties about the new cultural and economic institution of retirement during the 1940s and 1950s. Mandatory retirement policies generally required men to retire at sixty-five. However, many did not want to retire since work was so fundamental to manhood. In the process of coming to terms with retirement, especially as

³⁹³ Kenneth Walker, *Living Your Later Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 168-169.

increasing post-World War II prosperity led many to think of themselves as middle class, observers of retirement transformed "the problem of the old man," shifting focus from working-class men's struggles with age discrimination and pensions to a middle-class preoccupation with preserving youth and productivity.

5.0 CHAPTER 4 : GENDER, CLASS, AND RETIREMENT ANXIETIES, 1940S-1950S

My legs trembled as I climbed into the car, and I drove home battered and bruised, physically half sick and emotionally stunned. When I got home, the house was empty. I collapsed on a bed and lay there, suffering.

This was retirement day...This was it.

Now I was a retired man.

Gifford R. Hart (1957)³⁹⁴

When an unnamed company retired Gifford R. Hart, an executive with the firm, he experienced powerful feelings of anxiety. While he appreciated the formal retirement ceremony that honored his service, Hart lamented the end of the job he had valued for so long. After so many years at his desk, Hart drove home from work for the last time. He faced an uncertain future as a "retired man." Why did men worry about retirement? What would manhood mean in this new phase of life? Gifford Hart, and other aging men, feared they would not be able to reconstruct manhood

³⁹⁴ Gifford R. Hart, *Retirement: A New Outlook for the Individual* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), 163.

as they made the transition from "work" to retirement. Hart worried to such an extent that he even needed to write a book about it.

While American men had weathered the Great Depression, won a global war against fascism, and proudly opposed Soviet expansionism, the postwar years ushered in a new era of anxiety about manhood. Worries about the meanings of manhood in retirement rested at the center of this postwar masculinity crisis. As men faced retirement at the age of sixty-five, they lamented the loss of income, the end of daily routines, the disruption of gender identities within marriage, the end of friendships with other men in the workplace, physical decline and death, and the loss of their valued status as workers and professionals. World War II and the Cold War elevated the importance of service and usefulness as masculine virtues, while increasing suburbanization, rising incomes, and expanding job opportunities made middle-class status a key foundation of postwar manhood. Men worked within a broader culture that put a heightened premium on useful service to the nation and the achievement of middle-class affluence. Postwar experts and retiring workers viewed retirement as a threat to manhood, since manliness now depended on the maintenance of middle-class incomes and participation in the economically meaningful and productive activities found in the postwar workplace.

5.1 MANHOOD AND CLASS AFTER WORLD WAR II

There were several cultural, social, and political trends that surely contributed to Gifford R. Hart's unease about retirement and manhood. During the 1940s and 1950s, World War II, the Cold War, and the ascendancy of suburbanization and mass culture reshaped how men in the United States thought about masculinity. In addition to economic reasons for working,

numerous social and cultural pressures assumed importance. World War II put a heavy emphasis on service and usefulness. American men were expected to serve the nation, subsuming individual ambitions to the war effort. The war also engendered massive economic recovery, pulling the US out of the Great Depression. Now employed, men of the postwar era pursued attainable middle-class standards of living: suburban homes, two cars, kitchen appliances, and steady paychecks. The rise of the Cold War -- the heated political and cultural tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union -- redefined American political culture. "Real" men took a hard line against Communist expansion. In contrast, men who refused to stand tough against the Soviet Union were conveniently labeled "soft" on Communism and deemed unfit for political office. During the immediate postwar period, American men needed to be, at once, good soldiers, productive workers, selfless team members, capable leaders, and successful providers of affluent middle-class lifestyles. With so much to take care of, pundits bemoaned men's unease: "What happened to the American male?"³⁹⁵

While various period writers and some historians have since argued that men became increasingly ambivalent about their jobs during the fifties, working and the workplace actually became more important to men.³⁹⁶ Some men believed that corporate employment transformed

³⁹⁵ For overviews of World War II at home and abroad, see David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1998), 219-247. For background on the early Cold War, see Walter LaFeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1992*, 7th edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993); HW Brands, *The Devil We Knew: Americans and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); William L. O'Neill, *American High: The Years of Confidence, 1945-1960* (New York: Free Press, 1986); William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); and Foner, *Story of American Freedom*, 259-273. On postwar consumption and mass culture, see Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003). The question comes from Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Crisis of American Masculinity" (1958), in *The Politics of Hope* (1949; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1962), 237.

³⁹⁶ Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949; New York: Penguin Books, 1998); William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956); Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 240; and Richard L.

them into unoriginal and anonymous "organization men"; but work, as Gifford Hart suggested, allowed men to live up to new social and cultural imperatives and to escape from the feminizing domesticity of the home. As discussions of retirement illustrated, men wanted to remain ensconced in the corporate boardroom and the factory; they did not want to leave their jobs. However, expanding mandatory retirement programs forced older men out. In an era where women seemed to wield too much influence through their ascribed status as domestic caregivers, and world affairs required men to be active in "public" matters, men wanted to remain on the job. Work gave them a space where their wives' influence did not reach and where corporate hierarchies subordinated women to men. Employment also yielded a sense of usefulness, made vital by World War II and the Cold War. Finally, men remembered the "forgotten men" of the Great Depression. In the past, employment was unattainable. As a result of postwar prosperity, most men determined they would work as long as they could.

World War II redefined the relationships between work and manliness. In addition to bolstering men's access to jobs (and the male breadwinner ideal), the experience of global war emphasized the importance of team work and productive service to the nation. To be "men," males could not be idle individuals. Real men were useful and beneficial team players. During the war, men faced a Herculean task: to defeat fascism in two theaters of war. World War II made usefulness and national service the "template for postwar manhood."³⁹⁷ When the war ended in August 1945, President Harry S. Truman rewarded men with a new mission: "We are

Ochberg, "The Male Career Code and the Ideology of Role," in *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies*, ed. Harry Brod (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 173-174.

³⁹⁷ Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999), 16.

faced with the greatest task we've ever been faced with [rebuilding war-torn Europe and Asia]. It is going to take the help of all of us to do it."³⁹⁸ Americans' willingness to conform during the 1950s suggests how service and usefulness were made important by the war. In *The Organization Man* (1956), a critique of postwar men's obsession with conformity, William Whyte, Jr., observed: "Man exists as a unit of society. Of himself, he is isolated, meaningless; only as he collaborates with others does he become worth while, for by sublimating himself in the group, he helps produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts."³⁹⁹

Memories of the Great Depression affirmed men's eagerness to work and earn in offices and factories. As a man in his sixties, Gifford Hart surely remembered the difficulties men faced during the 1930s. Postwar men, especially older men, could recall the troubles they experienced during the "lean years" of the depression decade. Men viewed World War II as the beginning of a brighter economic future. The work of war paid off. In 1942, Private Carwood Lipton looked forward to the personal and economic opportunities afforded by the army and the end of the depression. "The Depression was over," he noted. "I was beginning a new life that would change me profoundly."⁴⁰⁰ The war also afforded new opportunities to New Yorker Robert Lekachman. He told the oral historian Studs Terkel that "The army provided me with my first steady job."⁴⁰¹ Men knew joblessness during the depression, and they wanted to leave those years behind. During the twenty year period after World War II, the US economy created over

³⁹⁸ Faludi, *Stiffed*, 19.

³⁹⁹ Whyte, *Organization Man*, 7.

⁴⁰⁰ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Band of Brothers* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 17.

⁴⁰¹ Studs Terkel, *"The Good War": An Oral History of World War II* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 66.

20 million new jobs.⁴⁰² With so many new opportunities to work and earn, postwar men did not want to leave their jobs. When he returned home from Europe after the war, a wartime friend offered Major Richard Winters the job of personnel manager at his family's nitration works. By 1950, he was general manager of the factory. Carwood Lipton also found employment opportunities after the war. When he returned home, he went to college and later found work in a glass manufacturing business. Eventually, he became a major executive with the company.⁴⁰³

The Cold War also contributed to anxieties about gender and sexuality after World War II. During the late 1940s and 1950s, Americans worried about Communists and homosexuals as sources of effeminacy and subversion. Gender ideology of the 1950s mirrored the Cold War ideology of "containment." The perceived pervasiveness of homosexuality led to new worries about the erosion of manhood. In response, politicians were quick to redraw the national and gender boundaries of the US. For example, Republican Party politicians in Washington, DC, affirmed heterosexuality as the national sexual identity when Undersecretary of State John Puerifoy complained in 1950 that the State Department was staffed by a large population of homosexuals. Politicians called for investigations into the presence of gay men in government posts, demanding their prompt removal.⁴⁰⁴ In 1950, Senator Eugene McCarthy characterized Democrats as sexual nonconformists: "Communists and queers" in the Truman Administration "lost" China; "prancing mimics of the Moscow party line" worked for the State Department; and

⁴⁰² Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear*, 857.

⁴⁰³ Ambrose, *Band of Brothers*, 306-307, 303.

⁴⁰⁴ KA Cuordileone, "'Politics in an Age of Anxiety': Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960," *Journal of American History*, 87:2 (September 2000), 532, 536.

officials such as Dean Acheson and UN Ambassador-at-Large Phillip Jessup were "dilettante diplomats" who "cringed" before the Soviet Union.⁴⁰⁵

Americans worried that manhood was ebbing under geopolitical and sexual forces. Were men tough enough to handle the Communist threat, especially since they lived in suburbs and, as Kinsey suggested, dabbled in homosexuality?⁴⁰⁶ During the early years of the Cold War, American political culture took a "hard" turn. "Peace," Truman asserted, "has to be built on power."⁴⁰⁷ In this era of anxiety about gender and sexuality, as reflected in Cold War rhetoric, work provided men with a familiar way to affirm manhood.

The rise of postwar mass consumption reorganized masculinity around middle-class standards of attainment. To be "men" after World War II, males needed to provide the accoutrements of suburban comfort. While ideals about masculinity before World War II seemed to emphasize economic stability through male breadwinning, postwar masculinity reflected desires for upward mobility. Working-class men expected that unions and employers would offer them high wages and job stability in exchange for "peace" on the shopfloor. The 1950 "Treaty of Detroit," for instance, the United Automobile Workers' (UAW) contract with General Motors, symbolized a bargain between labor and management: amiable labor relations in exchange for high wages, generous benefits, and middle-class standards of living.⁴⁰⁸ Editors of *Fortune* magazine remarked that the Congress of Industrial Organizations helped working

⁴⁰⁵ Wittner, *Cold War America*, 95.

⁴⁰⁶ Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety," 529, 532-533, 538.

⁴⁰⁷ Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety," 516; Lawrence S. Wittner, *Cold War America: From Hiroshima to Watergate* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 15.

⁴⁰⁸ Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 155.

men ("to an amazing degree") become "middle-class member[s] of a middle-class society."⁴⁰⁹ As providers, men organized manhood around upward mobility and the attainment of suburban lifestyles. "My next step," an auto industry welder noted in the 1950s, "is a nice little modern house of my own. That's what I mean by . . . getting ahead."⁴¹⁰ Higher wages meant additional discretionary income, which helped working people enjoy, to a greater degree, the expanding postwar consumer economy.

The "embourgeoisment" of the working class (and American culture writ large) reinforced the importance of work for men.⁴¹¹ During the 1950s, roughly 60 percent of families earned a "middle-class" income (\$3,000-\$10,000 annually). During the 1920s, in contrast, only 31 percent earned so much.⁴¹² There were powerful cultural and economic incentives for men who could work. Retirement to a fixed, and reduced, income would not suffice as an economic foundation of manhood.

The widening of the American middle-class after the Second World War and culture producers' insistence that the postwar United States was a middle- and not working-class nation greatly contributed to the new middle-class overtones in discussions of manhood and retirement. In *Fortune* magazine during the late 1940s, writers trumpeted, as Michael Zweig noted, "the

⁴⁰⁹ Quoted in Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 250.

⁴¹⁰ Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 161.

⁴¹¹ Cohen, *Consumer's Republic*, 155.

⁴¹² Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 24-25.

arrival of middle-class America and the end of the working class."⁴¹³ Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, writer Herbert Gold noted in 1957: "Now there are no workers left in America; we are almost all middle class as to income and expectations."⁴¹⁴ Retirement observers readily drew upon, as well as reinforced, middle-class themes in their analyses of manhood in retirement. Experts characteristically now envisioned the older man as a middle-class, no longer working-class, man. During the interwar period, "the problem of the old man" hinged on older working-class men's struggles with the economic foundations of manhood, systematically denied by age discrimination and assembly line speedups. The earlier discourses hinged on a stern social critique of class inequalities and ageism that had plagued working men as they reached later life. In the post-World War II period, discussions of men and manhood reflected a new preoccupation with middle-class executives and professionals as representative men in a predominantly middle-class culture. Experts retreated from discussions of older working-class men in the factory; they now focused on the retiring professional -- who worried more about questions of personal fulfillment, lifestyle choices, and the preservation of an affluent standard of living than age discrimination. Discussions of manhood and retirement began with the assumption that most men were financially stable, and they tended to focus on individual men's anxieties, building on the new influence of popular psychology.⁴¹⁵ Experts avoided discussions of class inequalities or injustice.

⁴¹³ Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America's Best Kept Secret* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 57.

⁴¹⁴ Herbert Gold, "The Age of Happy Problems," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1957, 60.

⁴¹⁵ Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). The influence of popular psychology is discussed at greater length in chapter 5.

Another reason why middle-class overtones pervaded discussions of manhood and retirement after World War II was the shifting career interests and the deaths of key authors and activists. Authors who once focused on aging working-class men or downwardly mobile middle-class men as the central figures in "the problem of the old man" discourse had either died or moved on to other subjects. Most significantly, Isaac Max Rubinow and Abraham Epstein, two of the most prominent old age pension advocates and commentators on older working-class men's struggles, passed away in 1936 and 1942 respectively. At the time of his death of pneumonia in 1942, Epstein, who was only fifty years old, taught courses on social insurance principles at both New York University and Brooklyn College. He also served as a consulting economist with the Social Security Board. Former iron worker, Secretary of Labor, and United States Senator James J. Davis died after a long struggle with a kidney ailment in November 1947. Ray Giles, who once wrote articles about aging professionals and Forty Plus Clubs during the Great Depression, had lost interest in older men's organizing efforts by the time he wrote *How to Retire -- and Enjoy It* in 1949: a lifestyle advice book for retiring middle-class professionals. He was no longer concerned with economic justice for aging men; he now focused on leisure opportunities that had to be considered and planned for before a (successful) man retired from his business career.⁴¹⁶

Executives complained that women pushed them too hard to succeed, demanding more and more of the accoutrements of suburban life: cars, homes, and appliances. Men could not stop working in their later years -- even if they wanted to. "More and more wives," the journalist J. Robert Moskin argued, "identify economic achievement with masculinity . . . and men are

⁴¹⁶ Ray Giles, *How to Retire -- and Enjoy It* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949).

unsexed by failure."⁴¹⁷ The renewed emphasis on feminine domesticity after World War II, coupled with the rationalization of housework, made the home a space where women wielded considerable influence. Women expertly cooked, cleaned, shopped, and cared for children. Men worried that women wielded too much influence, controlling a range of factors including sexual intercourse and patterns of consumption.⁴¹⁸

Retirement experts' writings suggest that postwar nationalism and worries about women and femininity shaped men's desire to work. The sociologists Eugene A. Friedmann and Robert J. Havighurst argued that men worked because they wanted to prove their usefulness. Work constituted "a purposeful activity, which is expected of . . . adult males in our society."⁴¹⁹ During the early Cold War, a surging American nationalism renewed interest in "the strong Puritan tradition" and the Protestant work ethic. Work allowed men of the 1950s to prove their mettle, just as the ruggedness of the frontier once challenged earlier generations. Employment provided ways for postwar men like Gifford Hart to perform masculinity: to distance themselves from the feminine household by working towards goals and rewards in the workplace, to revel in social contacts with other men, to prove their worth to the nation, and to pursue middle-class affluence. For men, work "is the symbol of worth, success, and achievement. It confers status and prestige on the worker which he can acquire in no other way. It is the evidence of his acceptance by and contribution to society, and the source of most of his meaningful social

⁴¹⁷ J. Robert Moskin, "Why Do Women Dominate Him?" in *Look Magazine*, ed., *The Decline of the American Male* (New York: Random House, 1958), 16; Schlesinger, "Crisis of American Masculinity," 238, 240-241.

⁴¹⁸ Moskin, "Why Do Women," 8-9; Schlesinger, "Crisis of American Masculinity," 238.

⁴¹⁹ Eugene A. Friedmann and Robert J. Havighurst, *The Meaning of Work and Retirement* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1954), 1, 3.

contacts."⁴²⁰ Retirement jeopardized the foundation of postwar manhood: "The lack of self-maintaining work in old age is . . . a symbol of failure."⁴²¹

5.2 THREATS TO MANHOOD IN RETIREMENT

Gifford R. Hart was very familiar with retirement experts' warnings about the difficult transition from work to retirement, citing his knowledge of "the literature of retirement" in his 1957 memoir and advice book.⁴²² During the 1940s and 1950s, experts in sociology and gerontology and popular magazine writers gave a lengthy list of potential dangers that men would encounter in old age. "Retirement shock," the loss of sexual ability, illness, social isolation, gender inversion within the home, and economic decline, for example, were all cited as problems that men would face when they retired. When Hart returned home from work for the last time and collapsed on his bed in a nervous heap, he was certainly aware of experts' warnings that manhood was precarious and uncertain in retirement.

⁴²⁰ Thomas Parran, Harwood S. Belding, Antonio Ciocco, James A Crabtree, Theodore F. Hatch, Adolph G. Kammer, and Violet B. Turner, "Monograph I," in *Criteria for Retirement: A Report of a National Conference on Retirement of Older Workers*, ed. Geneva Mathiasen (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1953), 66. This book is a report from a 1952 meeting on aging at Columbia University. For additional material, see Otto Pollack, *The Social Aspects of Retirement*, booklet (Philadelphia: Pension Research Council of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1956), 5, 20; and Robert J. Havighurst, "The Impact of Retirement of the Individual," in *Unions and the Problems of Retirement: Proceedings of a Conference* (University of Chicago, 3-4 April 1959), Booklet (Chicago: Union Research and Education Projects, 1959), 13, in vertical files ("Retirement"), Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations (hereafter ILIR), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (hereafter UIUC).

⁴²¹ Parran, et al, "Monograph," 66.

⁴²² Hart, *Retirement*, 27.

Retirement, as Hart pointed out, was a new concept during the 1940s and 1950s.⁴²³ Before Social Security, most men remained active in the labor market until they were prevented from doing so by ill-health, injuries, hiring age limits, firings, institutionalization, or death. Men usually did not "retire." Beginning in the 1940s, however, Americans expected men to stop working in their later years, presumably to live quietly on a small pension from the state. As the Townsend movement's logo once proclaimed, "Youth for work. Age for leisure."⁴²⁴ On the economic foundations of Social Security and expanding company pensions, more and more men were retired during the 1940s and 1950s. In 1950, only 45.8 percent of men over 65 held jobs. By 1955, the number had declined to 39.6 percent. In 1960, it was 33.1 percent.⁴²⁵ Some men wanted to retire from their jobs, but many more worried about the potential economic and social pitfalls. Most men did not decide when they retired; in many cases, company policies forced men out of work or prevented them from finding new full-time jobs. As men continued to live longer, retirement became a common part of the life cycle. By the 1950s, men might live into their 70s and 80s. Despite the frequency of retirement, experts in gerontology and sociology worried that retirement was a source of gender crisis.

What did "retirement" mean? How exactly did retirement threaten manhood? During the 1940s and 1950s, "retirement" generally meant the withdrawal of a man from his previous full-

⁴²³ Hart, *Retirement*, 12.

⁴²⁴ Russell Porter, "Looking for Utopia Along the Townsend Trail," *New York Times Magazine*, 5 September 1939, 5.

⁴²⁵ Patrick J. Purcell, "Older Workers: Employment and Retirement Trends," *Monthly Labor Review*, October 2000, 21; see also "The Older Worker," *Time*, 19 October 1953, 100; Dora L. Costa, *The Evolution of Retirement: An American Economic History, 1880-1990* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 174.

time occupation due to age.⁴²⁶ Three factors led to retirement: (1) company policies that required men to leave work at a certain age; (2) disability or illness that made it no longer possible to work; and/or (3) an individual's willingness to retire and the financial ability to do so. Experts spoke most frequently about corporate policies that mandated retirement. Since manliness depended on work and youth, men viewed retirement as a threat to manhood. For men, retirement meant "old age," which they equated with sickness, isolation, the loss of prestige and status, economic vulnerability, sexual failure, and ultimately death. Retirement robbed males of their jobs: the foundation of their identities as "men." Men of the 1940s and 1950s worried greatly about the problems they might face once they retired.

Men understood retirement to mean "disengagement" from their usual full-time employment -- and, by implication, from society. As employer retirement policies increasingly stipulated, economic and political institutions expected older men (and women) to, in essence, withdraw from society. Sociologists and gerontologists described this as "disengagement theory" during the 1950s and 1960s. As men aged, the ties between older persons and society would be severed. Older men disliked "disengagement." Disengagement theory was a problem for retirees because it questioned the "public" and "private" components of gender ideals. Working away from home for wages or salaries defined the male identity. By working, men believed they were "engaged" with society. If retirement meant disengagement, many men wanted no part of it. Experts and retirees drew upon stark and jarring themes -- including death,

⁴²⁶ Clark Tibbitts, "Retirement Problems in American Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 302; Donald H. Kausler and Barry C. Kausler, *The Graying of America: An Encyclopedia of Aging, Health, Mind, and Behavior*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 343.

illness, and the destruction of "men's" and "women's" spheres -- to express their displeasure about retirement and "disengagement."⁴²⁷

More and more companies inaugurated pension programs for their workers and executives. Surveys indicated during the 1950s that over 90 percent of US firms featured pension plans.⁴²⁸ Harkening back to pre-World War II industrial pension plans, postwar managers viewed pensions as useful ways to regulate workforce composition. Mandatory retirement ages and pensions allowed managers to move outmoded (i.e., older) men out, and create room for the advancement of younger staffers and workers. Also, as managers argued in earlier years, young men brought dynamism to business.⁴²⁹ Many older men, while they supported young men's advancement, disliked the loss of their jobs. An executive at a New Jersey firm reported that retired men -- working- and middle-class -- seldom enjoyed retirement. "Since we've had compulsory retirement in our shop," the man noted, "I've seen an awful lot of guys, big brass and no brass, go on the skids."⁴³⁰

By the 1950s, most companies featured mandatory retirement rules, typically at the age of 65. The National Industrial Conference Board estimated that 48 percent of firms in the United

⁴²⁷ Stanley Parker, *Work and Retirement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982), 13; Nancy C. Morse and Robert S. Weiss, "The Function and Meaning of Work and the Job," *American Sociological Review*, 20:2 (April 1955), 191.

⁴²⁸ James R. Morris, *Employment Opportunities in Later Years* (Burlingame, CA: Foundation for Voluntary Welfare, 1960), 75.

⁴²⁹ "Preparation for Retirement," *Personnel Journal*, November 1951, 211.

⁴³⁰ Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company of Newark, New Jersey, *Helping Employees Get Ready to Retire*, booklet (Newark: Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company of Newark, New Jersey, 1952), 1, in vertical files ("Retirement"), ILIR, UIUC.

States featured mandatory retirement programs.⁴³¹ In New Jersey, a survey of 82 industrial companies in the state showed that 73 percent featured mandatory retirement for workers who reached 65.⁴³² In a survey of reasons why men retired, 50 percent of the men cited "discharged by employer" as the reason why they had stopped working. During the 1950s, roughly half of retired men had been arbitrarily dismissed.⁴³³ In Irving Salomon's sample of 21 retired men's experiences, 1/3 (7) of the men did not choose to retire.⁴³⁴

Since the late-nineteenth century, sixty-five had been typically imposed as the age when aging men would be deemed eligible for pension benefits (if their employers offered them) and retired. Employers chose the age of 65 because they did not want to pay benefits to men who were, in their opinion, too young. A man at age 60 would live longer and collect pension benefits for a longer period of time than a man who was 65. It was cheaper to set the pension age as high as possible. The Roosevelt Administration, the architects of Social Security, also adopted the age of 65 when they designed the old age insurance provisions during the 1930s. After World War II, employers utilized these established precedents when they created new mandatory retirement programs. Postwar employers created a formal process that allowed them to move older men out, while at the same creating room for the promotion and hiring of young men. These programs provided for a more subtle form of age discrimination, smoothed over by pensions and Social Security. Standard Oil, General Electric, and the American Telephone &

⁴³¹ Jack F. Culley and Fred Slavick, *Employment Problems of Older Workers*, booklet (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1959), 22, in vertical files ("Retirement"), ILIR, UIUC.

⁴³² Charles R. Naef, *Pre-Retirement Programs in New Jersey*, booklet (New Brunswick, NJ: Institute of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University, 1960), 6.

⁴³³ Wilcock, "Who's Too Old To Work?" 8.

⁴³⁴ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 174-205.

Telegraph Company argued that mandatory retirement for all workers at a certain age created an equitable workplace. Under mandatory retirement, the worker "knows where he stands." He knows he will retire (with a pension) at age 65.⁴³⁵

Gifford Hart feared retirement because, as many experts suggested, the abrupt end of work caused aging men to die prematurely. Work defined manhood, and the arbitrary retirement of a man at age sixty-five could, as many men apparently believed, abruptly and literally kill him. Observers called this "retirement shock."⁴³⁶ Robbed of their cherished routines, self-esteem, friendships, and economic status, retired men allegedly became ill and depressed. Soon, they died. "Forced retirement can be a man's death sentence," *Nation's Business* argued.⁴³⁷ Hart heard numerous tales of retirement shock as his own retirement approached. He collapsed this "folklore" into the story of a fictional man, "John." John was a successful professional who loved his job, but in a tragic turn of events, John "dropped dead" the day after he retired.⁴³⁸ Other narratives featured suicides. Writing in the *New York Times Magazine*, John L. Springer claimed in 1959 that a vice president of an important corporation committed suicide after a year

⁴³⁵ "Should You Be Forced to Retire at 65?" *US News & World Report*, 13 September 1957, 95.

⁴³⁶ Harold R. Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement* (Boston: Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1953), 91-95; Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, *Helping Employees*, 1; A. Barr Comstock and Sydney Morrell, "Need 65 Be Time To Retire?" *Nation's Business*, June 1949, 47-48; "Training Is Urged on How To Retire," *New York Times*, 30 November 1949, 25.

⁴³⁷ Comstock and Morrell, "Need 65 Be Time To Retire," 48; "When and How Retirement? Problem for Leaders," *Newsweek*, 12 July 1954, 48.

⁴³⁸ Hart, *Retirement*, 27; Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 3; Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, *Helping Employees*, 1; Philip L. Seman, "Hobbies as Recreation for Older People," *Recreation*, August 1944, 254; Robert J. Havighurst, "The Impact of Retirement of the Individual," in *Unions and the Problems of Retirement: Proceedings of a Conference* (University of Chicago, 3-4 April 1959), booklet (Chicago: Union Research and Education Projects, 1959) 12, in vertical files ("Retirement"), ILIR, UIUC; Elon H. Moore, "Preparation for Retirement," *Journal of Gerontology*, 1:2 (April 1946), 206.

of "uselessness" and "loneliness" in retirement.⁴³⁹ Among professionals, these narratives about retirement shock proliferated. "I daren't retire," an aging executive remarked in 1956. "I'd be dead in a couple of years."⁴⁴⁰

No valid research underpinned the assertion that retirement led to higher death rates among older men, but some experts claimed that doctors' "clinical observations" proved older men who worked lived longer than retired men.⁴⁴¹ The assumption that retirement killed aging men was ubiquitous. Dr. Edward J. Stieglitz, a hospital chief of staff in Maryland, argued, "It is an axiom of clinical medicine that forcing the one-track mind executive to retire is tantamount to signing his death certificate within the year." More directly, Dr. Roger I. Lee, a former president of the American Medical Association (AMA) concluded: "Death comes at retirement."⁴⁴² This argument was often based upon rumor, unsubstantiated stories passed on among coworkers. No systematic research supported the contention that retirement killed aging men. However, experts used these urban legends to highlight men's anxieties about retirement, manhood, and aging. Many experts emphasized that retirement -- unless carefully planned for -- led to men's demise. Men struggled to envision manhood without work.

Retirement signified to Gifford Hart, and other aging men, how they were closer to the end than the beginning. Many men disliked retirement because it was synonymous with the final phase of life. Men worried about frailty, illness, and ultimately death in old age. As Hart noted,

⁴³⁹ John L. Springer, "What Is the Right Time To Retire?" *New York Times Magazine*, 15 February 1959, 13; Nancy E. Gross, *Living With Stress* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1958), 148.

⁴⁴⁰ Carlton Wallace, *How to Retire Successfully* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1956), 90.

⁴⁴¹ "Work Long and Live Longer," *Science Digest*, June 1946, back cover.

⁴⁴² Comstock and Morrell, "Need 65 Be Time," 47.

"Could it be that his [the aging man's] retirement is at least partly compounded of his own fears for the future?" Hart continued, "Is his retirement unwelcome not so much because it is retirement but because it is an inescapable reminder of something else?"⁴⁴³ Retirement "reminded" older men they were near the end of their lives, especially since at age 65 they were only expected to live to age 68 or 70 during the 1950s.⁴⁴⁴

Experts worried that retirement made many aging men chronically ill. Boredom, inactivity, and isolation in retirement caused physical decline. In a 1952 advice pamphlet, Kathryn Close wrote about "Andy Smith" and how this man's poorly planned retirement contributed to chronic illness and physical deterioration. Smith was a successful man. He rose through the ranks of his company. Once a factory hand, he retired as a highly paid and well-regarded executive. But retirement, due to rigid company rules, "sunk" the older man. With no work, he quickly became bored, lonely, and restless. After so many months spent listening to the radio and sitting home alone, he began experiencing acute pains in his chest. Smith's heart was failing. Soon, he became an "invalid."⁴⁴⁵ David D. Stonecypher, who wrote for the *New York Times Magazine* and *Science Digest*, argued in 1957 that the retired man "fears his body is

⁴⁴³ Hart, *Retirement*, 74-75; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 177.

⁴⁴⁴ Martin Gumpert, "We Can Live Longer -- But for What?" *New York Times Magazine*, 22 March 1953, 14; Harry J. Johnson, "How To Retire and Be Happy," *US News & World Report*, 1 February 1957, 38.

⁴⁴⁵ Kathryn Close, "Getting Ready To Retire," Public Affairs Pamphlet No. 182, New York: Public Affairs Committee, Inc., 1952, 1; "Retirement May Uncover Hidden Emotional Defects," *Science Digest*, September 1958, 25; Frank Howard Richardson, "Retirement: Tonic or Slow Poison?" *Today's Health*, June 1953, 19, 70; Hans Selye, *The Stress of Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 265; Milton L. Barron, Gordon F. Streib, and Edward A. Suchman, "Research on the Social Disorganization of Retirement," *American Sociological Review*, 17:4 (August 1952), 479-482.

degenerating." Older men worried arthritis, cataracts, heart disease, stroke, "and other frightening things."⁴⁴⁶

Some retired men worried that persistent health troubles would consign men to a permanent convalescence in the domestic sphere. After suffering heart trouble, Bill Biggers, a railroad worker, sarcastically asked his doctor: "'Doctor, do you know where there's furniture having a bargain sale on rocking chairs? Maybe I'll learn to knit and crochet."⁴⁴⁷ Biggers was no longer able to exert himself. While many men experienced health troubles in later life, retirement was certainly not the principal cause of ill health. Lifestyle choices (such as smoking or drinking) surely contributed to men's health troubles.

Men worried also worried about aging and retirement because of the loss of physical strength they associated with aging. Since healthy bodies and physical ability defined major components of manliness, declining strength and waning physical ability pointed to the loss of manhood. "On the physical side," British author Carlton Wallace wrote, "there is the obvious reduction of muscular strength and of bodily endurance. It is no longer possible to perform great feats of weight-lifting, and it is no longer possible to maintain a high degree of physical performance over prolonged periods."⁴⁴⁸ Older men worried their bodies would deteriorate when they retired. Physical decline in later life frightened aging men. Some older men even

⁴⁴⁶ David D. Stonecypher, "You Can Grow Old Gracefully," *Science Digest*, December 1957, 64; see also "How To Retire and Be Happy," *US News & World Report*, 1 February 1957, 38; and Jesse F. Ballenger, "Senility and Self in Modern America: A Cultural History of Alzheimer's Disease" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 2000), esp. ch. 3.

⁴⁴⁷ Bill Biggers, "You're Never Through Till You Quit," *Today's Health*, November 1957, 32.

⁴⁴⁸ Carlton Wallace, *How to Retire Successfully* (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1956), 19; Selye, *Stress of Life*, 265.

thought of their bodies as "inferior," and as a result, they did not take adequate care of themselves.⁴⁴⁹

In addition to death and illness, older men worried about the erosion of separated spheres of activity for men and women.⁴⁵⁰ In 1952, a retired executive told *Business Week* that retirement brought him "from a man's world into a woman's world."⁴⁵¹ Men envisioned themselves as "public" beings who worked in paid occupations, while women occupied the "private" realm of the home. Despite the fact that women also worked in offices and factories, and that many wives worked away from home in paid occupations during the 1950s, aging men understood gender in terms of separated spheres.⁴⁵²

In the new literature on retirement, experts in sociology and gerontology did not often write about women as retiring "workers." Usually, women appeared as discontented housewives, uncertain about (if not opposed to) men's retirements. Why did experts focus on men's struggles with "growing old?" As journalism professor Walter B. Pitkin explained during

⁴⁴⁹ Gross, *Living With Stress*, 147; Stonecypher, "Old Age," 68.

⁴⁵⁰ I use the term "separated spheres" to acknowledge critiques of "separate spheres" models in gender and women's history. During the 1950s, for example, experts used ideologies about separated spheres to make sense of the gender order in retirement, as men's return to the home, they believed, undermined key gender arrangements between husbands and wives. For insightful critiques of separate spheres ideology in US women's history, see Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History*, 75:1 (June 1988), 9-39; and Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 8-10. For important discussions of women's public activities and gender politics during the 1950s, see Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994). A lengthier discussion of retired men's struggles with "men's" and "women's" spheres of activity can be found in chapter 5.

⁴⁵¹ "Retirement Not Always Happy," *Business Week*, 5 April 1952, 50. Jacob Tuckman and Irving Lorge, *Retirement and the Industrial Worker: Prospect and Reality* (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1953), 68, 69; Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 152; William Attwood, "Why Does He Work So Hard?" in *The Decline of the American Male*, ed. *Look Magazine* (New York: Random House, 1958), 58.

⁴⁵² Elaine Tyler May, "Pushing the Limits: 1940-1961," in *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, ed. Nancy Cott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 492-493.

the mid 1940s, retirement took place within the "man's world" of business and industry. He said women were "lucky" because they did not work in paid public occupations long enough to face retirement. For women who (unfortunately, according to Pitkin) did work away from home, the author urged them to prepare for retirement by reading what experts had to say about the male majority: "let them read what we have to say about men. It will apply to them too."⁴⁵³

Older men also worried about the loss of sexual ability due to age and physical decline. Although less frequently discussed in the literature on aging and retirement during the 1950s, experts occasionally linked men's fears of aging to anxieties about sexual ability. The gerontologist Dr. Edward J. Stieglitz described how men invested heavily in youth and "vigor" as components of their manhood. To answer the question, "Why fear senescence?" he noted: "Not infrequently these fears [of aging] are associated with a distorted outlook about the anticipated decline of sexual vigor and enthusiasm." David D. Stonecypher agreed, concluding that the loss of "sexual drive" could only "arouse thoughts intensely painful" for aging men.⁴⁵⁴

In addition to the spatial, economic, and political dimensions of gender, Gifford Hart worried about the relationship between time and gender -- specifically, the manhood derived from men's daily routines. Gender arranged the hours of a man's day; for roughly eight or ten hours per day, most men worked away from home, while their wives (at least ideally) remained home as domestic caregivers. As they faced retirement, older men worried about the loss of daily routines. For years, they woke up, dressed, ate a breakfast that was prepared for them by their wives, and ventured out to work. At the end of the day, they returned home to dinners,

⁴⁵³ Walter B. Pitkin, *The Best Years: How to Enjoy Retirement* (New York: Current Books, 1946), 44.

⁴⁵⁴ Edward J. Stieglitz, *The Second Forty Years* (Philadelphia: JB Lippincott Company, 1946), 2; Stonecypher, "Old Age," 67.

evening papers, and sleep. This arrangement of time defined their manhood. Retirement jeopardized the daily routine; in retirement, their days would, they believed, look more like their wives' daily experiences. As Paul Boynton argued, the jarring end of a man's routine could lead to physical decline. The loss of a man's daily routine was a "just plain understandable fear," according to retired businessman and writer Irving Salomon. As Gifford Hart wrote, older men did not want to confront the end of their cherished routines: "A certain world, which may have meant even more to them than they are aware, has suddenly evaporated. The discovery is shocking. In a sense, the man has lost his identity; he has become a nobody instead of a somebody, and he doesn't like it."⁴⁵⁵

Men often disliked retirement because they often could not choose when to retire, despite some companies' gradual retirement programs. Mandatory retirement jeopardized manhood because it put a definite conclusion on men's ties to their jobs. There was no process of negotiation, nor did men have the option to continue working for the company. While some experts noted that mandatory retirement systematized the layoffs of older men and avoided favoritism on the basis of age, other experts concluded that companies liked mandatory retirement because it paved the way for the promotion of "new blood."⁴⁵⁶ Men often did not retire voluntarily, as numerous experts' research suggests. Another writer's sample showed 50 percent. A 1959 National Industrial Conference Board survey disclosed that 48 percent of US firms featured mandatory retirement rules.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁵ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 3; Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 23; Hart, *Retirement*, 70.

⁴⁵⁶ Close, "Getting Ready to Retire," 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, Appendix B, 174-205; Richard C. Wilcock, "Who's Too Old to Work?" pamphlet, ILIR Publications, Bulletin Series, Volume 4, Number 3 (Urbana: University of Illinois Bulletin, September 1950), 8, in vertical files ("Age and Employment"), ILIR, UIUC; Jack F. Cully and Fred Slavick,

Gifford Hart agreed with the idea that retirement robbed men of acquaintances and friendships. Men's social relationships with other men were often rooted in the workplace, and retirement redefined these relationships along unequal lines or led to their conclusion. Retired professionals who wrote about their retirement experiences suggested that men still at work treated retired men differently once they had stopped working. As coworkers, men could be equals. But in retirement, older men were now has-beens. Retired professionals told stories about how former coworkers rebuffed them when they visited. Lonely and eager for companionship, retired men often returned -- only to discover their former friends and colleagues had no desire to talk with them. When Paul Boynton visited his old office, "Joe" shook his hand asked how he was doing. While he was polite enough, Boynton realized that his one-time friend was not paying attention to him. "Bill" behaved the same way. The (former) co-worker met him "with his old friendly grin but when you sit down for a moment's chat you see that he is working on something that is new to you. The job has moved, the scene has changed. Bill pushes aside his work and devotes himself to your concerns but you know, just the same, that you are in the way; you no longer fit this picture, you have fallen way behind the play."⁴⁵⁸

Hart was financially well off, but other men feared a loss of income once they retired. Pensions from companies and the federal government, even if men received benefits from both sources, paid less than the salaries and wages earned while working. While the number and amount of Social Security payments and private pensions increased during the 1950s, especially

Employment Problems of Older Workers, booklet (Iowa City: Bureau of Labor Management, State University of Iowa, 1959), 22.

⁴⁵⁸ Paul W. Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 49; see also Barron, Streib, and Suchman, "Research on the Social Disorganization of Retirement," 479-482; Giles, *How to Retire*, 227; and George Lawton, "Will Your Old-Timers Be Ready To Retire?" *Factory Management and Maintenance*, January 1950, 117.

in election years, the sums of money remained low.⁴⁵⁹ Retirement signaled a financial loss, and a reduction in lifestyle for men and their families. Less money meant less food and shelter for older men and women. Aging men also worried about funds to cover unforeseen health expenses. As pension scholars and retired professionals pointed out, throughout the 1950s, "financial fears" and "worry about economic security" constituted major sources of anxiety.⁴⁶⁰ Experts often lamented Social Security shortcomings, demanding increased benefits for older men and women. And the Congress of Industrial Organizations' constituent unions, especially the United Automobile Workers, insisted that working-class men should retain middle-class standards of living when they retired.⁴⁶¹

As mandatory retirement became common during the 1950s, Gifford Hart and other men worried what lied ahead for them in a life without work. Experts in gerontology and sociology, as well as retired professionals, popular magazine, and newspaper writers, cited numerous problems that men might confront when they retired. Men worried about death, the loss of sexual ability, boredom, illness, physical decline, the loss of working routines, the loss of middle-class incomes and lifestyles, and the destruction of separated spheres for men and women

⁴⁵⁹ Costa, *Evolution of Retirement*, 174-176.

⁴⁶⁰ Robert K. Burns, *Meeting the Challenge of Retirement*, booklet (Chicago: Industrial Relations Center, University of Chicago, n.d., 1959?), 9.42; Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 3; Thomas Parran, Harwood S. Belding, Antonio Ciocco, James A. Crabtree, Theodore F. Hatch, Adolph G. Kammer, and Violet B. Turner, "Monograph I," in *Criteria for Retirement: A Report of a National Conference on Retirement of Older Workers*, ed. Geneva Mathiasen (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1953), 68.

⁴⁶¹ See Dillard Stokes, *Social Security -- Fact and Fancy* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956). On the UAW and Social Security pension demands, see, among many discussions, "Labor Day -- 1947," *Voice of Local 212*, 8 August 1947, 2; Tom Hester, "Pension Plan," *The Searchlight*, 25 September 1947, 6; "Report to the Membership," *United Automobile Worker*, April 1957, 4; "Demand Short Week for Older Workers," *United Automobile Worker*, November 1957, 8; "The Study Push for Pensions," *Fortune*, June 1959, reprinted in *Social Security: Programs, Problems, and Policies*, ed. William Haber and Wilbur J. Cohen (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1960), 184; and "Ascends to Higher Mathematics to Figure Pensions at Age 60," *Dodge Main News*, 22 July 1950, 2.

in retirement and old age. Faced with such daunting prospects, retirement planning became a widely discussed topic during the 1950s. Experts urged men to ready themselves for retirement. If they did not prepare for their later years, men risked the loss of manhood.

5.3 CORPORATE RETIREMENT PREPARATION

Uncertainty about retirement was so widespread that corporate managers believed there was a need for intervention. Because so many firms instituted mandatory retirement ages during the 1940s and 1950s, prominent companies and labor unions explored retirement preparation programs for workers and executives. At Esso Standard Oil Company, managers surveyed 1,000 employees at its New Jersey refineries. They found that retirees experienced "retirement shock," hostility from wives, and overall boredom and isolation.⁴⁶² Companies such as Pitney-Bowes, Eastman Kodak, Lockheed Aircraft, Wrigley, American Rolling Mills, US Rubber, Western Electric, Shell Oil, and Esso Standard Oil and union leaders such as Walter P. Reuther of the UAW believed that working men and staffers needed to be readied for retirement. Companies explored ways to counsel their retirees on the economics of retirement as well as lifestyle considerations. Companies knew that men worried about the loss of manhood, and they took steps to ease aging men into retirement. The growth of these programs was substantial. During the early 1950s, for example, roughly 20 percent of American companies offered pre-retirement

⁴⁶² "What to Do For Retirement," *Business Week*, 14 April 1951, 34, 36.

counseling to older workers and executives.⁴⁶³ Gifford Hart acknowledged that retirement would be less daunting if men had assistance with the transition.

The expansion of retirement preparation programs after World War II signaled the revival of corporate paternalism. Once, historians generally believed that corporate paternalism and welfare capitalism began during the turn of the twentieth century and ended with the Great Depression, as massive unemployment and the rise of CIO unionism undermined forms of employer benevolence. But more recent work has shown that employers continued to pursue welfare capitalism after the New Deal and the Second World War.⁴⁶⁴ After the depression, numerous companies rebuilt paternalism within the context of new retirement programs. While some companies (especially the Chrysler Corporation) resisted the expansion of retirement benefits, other firms (such as General Motors) tried to assume control over retirement politics by publishing advice pamphlets and designing seminars. The expansion of retirement programs during the 1950s illustrates how employer paternalism survived the New Deal.⁴⁶⁵

⁴⁶³ "Retirement Not Always Happy," *Business Week*, 5 April 1952, 52.

⁴⁶⁴ On corporate paternalism during its heyday before the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), see Steve Meyer, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (1960; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); James D. Rose, *Duquesne and the Rise of Steel Unionism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Nikki Mandell, *The Corporation as Family: The Gendering of Corporate Welfare, 1890-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Wayne A. Lewchuk, "Men and Monotony: Fraternalism as a Managerial Strategy at the Ford Motor Company," *Journal of Economic History*, 53:4 (December 1993), 824-856; and Lisa M. Fine, "'Our Big Factory Family': Masculinity and Paternalism at the Reo Motor Car Company of Lansing, Michigan," *Labor History*, 34:2-3 (Spring-Summer 1993), 274-291. For newer approaches that emphasize the continuation of welfare capitalism beyond the 1930s, see Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-1960* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); and Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁴⁶⁵ "What to Do For Retirement," 34.

How did companies design retirement preparation programs? What did they teach aging workers and executives? The most pioneering counseling programs focused on both economic matters and lifestyle issues. Retirement programs created a framework where aging workers and professionals could begin thinking about, and planning for, their retirement. Observers often cited the Esso Standard Oil program in New Jersey as a model program. Established in 1950, Esso organized a series of informational seminars and presentations. They implemented advice from gerontologists and psychologists about aging workers' (specifically men's) anxieties and needs.⁴⁶⁶ As personnel scholars pointed out, Esso's program stemmed from the company's history with long-serving employees and its avowed respect for the "dignity" and "welfare" of older workers and retirees.⁴⁶⁷ The Esso Standard program focused on two overarching goals: (1) to warn aging men about the troubles they would confront in retirement; and (2) to help older men devise and implement a set of interests before and after they retired. The program functioned as a tutorial on the preservation of manhood in old age.

Refinery superintendents inaugurated aging workers into the retirement program through the mail. Exactly one year before the worker's retirement date, the man (signified as the typical gender of the Esso Standard worker) received a letter of notification and an invitation to attend a series of seminars and meetings about his retirement. There would be five meetings, all of them offered during the man's usual working hours. Attendance was not required, but as *Business Week* pointed out, "nobody has turned down the chance."⁴⁶⁸ The meetings brought men together

⁴⁶⁶ "What to Do For Retirement," 36.

⁴⁶⁷ "Preparation for Retirement," 211.

⁴⁶⁸ "What to Do for Retirement," 36; "Should You Be Forced To Retire at 65?" *US News & World Report*, 13 September 1957, 96.

who were scheduled to retire during the same month. Esso Standard's retirement seminars also integrated salaried and hourly workers into the same classes. The typical session size ranged from six to fifteen men.⁴⁶⁹ Managers devoted the first session to getting acquainted: managers, workers, speakers. Subsequent meetings were organized thematically: health and aging, finances, retirement activities, and a summary discussion.⁴⁷⁰

The typical retiring Esso man began the program by attending an introductory "What is Retirement?" session. Along with other men, he heard various speakers explain, in broad terms, about how aging affects "basic human needs." Also, speakers told their audiences at Esso Standard about the importance of defining retirement on their own terms. Would they disengage from society? Or, would they find new interests to replace the job? During the second session, the Esso Standard men listened to a physician on the subject of "Retirement and Your Health." Doctors warned their audience about the dangers of unhealthy lifestyles, as well as the benefits of proper medical care. Poor health led to illness and death.⁴⁷¹

The second half of the Esso Standard program focused on lifestyle choices for men in retirement. The third session, "Planning for Retirement," emphasized that retiring Esso men needed to find other productive activities to replace the job. The fourth meeting featured Esso retirement success stories: retired men who made the most of their retirements through civic affairs, hobbies that became lucrative businesses, and church activity. The meetings also featured Esso "Ex's" who "got off on the wrong foot" with their retirement, but had righted their

⁴⁶⁹ "What to Do for Retirement," 36; Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, *Helping Employees*, 10.

⁴⁷⁰ "What to Do for Retirement," 36.

⁴⁷¹ "What to Do for Retirement," 36; Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, *Helping Employees*, 10; Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib, *The Nature of Retirement* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 197-198.

course by finding ways to get out of the house and stay busy. Esso Standard counseled its retirees to find activities that were consonant with masculinity. "One thing is stressed," *Business Week* noted in 1951: "A man ought to plan something to keep his hands busy."⁴⁷² The final session was the "roundup" meeting. Here, the retiring Esso man presented his retirement plan, in particular, how he intended to spend his time. Additionally, Esso Standard hoped that its retirees would build contacts with other men of similar interests: "a man who likes gardening can be introduced to another man who has a similar hobby."⁴⁷³

After the Esso man retired, the company continued to check on him. Through correspondence and personal meetings, company officials kept themselves abreast of men's retirement choices. Beginning in the 1950s, companies used a variety of means to involve themselves in workers' retirements. By doing so, companies wanted older men to feel they still had ties to the workplace (and perhaps their manhood). "Most companies," Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib remarked, "seek to retain for the worker the sense of belonging."⁴⁷⁴ Other companies regularly sent company newsletters and Christmas cards to retirees. Some companies offered special benefits to retirees. Phone companies offered discount phone services, while some railroad firms offered travel discounts. Most significantly, some firms made a point of offering life insurance and health benefits to retirees.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷² "What to Do for Retirement," 36; Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, *Helping Employees*, 10; Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 198.

⁴⁷³ "What to Do for Retirement," 36; Mutual Benefit Life Insurance Company, *Helping Employees*, 10.

⁴⁷⁴ Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 199.

⁴⁷⁵ Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 199.

Companies who offered retirement preparation programs ("nearly all") emphasized that husbands and wives needed to prepare for retirement together, since it would affect them both in significant ways. Men believed that retirement undermined the spatial arrangement of gender, necessitating a process of renegotiation between husbands and wives. Now reintegrated into the home on a full-time basis, men and women would need to work together on how husbands would occupy their time, yet not be "under foot" with his wife. Companies encouraged women to participate in their husbands' retirement preparation. Husbands and wives needed an opportunity to work on the ground rules of retirement.⁴⁷⁶

In addition to the ambitious Esso Standard Oil program, numerous other companies offered smaller programs. These smaller programs focused on retirees' lifestyle choices. For example, in 1978 Pitney-Bowes firm in Connecticut created an arts-and-crafts program that allowed its working men to explore hobbies, crafts, and arts. Lockheed Aircraft hired a retirement counselor named Ray H. Geist to oversee a similar crafts and handiwork program. These programs were large enough to include not only the oldest executives and workers, but also younger men whose retirement was in the distant future. Both firms agreed with experts and workers about men's unease about retirement, concluding that new activities and hobbies would help aging men adjust to life without work. Joseph Morrow, P-B's personnel relations director, argued that "a man with a hobby finds retirement one of the happiest times of his life." Without some form of purposeful activity, the retiring man would surely become despondent and ultimately die. Morrow drew upon widespread discussions of "retirement shock": "the chances

⁴⁷⁶ Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 198; "What to Do for Retirement," 36.

are he will die soon," he concluded.⁴⁷⁷ To promote their arts and handiwork program, Pitney-Bowes, for example, sponsored an annual arts-and-crafts show in Stamford, Connecticut. Companies believed they offered solutions to the postwar "problem of the old man" in retirement. They thought they could teach men how to remain busy in retirement.

The Congress of Industrial Organizations challenged companies' new enthusiasm for retiree paternalism. During the 1950s, Walter P. Reuther and the United Automobile Workers union launched numerous initiatives on behalf of older working-class men. While the UAW focused on autoworkers, they envisioned their programs as models for the entire country. Under Reuther's leadership, the UAW advocated and instituted retiree social centers (called "Drop-In Centers") in auto towns such as Detroit. The union also pushed for the expansion of corporate pension programs, increased Social Security payments, expanded health coverage, and pre-retirement training programs. As its retired membership expanded continually throughout the 1950s, the union devoted more and more funds on their behalf. To fund its new retirement training initiative, the UAW earmarked over \$14,000 per month. The purpose of the program was "to begin to prepare workers for the change that retirement will bring into their lives so that they can make the emotional adjustment and . . . [make] full use of the new leisure which their years of productive work have earned for them." In 1957, the UAW featured a retired membership of over 78,000 former autoworkers.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁷ "To Retire Happily, Get a Hobby First," *Business Week*, 22 December 1951, 36, 38.

⁴⁷⁸ Elvira Delaney, "After the Job -- What?" *Recreation*, May 1958, 154-155; "UAW's Drop-Ins Woo Pensioners," *Business Week*, 17 April 1954, 158-160, 162, 164; "Auto Union to Bargain for Retired Workers," *Business Week*, 1 June 1957, 130; two-page photo essay on UAW Drop-In Centers, *United Automobile Worker*, June 1954, 6-7.

Employers and unions envisioned their programs as benevolent and helpful responses to widespread anxieties about manhood and retirement after World War II. In addition to workers and staffers, managers and unionists were concerned enough about the tense relationship between retirement and masculinity to inaugurate preparation programs. As more and more men retired and lived longer lives, workers, executives, and managers wanted to help retirees take a sense of manhood with them into retirement.

5.4 SAYING GOODBYE: THE LAST DAYS OF WORK

Many of the themes related to postwar men's anxieties about retirement came together in discussions of the last days of work and, for some, retirement ceremonies. Retiring middle-class men such as Gifford Hart, Paul Boynton, and Raymond Kaighn often discussed their anxieties about the loss of sacred routines, friends in the workplace, and the sense of purpose and status they derived from working. Men talked about how they, as Kaighn put it, "hate[ed] to give it all up."⁴⁷⁹ In the postwar advice literature, aging men wrote about the retirement day as an unsettling time. The retirement day encapsulated a stark contradiction: on one hand, employers and coworkers tried to honor retirees' service and hard work with kind farewells and gifts. On the other hand, retirement meant the abrupt end of a man's career. It was simultaneously a time of tragedy and celebration. Retirees seized upon retirement ceremonies to validate their worth as workers and men. Men boldly proclaimed how they would enjoy their "freedom" by tinkering in workshops and traveling to warmer climates. They insisted no other men could take their place.

⁴⁷⁹ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 16.

The retirement day and the last days of work proved to be an awkward benchmark of men's transition from work to retirement. Paul Boynton described the retirement day as the "dividing line between the old life and the new."⁴⁸⁰

Middle-class executives and professionals figured most prominently in discussions of retirement ceremonies in the advice literature and the newspapers. However, other common figures included long-serving mail carriers, policemen, military leaders, school officials, and elite businessmen -- individuals who sparked the interest of newspaper editors and their readers during the 1940s and 1950s. Despite newspapers' focus on professionals and executives, Chicago steelworkers' retirements sometimes made the pages of the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.⁴⁸¹ (The *New York Times* focused on middle-class men's retirements, except for occasional discussions of postal workers' retirements.)⁴⁸² Overall, published sources suggest that companies and government agencies held retirement ceremonies during the 1940s and 1950s; they ranged from informal gatherings to organized luncheons and formal evening ceremonials. Retired professionals, who produced most of the retirement advice literature during the 1950s, wrote about their own retirement experiences -- ignoring working-class experiences. Throughout

⁴⁸⁰ Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 46.

⁴⁸¹ "Plants Honor 4 South Side Steelmakers," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 June 1950, 2; "Ten Employees of Wisconsin Steel Retire," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 July 1952, 1.

⁴⁸² For example, see "Charles E. Hill Honored," *New York Times*, 27 June 1946, 31; "Two Surety Veterans Retiring," *New York Times*, 31 December 1947, 26; "Dr. Bayne Is Honored By 1,000 Educators," *New York Times*, 8 May 1949, 69; "5th Ave. Group Hails Leadership of Terry," *New York Times*, 26 October 1949, 29; "Worthington Sales Chief Retiring After 59 Years," *New York Times*, 19 September 1951, 51; "Judge Conger, 70, Honored," *New York Times*, 8 January 1952, 29; "Dr. Gartlan, Retiring, Honored at Luncheon," *New York Times*, 8 June 1952, 63; "Justice Davis at 70 Retires This Week," *New York Times*, 28 December 1952, 24; "Fete For Hungerford," *New York Times*, 29 January 1953, 30; "To Fete Retiring School Aide," *New York Times*, 15 May 1953, 25; "700 Educators Bid Dr. Ernst Good-By," *New York Times*, 17 May 1953, 68; "Tobin Retiring from Erie," *New York Times*, 20 October 1954, 43; and "Gillroy is Honored By Building Groups," *New York Times*, 11 November 1958, 48, as well as other citations discussed below.

the retirement advice literature and newspaper articles, retirees expressed mixed feelings of excitement and anxiety about retiring.

One reason why retirees, especially in white-collar occupations, experienced anxiety upon retirement was the chilly, if not rude, reactions of their co-workers to announcements that a man was retiring. When fellow executives and staffers learned of Gifford Hart's upcoming retirement, Hart noted they generally expressed a "mild, inarticulate embarrassment." No one told him they were happy for him, and no one said they were angry with him for leaving. But Hart noticed a palpable change in his co-workers' demeanor toward him. They seemed to lose respect. A few tersely remarked, "Well, good luck."⁴⁸³ Hart's co-workers assumed that men belonged in the workplace. There, a man could be a real man; he could be useful and valuable. They typically viewed retirement as a tragedy, but they conceived of voluntary retirement as foolishness. Hart, who voluntarily retired because of fragile health, worried that his colleagues thought of him as a quitter. No one envied Hart for retiring.⁴⁸⁴

In their discussions of the last day of work, retirees lamented how relationships with their working friends changed so quickly. Retirees knew they would miss the shop talk, cocktails, and lunches shared with (always male) coworkers. Everything would change when they retired. Gifford Hart warmly described the farewell luncheon thrown for him by a "big group of my business friends" on his last day of work: "The preliminary cocktails were fine, the group was congenial, the conversation was loud and gay."⁴⁸⁵ Men told jokes, recalled old times, patted

⁴⁸³ Hart, *Retirement*, 149.

⁴⁸⁴ Hart, *Retirement*, 143.

⁴⁸⁵ Hart, *Retirement*, 158.

each other on the back, and vowed to remain close. In retirement, Hart knew he would miss socializing with his associates. This homosocial world had been a defining part of his, and many other retired men's, manhood.⁴⁸⁶ Men depended on their male-exclusive work cultures and social circles to establish boundaries and spaces where women could not enter. Thomas Collins suggested that men were deeply committed to homosociability in the workplace. Specifically, they were "married" to luncheon meetings with other men, and after-hours activities such as bowling leagues.⁴⁸⁷

Men made comparisons between the last days of work and the ending of a romantic relationship with a woman. Work offered them emotional bonds. Men "loved" their jobs; they were "married" to them. Retirement felt like divorce. Thomas Collins, wrote in 1956: "You will be leaving your job at sixty-five much as a man might leave his wife after forty years of marriage. Because every man who works for a living is a bigamist of sorts. He is married to his wife, and he is married to his work." He concluded, "In the closing days . . . you will have some of the emotions of a man who is breaking off a romance."⁴⁸⁸

Available discussions of working-class men's last days of work before retirement vaguely suggested that retirees would miss the work itself -- the tasks and skills required of them on the job. In a 1959 study of the "nature" of retirement, a retiring locomotive engineer told two

⁴⁸⁶ On the tensions between heterosocial and homosocial leisure among men and women, see Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Randy D. McBee, "'He Likes Women More Than He Likes Drink and That Is Quite Unusual': Working-Class Social Clubs, Male Culture, and Heterosocial Relations in the United States, 1920s-1930s," *Gender & History*, 11:1 (April 1999), 84-112; and Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

⁴⁸⁷ Thomas Collins, *The Golden Years: An Invitation to Retirement* (New York: John Day Company, 1956), 249.

⁴⁸⁸ Collins, *Golden Years*, 249.

sociologists that it "was not easy putting a good engine on pit for the last time." The aging train man was dismayed by the end of his work rhythms. "I went home that day without even going into the washroom," he commented. He left the grime on his hands, taking with him the dirt and soot he had worn into his pores.⁴⁸⁹

As their retirement day approached, retirees wanted to perform their tasks with greater rigor and precision. They wanted to leave a personal imprint on their jobs, proclaiming to coworkers and management that no other man could replace them. Gifford Hart noted that he did his best work during his final six months. Since he was retiring, coworkers expected him to slow down. Hart refused. Despite ailing health, Hart worked harder than ever, noting that his energy level and skill had actually increased. Hart concluded, "I want to make my exit with all flags flying and band playing 'He's a jolly good fellow.'" He felt an overriding "urge" to leave his mark.⁴⁹⁰ Perhaps Hart believed that a final burst of hard work would allow him to take a sense of manhood with him once he retired.

During their last days, aging men asserted their expertise and sense of importance when they mocked the younger men who would replace them. By ridiculing naïve and inexperienced replacements, they tried to assert themselves as superior men. Thomas Collins mused about how his young successor seemed like he would never function as a true replacement. He knew nothing of the job's complexities, all of which Collins claimed to have mastered. When the young lad boasted of his plans to transform the position, the retiring Collins kept his thoughts to himself. He knew better; he privately thought no youngster could ever achieve his level of

⁴⁸⁹ Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib, *The Nature of Retirement* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 17.

⁴⁹⁰ Hart, *Retirement*, 145.

mastery. As he ventured into retirement, Collins wanted to take with him that sense of importance. He was a man who once mattered in the workplace.⁴⁹¹

The last days of work before retirement forced executives to relive their own personal history as they cleaned out their desks -- an awkward, forced journey through their many years of work. Paul Boynton described these moments with bittersweet sadness, as they underscored the impending end of his career and his status as a man of the working world. When he cleaned out his desk, Boynton discovered letters he once intended to mail, as well as a forgotten shopping list that caused an "unhappy misunderstanding" with his wife. Most significantly, he came across an old timetable. The retiring Boynton knew he would no longer monitor appointments and meetings with such precision. The timetable symbolized a key component of his working years that he would no longer need when he woke up the next day in retirement. Once he finished cleaning his desk, it was time to leave work for the last time: "you go with the same sinking feeling that the only world you know and feel at home in is yours no longer. You are cut adrift. From now on, you are on your own."⁴⁹²

Because men worried so extensively about retirement, many offices and factories held retirement ceremonies for their departing workers and executives. Workers, experts, and employers viewed the retirement ceremony as an important moment in a man's career. Employers and workers wanted the retirement ceremony to honor men's service in business, to impart meaning and status to a man for many years of hard work. As a retired professional wrote, "The recommendation is that retirement should be marked by ceremony, by a sequence of

⁴⁹¹ Collins, *Golden Years*, 249. See also James A. Michener, "Out to Pasture," *Nation's Business*, April 1949, 33.

⁴⁹² Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 46-47.

deliberate actions which will give definite shape to the changes which are to be made. Certain doors leading to the past should be closed, locked and bolted, even screwed or bricked up; others have to be opened and what is beyond them swept and furbished and otherwise made habitable."⁴⁹³ As written accounts of retirement ceremonies in newspapers, magazines, and advice books illustrate, ceremonies honored the retiring man's service, loyalty, endurance, and success with a company or agency.

Despite the fanfare, the retirement ceremony also reminded retirees they were no longer part of the working world. Retirement "closed" the doors of the workplace to the retired man. As retired men's writings suggest, ceremonies functioned as a polite but final send off -- a way to nicely nudge older men out the door. Amidst the martinis, expensive dinners, kind words, and gold watches, retirees lost work as the foundation of manhood. Once the celebrations ended, retirees discussed how they experienced feelings of anxiety and loss. "It may be the nearest thing to dying you have ever experienced," Paul Boynton wrote.⁴⁹⁴ Employers, workers, and executives envisioned the retirement ceremony as a way to mark the transition from one momentous part of the life cycle to the next. However, the retirement ceremony encapsulated numerous contradictions.

The specific structure of retirement ceremonies varied from company to company. Often, retirement ceremonials took place during lunch hours. Sometimes, they extended over an entire day or even two days. During the retiring man's last day of work, he often listened to and made speeches at receptions, ate lunches and dinners with coworkers, and had private meetings with

⁴⁹³ Wallace, *How to Retire Successfully*, 119.

⁴⁹⁴ Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 46.

his supervisor. When "John Jones" retired from his white-collar job during the mid-1950s, he enjoyed "the customary farewell party" with his colleagues. His employer presented him with a travel bag as a show of gratitude.⁴⁹⁵ When he described his retirement ceremony, Raymond Kaighn described a rapid succession of events: a lunch with friends, laudatory speeches, letters of praise received from colleagues ("to buck up the ego when it has gone limp!"), kisses from a "demonstrative woman or two," and finally the goodbye handshakes and hearty pats on the back. "God bless you, old scout. Take it easy and enjoy yourself!" his coworkers told him. Suddenly, the man found himself out on the street; he was now retired.⁴⁹⁶

Retirement ceremonies and the activities of the last day of work allowed the retiring man to free themselves from power relations within the workplace. Supervisors gave orders; workers carried them out. Retirement ceremonies gave aging men, who had worked faithfully for their companies for many years, an opportunity to receive honors from superiors. Rather than act in accordance to their boss' every whim, a retiring man could hear the boss give a glowing speech about his successful career, eat a fine meal paid for by the firm, and receive a manly handshake from the boss in thanks for his fine service. The boss also told the retiring worker he would be sorely missed, that the company would not be the same without him. Proceedings always concluded with warm wishes for health, a long life, and a happy retirement. In addition to the ceremony, retiring executives in particular remembered private farewell meetings with their boss. There, retirees heard praises about their service. The last day's activities allowed older

⁴⁹⁵ Theodor Greene, *How to Enjoy Retirement for the Rest of Your Life* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957), 54.

⁴⁹⁶ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 16.

men to receive acknowledgement, however small, from their supervisors.⁴⁹⁷ In addition, it was custom for retirees to enjoy an expensive cigar -- lit personally by the boss. Some men even went so far as to take off their shoes during the retirement ceremony, putting their stocking feet on the head table.⁴⁹⁸

During the retirement ceremony, the retiring man generally received a gift from the company. Men received any number of items: gold watches, fishing tackle, golf clubs, scrolls of honor, encyclopedias, and gold medals were common. Most often, retired men went home with fishing poles or golf clubs -- a reminder they could now enjoy a work-free life filled with leisure. Companies bestowed a sense of manliness on their retirees by decorating them like soldiers, giving them medals and booty to honor their years of service. Sometimes in front of the entire company, bosses presented retiring workers with service medals and gifts.⁴⁹⁹

The gifts made some men uneasy. Men pondered why employers would send them away with a wrist watch. After all, some men remarked, when a man retired he no longer needed to keep track of time. Some men disliked encyclopedias (intended to be a light-hearted gift) because the retired man would now "have so much time to read."⁵⁰⁰ Retirees did not want to be reminded they would no longer work. At the end of retirement ceremonies, retirees gave

⁴⁹⁷ Collins, *Golden Years*, 249; Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 46; Hart, *Retirement*, 159; Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 16; Close, "Getting Ready To Retire," 1.

⁴⁹⁸ "A Postman 29 Years Takes His Ease on Retirement," *New York Times*, 2 May 1956, 33.

⁴⁹⁹ Ethel Sabin Smith, *The Dynamics of Aging* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1956), 125; Michener, "Out to Pasture," 70; Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 16; Herbert Corey, "Will Retirement Be a Bore to You?" *Nation's Business*, July 1947, 39.

⁵⁰⁰ Corey, "Will Retirement Be a Bore," 39.

"awkward" speeches to offer thanks.⁵⁰¹ In 1950, executive Tom Jenkins was noticeably uncomfortable during his farewell dinner. "There was Tom," another man, soon to retire himself, sympathetically observed, "up front, fiddling with the gold watch just given him, and trying to find the right words for what he was feeling inside." He was not only overwhelmed to receive the fine watch; he was worried about what he would do next.⁵⁰²

Some men avoided ceremonies and formal goodbyes. "For some men this is a day to get through as painlessly as possible," Paul Boynton observed. "They prefer to say nothing about it, to avoid any unnecessary fuss." Retirement ceremonies, for some older men, conveyed an uneasy sense of finality and loss -- despite company's intent to honor and celebrate the retiring man's accomplishments. Boynton argued that all men, even those who left their jobs quietly, experienced the same anxieties. He wrote, "Whether you prefer to go out as unostentatiously as an invisible man or with fanfare and gifts and speeches, the last day will have the same quality of finality, the same realization as you perform familiar tasks, 'I won't be doing this again.'"⁵⁰³ When New York City's postmaster general retired in 1952, he refused to attend any ceremony. He would only receive a small group of colleagues in his office for a private (and brief) goodbye.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ Wallace, *How to Retire Successfully*, 119; "Should You Be Forced to Retire at 65?" *US News & World Report*, 13 September 1957, 95; Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 46; Close, "Getting Ready To Retire," 1; "Honored At Retirement," *New York Times*, 26 February 1944, 5.

⁵⁰² "Will Your Old-Timers Be Ready to Retire?" *Factory Management and Maintenance*, January 1950, 115.

⁵⁰³ Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 46.

⁵⁰⁴ "Goldman Retires As Head Mailman," *New York Times*, 29 April 1952, 20.

Some men tried to reclaim some of their manliness by proclaiming their antipathy towards their boss or the company. Retirement could bring out years of pent-up frustration. In 1949, a retiring executive named John Bassett bitterly wrote "SITBE" on the calendar entry for the day of his retirement. "SITBE" stood for "Spit in the boss' eye."⁵⁰⁵ Bassett's long history with the company left him with much resentment: the early retirement of a friend (and his replacement with a younger and less-effective man), unrecognized efforts, and failed departmental improvements. When the boss, named JC Gower, invited Bassett into his office to talk about his upcoming retirement, Bassett never SITBE. The two men talked about Bassett's grievances and cleared the air. Gower even gave the executive an extension of his employment with the department.⁵⁰⁶

Other, less angry men announced what activities they planned to explore once they retired. Some men discussed long-postponed vacations (often to warmer climates), hobbies to be explored, or new employment opportunities to seek. When Morris Warschauer, a member of the New York City school board, retired in the early 1950s, he vowed he would remain "active in educational affairs."⁵⁰⁷ In Chicago, a retiring policeman, Joseph Sychowski, bragged to friends he would take a long vacation in the South to get away from the chilly winter in the Windy City.⁵⁰⁸ Company newsletters provided some information about what working-class men planned to do when they retired. Leo Wendt, who retired from his job as a machinist at Detroit Steel Products in 1956, told coworkers he planned to rest during the winters and visit his

⁵⁰⁵ Michener, "Out to Pasture," 33.

⁵⁰⁶ Michener, "Out to Pasture," 70-74.

⁵⁰⁷ "Career Man Ends Long City Service," *New York Times*, 16 January 1958, 25.

⁵⁰⁸ "Retiring Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 January 1952, 15.

daughter's house (with its large backyard garden) in the nearby suburb of Mt. Clemens. Another retiring DSP worker, Roman Cichowski, planned to simply "rest and relax."⁵⁰⁹

Women, specifically wives, played key roles during the last days of work and the retirement ceremony. Women constituted an audience for the affirmation of manhood: they dutifully attended their aging husbands' retirement ceremonies, marveling with pride to hear praises of their husbands' fruitful endeavors in the workplace. In middle-class men's writings, wives marveled at the sights and sounds to be experienced at the retirement ceremony. Surely grateful for his wife's support as his retirement approached, Raymond Kaighn remarked that "your wife is right there at the head table with a special hairdo, a new gown, and an orchid, treasuring in her heart every kind thing said about her hero and not missing the smallest item of the great occasion. In a glow of happiness, you have your great moment in the spotlight."⁵¹⁰ Women remembered everything about the experience: the excellent food, the speeches, the new clothes, and the company's "generous" parting gift. Impressed with the company's admiration for her husband, the wife continued to talk about the experience when she arrived home.⁵¹¹ Retirement ceremonies allowed retirees to show their wives they were real men -- males who had accomplished a great deal during their working years. In addition, retirement ceremonies allowed men to affirm separated spheres for men and women as a signifier of gender. Men worked in offices and factories, and women admired them for their labor.

⁵⁰⁹ "Dutch Retires," *DSP Folks*, March 1956, 5; "Roman Retires," *DSP Folks*, March 1956, 5. In possession of the author.

⁵¹⁰ Kaighn, *How To Retire and Like It*, 16.

⁵¹¹ Kaighn, *How To Retire and Like It*, 16.

Narratives of the retirement day usually concluded with discussions of burgeoning isolation, confusion, and depression. Once the parties concluded and it was time to go home, retired men described jarring moments of grim realization. After years of work, they were no longer employed professionals. They would no longer wake up every morning and venture out to work. They would no longer earn salaries. The future looked grim. As Harold R. Hall, a professor of business at Harvard University, wrote in 1953, "*One day later he is -- nobody.*"⁵¹²

The next morning, retired men confronted more intense feelings of dread. Drawing on his personal experiences, Raymond Kaighn discussed how retired professionals quickly lamented the loss of their daily routines and the feelings of economic usefulness and meaning they derived from work. "Yesterday," he wrote, "you were helping to keep the wheels of economic life whirling. They are whirling alright this morning, but without your help. That is not a comfortable feeling. They don't need you out there anymore. That is still more uncomfortable to think about. You are through."⁵¹³ Some men enjoyed the first morning of their retirement. They slept in, smiling as they turned off their alarm clocks. One man, who slept past noon, enjoyed a huge breakfast. However, grim realities soon clouded over new retirees' initial satisfaction. Men felt "queer" as they watched their wives cleaning and cooking. Retirees realized they were "underfoot."⁵¹⁴

Discussions of the retirement day also show the extent to which professionals and the middle-class now defined the archetypal "retired" man. Middle-class men generated the advice

⁵¹² Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 94. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹³ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 17.

⁵¹⁴ Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 47-48.

literature on retirement during the 1950s, defining "work" and "retirement" on their own terms. Retired men such as Raymond Kaighn, Gifford Hart, and Paul Boynton wrote about retirement as they experienced it. They worried most about fulfillment, since they themselves had retired with pensions and benefits. And retirement ceremonies, while laden with contradictory interpretations of masculinity, conveyed gratitude and respect to these retirees. Since the retirement advice literature focused so heavily on the middle class, we do not know as much about working-class men's experiences with retirement ceremonies and the last days of work. By the 1950s, discussions of men's troubles with "growing old" reflected a broader cultural reorientation towards the middle class, erasing earlier views aging which emphasized working-class men's troubles with "growing old" and masculinity.

5.5 HANGING ON: RETIREMENT AVOIDANCE

Faced with widespread discussions of the dangers and anxieties found in retirement, many men concluded they would not retire voluntarily, choosing to cling to their jobs for as long as they could. Employment defined their identities, and they were not willing to abandon their status as workers and professionals. "I'd rather wear out than rust out," some men stubbornly argued.⁵¹⁵ At Columbia University, scholars at a conference on aging spoke about how some men refused to accept retirement; many of them tried to remain employed. Even if a man was financially secure, they noted, he still did not want to retire. The group concluded that men

⁵¹⁵ Richardson, "Retirement," 19.

will sometimes cling tenaciously to a job in order to avoid or at least postpone assumption of the dreaded role assigned to old age. Driven by cultural forces which make a job the symbol of his continuing worth as an individual, the worker is loathe to surrender it, even when he is financially secure, even when his health makes continuing inadvisable. He is afraid to stop, afraid of being inactive . . . Retirement represents to him emptiness, loneliness, boredom, and a generally devalued existence.⁵¹⁶

Statistical evidence suggests that a majority of men were willing avoid retirement. For example, in a 1952 *Business Week* survey of retired men's opinions in Cleveland, nearly 52 percent opposed corporate retirement policies.⁵¹⁷ Men did not want to give up the social and economics dividends they derived from work, viewing retirement as something that real men could never accept.

Retirement avoidance occurred among both working- and middle-class men. Clark Tibbitts, who worked with the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, noted that "salaried workers" and "wage-earners" preferred to avoid retirement if they were healthy enough to work. Other scholars talked about older men from many different occupations -- including postmen, businessmen, carpenters, and janitors -- who tried to avoid retirement. They were, as some experts remarked, made of "sterner stuff."⁵¹⁸ Such men planned to "die in harness."⁵¹⁹

⁵¹⁶ Thomas Parran, Harwood S. Belding, Antonio Ciocco, James A Crabtree, Theodore F. Hatch, Adolph G. Kammer, and Violet B. Turner, "Monograph I," in *Criteria for Retirement: A Report of a National Conference on Retirement of Older Workers*, ed. Geneva Mathiasen (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1953), 66-67.

⁵¹⁷ "Retirement Not Always Happy," *Business Week*, 5 April 1952, 52.

⁵¹⁸ Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 2 (quote); "New York's Desmond Program Moves Forward," *Aging* (US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), November 1953, 7; Robert J. Havighurst, "The Impact of Retirement of the Individual," in *Unions and the Problems of Retirement: Proceedings of a Conference* (University of Chicago, April 3-4, 1959), Booklet, Chicago: Union Research and Education Projects, 1959, 12, in vertical files ("Retirement"), ILIR, UIUC; Herbert Corey, "Will Retirement Be A Bore To You?" *Nation's Business*, July 1947, 39; "Judge Inch at 82 Is Going Strong," *New York Times*, 3 August 1955, 55; "The Oldsters Go Back To Work," *Newsweek*, 13 January 1958, 70-71; "When and How Retirement? Problem for Leaders," *Newsweek*, 12 July 1954, 48-51; "Old Hands Snub Pensions," *Business Week*, 18 November 1950, 124-126.

Some writers suggested that wives supported men's retirement avoidance. Raymond Kaighn met with the wife of a retired man who told him about how her husband briefly tried retirement. Hating it immediately, the older men quickly went back on the job. The man believed he was no longer himself without work; he became, according to his wife, "a caged animal tramping about." Once he was working again, the household returned to a state of calm. "No, I hope never again to 'retire,'" the wife told Kaighn. "We'll die with our boots on."⁵²⁰ For men who wanted to stay on the job, however, company rules often precluded their plans. Mandatory retirement policies often stipulated that older men leave.

Hollywood filmmakers noticed aging men's eagerness to avoid retirement. Twentieth Century-Fox's *As Young As You Feel* (1951) captured men's unease about the end of their careers and Americans' ambivalence toward corporate retirement policies. Starring Monty Woolley, Thelma Ritter, David Wayne, and a newcomer named Marilyn Monroe, the film is a comedy about an aging printer named John Hodges (played by Monty Woolley). Acme Printing Services, the company where Hodges had worked for many years, greeted him at the punch clock one afternoon with a retirement notice. "No! Oh no! By the eternal, no!" Hodges exclaimed. He loved "the art" of printing. Yet his company had "fired" him. To remain employed, Hodges devised a bold scheme: He would impersonate the president of Consolidated Motors, an important automobile manufacturing firm that controlled ACME Printing, Mr. Harold P. Cleveland, and order the printing firm to abandon its "absurd" retirement policy. (The film

⁵¹⁹ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 33; Thomas Parran, "Must You Retire at 65," *Collier's*, 24 May 1952, 75; "When and How Retirement?" *Newsweek*, 12 July 1954, 50.

⁵²⁰ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 88.

subtly alludes to auto manufacturing as a prominent industry known for discriminating against older workers.) Hodges, who disguised his age and his identity by dyeing his beard and hair from gray to black, surprised the top brass at ACME with an "inspection" visit -- posing as Mr. Cleveland, "the prexy of CM."

Initially, the plan works. Louis McKinley, who ran ACME, struggled to please Mr. Cleveland (Hodges in disguise). After the men had toured the factory, Hodges expressed his displeasure about ACME's "asinine policy" of retiring men at sixty-five, complaining there was "not one single white-haired man on the job." For the company to thrive, he insisted the firm needed to embrace older men, "the artisans, yes, those artists" who honored the trade. He told McKinley to stop running his print shop like an automobile factory, and bring back the retired men immediately. Although automobile manufacturing "perhaps required youth rather than experience," as Hodges remarked, "the art of printing" demanded men with skill and experience. Eager to please, McKinley abolished the policy on the spot, ordering his secretary (Marilyn Monroe) to call the retired men back to work.

Before Hodges could excuse himself and end the deception, the boss whisked him away to a crowded Chamber of Commerce luncheon. There, Mr. Cleveland (still Hodges) delivered an impromptu speech condemning retirement policies, describing men over sixty-five as "a great fund of stability" that would ensure American economic growth, curb inflation, and prevent another depression. The speech is well-received and widely discussed in the press. When the real Mr. Cleveland learned of the speech, he sought out the imposter. Once they met, Cleveland and Hodges quickly developed a mutual respect. Asked why he put on the ruse, Hodges simply stated: "I wanted my job back." Impressed by the printer's intelligence and audacity, Cleveland offered Hodges a new job as a "consultant" with Consolidated Motors, but the printer declined.

In the final scene, Cleveland promised Hodges he could return to his job at ACME Printing Services.⁵²¹

As a writer remarked in 1954, "The retired man . . . is a marooned sailor watching the ship in which he once served disappearing behind the skyline."⁵²² Gifford R. Hart certainly felt that way, as he collapsed on his bed after his retirement ceremony. Retirement became a widespread source of anxiety about manhood during the 1940s and 1950s. Taken together, the remaking of manhood within the context of an expanding middle class and its emphasis on the attainment of affluence, memories of the Great Depression, the experience of world war, and the rise of the Cold War affirmed work as a pillar of manhood. Employment remained vitally important to men for many reasons. In addition to working for attainment of middle-class status, men worked to affirm the new cultural importance of usefulness and service to the nation. Finally, men worked in order to create and uphold spatial and economic boundaries between manhood and womanhood, as more and more women worked away from home.

Company retirement policies, which typically forced men out at age sixty-five, undermined men's ties to the workplace as they aged. Retirement exposed many men's anxieties about the loss of manhood, especially its new middle-class foundations. Discussions of "retirement shock" and sudden death after retirement, the loss of income, the erosion of separated spheres for men and women, and physical decline in later life underscored men's uncertainty regarding manhood. Anxiety about manhood in retirement was so prevalent that several major

⁵²¹ *As Young As You Feel*, dir. by Harmon Jones, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951.

⁵²² Kenneth Walker, *Living Your Later Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 99.

companies explored retirement training and preparation programs for their older workers and executives. Frequent discussions of retirement ceremonies and the last days of work highlighted not only how postwar men eagerly wanted to remain at work, but also how they viewed retirement as a dangerous phase of life where manhood was uncertain. Since the meanings of manhood in retirement were unclear, many men tried to avoid the end of their careers. The final chapter examines how men, once retired, tried to rebuild manhood. What were the results of their efforts?

**6.0 CHAPTER 5 : RECONSTRUCTING MANHOOD IN RETIREMENT, 1940S-
1950S**

We are a disappointed generation . . . Our manner of life says it aloud. The age of happy problems has brought us confusion and anxiety amid the greatest material comfort the world has ever seen. Culture has become a consolation for the sense of individual powerlessness in politics, work, and love. With gigantic corporations determining our movements . . . we ask leisure, culture, and recreation to return to us a sense of ease and authority. But work, love, and culture need to be connected.

Herbert Gold (1957)⁵²³

The art of good retirement is to find in leisure, the meanings you get out of work.

Robert J. Havighurst (1959)⁵²⁴

Many retired men probably would have agreed with Herbert Gold's sentiments as expressed in his 1957 *Atlantic Monthly* article. Retirees of the 1950s were a disappointed generation; they were pushed out of their jobs at a time when material wealth and profitable work seemed within

⁵²³ Herbert Gold, "The Age of Happy Problems," *Atlantic Monthly*, March 1957, 61; also quoted in KA Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 103.

⁵²⁴ Robert J. Havighurst, "The Impact of Retirement on the Individual," in *Unions and the Problems of Retirement: Proceedings of a Conference*, booklet (Chicago: Union Research and Education Projects, 1959), 14, in vertical files ("Retirement"), Institute of Industrial and Labor Relations (hereafter ILIR), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (hereafter UIUC). The conference was a meeting on aging at the University of Chicago in April 1959.

most Americans' grasp. Despite increasing material standards, adult men felt powerless, as pundits often pointed out. Companies, large bureaucracies, and women, men complained, demanded too much of them and undermined their individuality.⁵²⁵ As Gold suggested, many Americans looked to leisure to find fulfillment and achievement in a mass society. But Gold warned that leisure, on its own, could not provide men and women with the sense of self-esteem and individuality they yearned for. Without work and productivity as the social and economic foundations of daily life, how could a man, for instance, enjoy his leisure? How could men find satisfaction if all they did was pursue recreation? Men needed work *and* leisure if they were to attain the "sense of ease and authority," or the fulfilling and balanced life that Herbert Gold described.

Observers of retirement, however, typically believed that leisure could *replace* the role of work in a man's life. During the post-World War II years, increasing affluence and the expansion of the middle class transformed Americans' thinking about aging and gender. "The problem of the old man," with its earlier focus on economic justice for working-class men, gave way to a new preoccupation with leisure activities in an upwardly mobile, middle-class society. Those who wrote about retirement trends during the late 1940s and 1950s thought of retirees as aging middle-class professionals with stable incomes and suburban homes. Retirement, in their view, could mean the loss of these economic and social foundations for manhood, as well as the disruption of established boundaries between men and women. Thus, experts, including popular advice authors and academic observers such as the University of Chicago sociologist Robert J. Havighurst, urged retired men to think about avocations, ironically, as new *vocations*. If men made "productive" use of their leisure, and applied the same dedication and seriousness they did

⁵²⁵ See chapter 4.

when they were working, then retirees could remain physically, mentally, and socially engaged as adult men. Furthermore, much like the earlier job, leisure also offered men the opportunity to put distance between themselves and their wives. Manhood could be preserved, but only if retired men remained affluent, productive, and youthful as they aged.

6.1 NEGOTIATING GENDER IN THE HOUSEHOLD

The home was at the center of "the problem of the old man" during the postwar years. Retirement undermined gender differences in fundamental ways because it removed men from their jobs and brought them back home full-time, challenging men's and women's public-private assumptions regarding masculinity and femininity. According to the writings of numerous academics, magazine writers, and advice authors, men were supposed to work in paid occupations away from home, while women remained in the home as domestic caregivers. As the spatial and economic dimensions of gender eroded upon retirement, older men and women began working to reconstruct identifiable differences between husbands' and wives' activities -- with a focus on labor, leisure, and space within the home.⁵²⁶ Women resisted men's encroachment on household labor, and men pursued new forms of "housework" to redefine manhood. Also, retired men defined specific spaces within the home as masculine, building "dens" and "workshops" to retreat from women and explore handiwork and construction. Men also used leisure to differentiate their activities from wives' endeavors. Furthermore, experts'

⁵²⁶ For additional discussions of the spatial arrangement of gender in the home after World War II, see Kristen Haring, "The 'Freer Men' of Ham Radio: How a Technical Hobby Provided Social and Spatial Distance," *Technology and Culture*, 44:4 (October 2003), 734-761.

focus on middle-class homes was a major reason why the working class disappeared from "the problem of the old man" discourse during the 1940s and 1950s.

Gender-specific dichotomies of "work" versus "home" underpinned experts' views of retirement. Male retirement advice authors described scenarios where husbands and wives occupied very different realms of daily experience. Men, as interpreted by these experts, knew nothing about the home since they spent all their time at work. They did not cook or clean. Men did not buy groceries, nor were they aware of how money was budgeted. Socially, man and wife did not spend time together. He worked, returning home only to eat and sleep; she stayed home, cleaning and cooking in support of her husband (and presumably slept, though observers failed to mention it). Every morning men left for work, while women remained home: "His special domain was his place of work; her province was their home."⁵²⁷

These notions of separated spheres, however, did not conform to many men's and women's realities. First, women could be found away from the home, laboring in both offices and factories. As World War II concluded in 1945, an estimated 80 percent of working women were determined to remain employed.⁵²⁸ By the end of the 1950s, twice as many women were working than in 1940; and 40 percent of women over the age of 16 worked in a paid occupation.⁵²⁹ Working women's endeavors did not go unnoticed. Men frequently complained about women's expanding presence in the workplace during the 1950s. Some male executives grumbled that women no longer confined themselves to the steno pool. They could even be

⁵²⁷ Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 148.

⁵²⁸ This statistic appears in William H. Chafe, "America Since 1945," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 161.

⁵²⁹ William H. Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II* (1986; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 126.

found in managerial posts.⁵³⁰ Second, many men remained at home, breaking down the home space as a woman's "sphere." Once they retired, men reentered the home on a constant basis, where women managed daily affairs.

Husbands often complained to scholars that their wives disliked their new presence at home. Women viewed the home as their arena of authority; men were interlopers. Experts remarked that wives (labeled "queens") vowed not to "relinquish" authority to their husbands, the "dethroned kings."⁵³¹ While men were supposed to wield social and economic authority over the home as a result of their breadwinner status, women actually oversaw the maintenance of the home. Men may have predominated in the office, but women governed the household. Retirement transformed men's and women's relationships to the home, forcing them to share domestic space all day long: "In our society the great majority of marital arrangements before retirement are based on the husband's absence from the home during working hours. His absence necessitates self-reliance and a certain autonomy of decision-making on the part of the wife . . . The wife who in the minutiae of living has built up a position approaching matriarchy may suddenly be confronted with the . . . husband."⁵³² While not every married couple struggled with men's return to the home, there were many husbands and wives who did. Men's retirement compelled men and women to revisit their assumptions about gender relations within the

⁵³⁰ See Sloan Wilson, "The Woman in the Gray Flannel Suit," *New York Times Magazine*, 15 January 1956, 8.

⁵³¹ Margaret S. Gordon, "Work and Patterns of Retirement," in *Aging and Leisure: A Research Perspective Into the Meaningful Use of Time*, ed. Robert W. Kleemeier (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 44; Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib, *The Nature of Retirement* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 119.

⁵³² Otto Pollack, *The Social Aspects of Retirement*, booklet (Philadelphia: Pension Research Council of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1956), 7; idem, *Positive Experiences in Retirement*, booklet (Philadelphia: Pension Research Council of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1957), 37.

contexts of home, marriage, and family. The ways they tried to reconstitute separated spheres of activity for women and men during the post-World War II period suggests how difficult retirement was for both men and women.

Aging women faced their own "retirement shock": how to deal with the continual presence of husbands, the added burdens placed on household work, the clash of personalities, and the orientation to life on a fixed income. Experts feared that men's retirement would contribute to a tense atmosphere at home.⁵³³ In response to the potential for domestic unrest, experts cautioned men to tread lightly until their wives had adjusted to their regular presence. As Joseph C. Buckley wrote in *The Retirement Handbook* (1953): "During the years when the husband works, the wife sees him for only a few hours during the day, except on weekends and during vacations. After retirement the husband may be around the house a good deal of the time. This may be a new experience for both of them."⁵³⁴

Discussions of men, women, and gender within the home were greatly influenced by broader discussions of popular psychology. Retirement advice authors' writings drew upon, and reinforced, the prominence of popular psychology in postwar mass culture. Americans actively sought out, especially by buying and reading popular magazines, advice on numerous subjects, retirement included. By the 1940s and 1950s, men and women had become enamored with what Eva S. Moskowitz characterizes as the "therapeutic gospel." As a result of the popularization of

⁵³³ Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib, *The Nature of Retirement* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 119.

⁵³⁴ Joseph C. Buckley, *The Retirement Handbook: A Complete Planning Guide To Your Future* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 5; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 228.

psychology, Americans became obsessed with correcting "negative" attitudes and social problems with psychological analysis and treatment, including therapy and self-help.⁵³⁵

Psychologists themselves actively encouraged Americans' growing faith in their profession. During the 1940s, academic psychologists formed the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, promoting the therapeutic and social benefits of the profession to other academics, as well as companies and marketing firms. Also, between 1945 and 1960, membership in the American Psychological Association (APA) jumped from 4,173 to 18,215. As the field grew and developed institutional foundations, psychologists promoted the idea that social tensions and personal anxieties -- such as marital tensions, individuals' bouts with anxiety, and even poor school performance in children -- could be treated and "cured" with psychological knowledge and treatments.⁵³⁶

Popular magazines and corporate advertising played a pivotal role in disseminating the new "religion" of psychology.⁵³⁷ Companies targeted consumers' "fantasies and desires," harnessing men's and women's emotions to sell products ranging from milk to undergarments. Ideas and advice became key commodities in the mass market. For example, popular magazines positioned themselves as arbiters of self-help for women, trying to identify prevalent anxieties in women's lives and then encouraging women to look to the magazines for solutions to their problems. Betty Friedan accused magazines of glorifying housewifery, but popular magazine writers brought housewives' problems into full view. *Cosmopolitan* and *Ladies' Home Journal*,

⁵³⁵ Eva S. Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2.

⁵³⁶ Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 3-4, 154.

⁵³⁷ Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 6.

for instance, urged women to identify psychological solutions to their anxieties and problems as housewives. According to magazine writers, women could alleviate their stresses regarding husbands and personal fulfillment with techniques such as "managing emotional steps" and "auto conditioning." Auto conditioning was particularly popular, asking women to "banish" thoughts of anger and despair. In addition, women could "auto condition" themselves to focus on their "positives."⁵³⁸ Men, too, began relying on magazines for advice. *Playboy* and *Esquire* urged men to find pleasure and satisfaction through conspicuous consumption and erotic fantasy.⁵³⁹

Retirement, older male advice authors argued, was a major source of unease for adult men in postwar culture. Just as purveyors of advice targeted housewives and younger playboys to purchase their ideas about self-help and fulfillment, they just as zealously sought ways to help retired men. Retirement advice writers went much further than "autoconditioning," however, when they discussed ways for older men to preserve manhood. In addition to attitude, retirement advice authors such as Gifford Hart, Ray Giles, Joseph C. Buckley, and Raymond Kaighn outlined concrete strategies and activities that would, ideally, shore up masculinity from aging and retirement. As many postwar men and women confronted gender in a period that celebrated rigidly defined roles for men and women, advice became a central arena where these men and women looked for ways to affirm gender boundaries. In retirement advice, questions about gender began in the home.

The prominence of advice as the main arena where experts defined manhood in retirement ensured that middle-class culture would become the new foundation for discussions of

⁵³⁸ Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 164, 171-172.

⁵³⁹ Bill Osgerby, "A Pedigree of the Consuming Male: Masculinity, Consumption, and the American Leisure Class," in *Masculinity and Men's Lifestyle Magazines*, ed. Bethan Benwell (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 76-81; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 254-257.

"the problem of the old man." During the 1940s and 1950s, "the problem of the old man" was transformed, from a discourse on older working-class men in an industrial economy to a discussion of individual middle-class men and their anxieties about personal fulfillment without work. Post-World War II magazine writers, self-proclaimed retirement experts, and academics stopped interrogating questions of class and economic justice. Many retirement advice authors of the postwar years were themselves aging professionals or retired executives, as was true for Gifford R. Hart, Raymond Kaighn, and Ray Giles.

From the perspective of culture producers in the advice field, the United States now appeared to be a well-off middle-class nation. Between 1945 and 1960, the Gross National Product (GNP) increased by 250 percent. Nationally, incomes jumped by an estimated 60 percent. Culture producers also wanted access to Americans' greater supply of discretionary dollars (5 times as many in 1950, as opposed to 1940).⁵⁴⁰ Experts who wrote about retirement assumed that retirees had already acquired middle-class affluence and suburban residences.

The arrangement of household tasks in the suburban home -- especially cooking and cleaning -- was a central point of tension between men and women. The expectations placed upon women's labors remained the same once husbands retired. Wives often continued to cook and clean just as they had when their husbands were working. Men, however, were oblivious to their wives' specific approaches to household work and management. They spent their days at the office, not observing their wives' work processes. When they retired, some men tried to assert command over household labor, presuming they were bringing the workplace virtues of

⁵⁴⁰ In order, these statistics come from Osgerby, "Pedigree of the Consuming Male," 762; Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 165; and Moskowitz, *In Therapy We Trust*, 157.

efficiency and organization to domestic labor. Men, however, did not understand that their wives had already established their own routines, work processes, and management principles. While men supposedly knew how to work faster and save time (after all, "time is money"), women disliked their husbands' interference with long-established work processes.⁵⁴¹ Women remarked that husbands made poor colleagues. When men helped, their inexperience prolonged tasks in the domestic workplace. "The routine of running the household," the sociologist Otto Pollack remarked, "may be upset by a well-meaning but not necessarily efficient helper."⁵⁴²

Thus the full-time presence of retired men in the domestic workplace generated complaints and resistance from women. Typically, labor historians have been more attuned to men's complaints about intruding women, however; they have often cited instances where men complained about women's encroachment in workplaces. For example, in interwar Detroit, men denounced women's employment in the industry, and institutionalized gender inequality through separate seniority lists. During the antebellum period, working-class men in New York City argued that labor unions and industrial employment were male terrain -- suggesting that women did not belong in factories or unions.⁵⁴³ While gender and labor historians have shown how

⁵⁴¹ Raymond P. Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 91; Pollack, *Positive Experiences in Retirement*, 37.

⁵⁴² Otto Pollack, *The Social Aspects of Retirement*, booklet (Philadelphia: Pension Research Council of the Wharton School of Finance and Commerce, University of Pennsylvania, 1956), 7.

⁵⁴³ See, for example, Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 130-154; Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1914-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), esp. 66-99; Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); and Gregory Wood, "'The Paralysis of the Labor Movement': Men, Masculinity, and Unions in 1920s Detroit," *Michigan Historical Review*, 30:1 (Spring 2004), 59-91. See also Linda Gordon, "US Women's History," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997), 270-271.

women challenge male power and created political, cultural, and economic spaces of influence, they have not often examined how women have resisted men's encroachment on these spaces. Discussions of retirement highlighted women's complaints about men trespassing on domestic space. Older men came home to stay in retirement, and they became visible, vocal, and meddling features around the house.

Some experts were encouraging retirees to assert themselves in the domestic workplace. They suggested to men they could find manliness in what heretofore had been known, in feminized terms, as "housework." Household work was physical work. It was not easy to scrub, cook, and sweep for hours each day. Were retired men "manly" enough to roll up their sleeves and help? Could they handle the work? Faced with retirement and re-entry into the home, Gifford R. Hart, for instance, tried to redefine the gender meanings attached to housework. Men who refused to use a broom, he suggested, could not really call themselves "men." This was a progressive concept during the 1950s. Observers of retirement, however, were not primarily concerned with easing wives' burdens after so many years of domestic labor. Rather, experts envisioned this redefinition of housework as a way for aging men to remain physically active. As Hart wrote in 1957: "Unless you are deaf and blind, you will discover, soon after you retire, that you will have to revise some of your ideas about the housewife's day. You [the retiree] have taken the wear and tear of business principally on your nerves . . . she takes the wear and tear of housework principally on . . . a surprisingly wide variety of muscles." Were women tougher than men? Hart suggested that retired men needed to re-demonstrate their strength and usefulness. Housework was rigorous, consonant with a "man's" work: "If you get right in there

with her and pitch for a couple of days, you will . . . find, no doubt to your surprise, that there is real satisfaction and pride in doing . . . those jobs around the house."⁵⁴⁴

The necessity of renegotiating household work was not only grounded in shifting ideals about gender, but also rooted in practicality. As women aged, they could not be expected to work as strenuously on cleaning, cooking, and washing -- especially if they lived in a large residence. Retired men's entry into full-time domestic living perhaps forced them to revisit the gendered connotations of "women's work." Retired men would need to help with household tasks. And if their wives fell ill or passed away, they would have to assume sole responsibility for housework. There were numerous ways for retired men to help. They could make beds, sweep floors, hang laundry, or clean the kitchen. In addition to cleaning, experts urged retired men to take their wives out to restaurants more often. Some retired men favored their wives' familiar cooking, however.⁵⁴⁵

Just as some experts urged men to help wives with household labor, others ignored changes in housework after retirement, assuming that women would remain the sole domestic caregiver. Men presumed that women would never retire from domestic work. It was widely believed that men struggled in retirement because the end of men's employment undermined the routines that had previously defined men's and women's lives. Since men assumed that salaried employment or wage labor in public settings defined "work," male retirement observers argued that women did not face the jarring transition of retirement: "His [the retired man's] wife . . . is less affected by the change and will likely keep up her accustomed household duties and interests

⁵⁴⁴ Gifford R. Hart, *Retirement: A New Outlook for the Individual* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), 97-98; Pollack, *Social Aspects of Retirement*, 7.

⁵⁴⁵ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 36, 93.

to the end." ⁵⁴⁶ Male writers who surveyed retirement overlooked the many older, married women who worked in paid occupations during the 1950s, and would, theoretically, "retire" from their jobs if they continued working into their sixties and seventies.

Challenging Betty Friedan's long-standing assertion that postwar magazines portrayed women as home-bound housewives, Joanne Meyerowitz argues that those magazines and periodicals generated much material on women in public settings, pursuing, for example, business careers and political activities. She found that women readers admired public women in prominent positions, such as former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce.⁵⁴⁷

While periodicals such as *Woman's Home Companion* and *Ladies' Home Journal* spoke frequently about women's public activities, male retirement advice authors consigned women to the home. In their writings, they assumed that men belonged to the realms of office and career, while women reigned over domestic space. For example, the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* citations on "retirement" focused consistently on men as the central figures in retirement. Only sporadically did advice writers, themselves typically men, write about women as retirees. Of 160 articles on "retirement" between 1947 and 1961, only 11 percent (18 articles) focused on women as retiring workers (Tables 16 and 17).

⁵⁴⁶ Theodor Greene, *How to Enjoy Retirement for the Rest of Your Life* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957), 53-54; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 230-231; Joseph C. Buckley, *The Retirement Handbook: A Complete Planning Guide To Your Future* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 5; David D. Stonecypher, Jr., "Old Age Need Not Be 'Old,'" *New York Times Magazine*, 18 August 1957, 66-67.

⁵⁴⁷ Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique," 236.

Table 16. Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature Citations that Focus on Women in Retirement

Years	Articles	On Women	Percent
May 1947-February 1961	160	18	11.3

* Statistics taken from "Retirement" entries only.

* "Retirement" first appears as an entry in the *Readers' Guide* in vol. 16 (May 1947).

* The percentage is rounded.

Sources: Sarita Robinson, Bertha Joel, and Mary Keyes, eds., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 16, May 1947-April 1949 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1949), 1706; Sarita Robinson, Bertha Joel, and Zada Limerick, eds., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 17, May 1949-March 1951 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1951), 1702; Sarita Robinson, Bertha Joel, and Zada Limerick, eds., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 18, April 1951-March 1953 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1953), 1745; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 19, April 1953-February 1955 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1955), 2005; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 20, March 1955-1957 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1957), 2077; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 21, March 1957-February 1959 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1959), 1643; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 22, March 1959-February 1961 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1961), 1402.

Table 17. Men and Women as Retirees in *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* Citations

Years	Articles	On		Percentage	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
May	8	5	3	62.5	37.5
1947-April 1949					
May	9	8	1	88.8	11.1
1949-March					
1951					
April	31	30	1	96.7	3.2
1951-March					
1953					
April	40	33	7	82.5	17.5
1953-February					
1955					
March	33	28	5	84.8	15.1
1955-February					

1957

March	24	23	1	95.8	4.2
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1957-February

1959

March	23	23	0	100	0
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1959-February

1961

* Statistics taken from "Retirement" entries only.

* Percentages are rounded.

Sources: Sarita Robinson, Bertha Joel, and Mary Keyes, eds., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 16, May 1947-April 1949 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1949), 1706; Sarita Robinson, Bertha Joel, and Zada Limerick, eds., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 17, May 1949-March 1951 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1951), 1702; Sarita Robinson, Bertha Joel, and Zada Limerick, eds., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 18, April 1951-March 1953 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1953), 1745; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 19, April 1953-February 1955 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1955), 2005; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 20, March 1955-1957 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1957), 2077; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 21, March 1957-February 1959 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1959), 1643; Sarita Robinson, ed., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, vol. 22, March 1959-February 1961 (New York: HW Wilson Company, 1961), 1402.

Despite experts' encouragement, most retired men did not want to busy themselves with "women's work." One retired man described his home as a "chamber of horrors." He told author Ray Giles to "Watch out . . . that you don't become a lady's maid. Too many of the men I know who have retired get to dusting the furniture, doing the marketing, sweeping the sidewalks, and even hanging out the wash. Housework was becoming too great a part of my program, and 'It jest ain't natcher!'"⁵⁴⁸ Another man complained how his wife transformed him into a domestic helper. He warned other retirees to learn from his unfortunate mistakes.

⁵⁴⁸ Ray Giles, *How to Retire -- and Enjoy It* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1949), 226.

Let me give these newly retired brothers a tip. Don't start in doing a lot of household chores. I never made a bed in my life up to my retirement, and now I do two of them every morning. I also volunteered to make the gravy for dinner and the salads for supper, and I have been doing that now for the past ten years. Of course you want to help the little wife, but she has her work inside the house, and you be quick to find something outside before she has you nailed down to some new habits you don't dare break.⁵⁴⁹

Beginning in the home and extending beyond, men pursued numerous strategies to reconstruct boundaries between the masculine and the feminine. During the 1940s and 1950s, retired men worked *in the house* (as opposed to completing "housework") in order to carve out activities of their own. While most men disliked "housework," they nonetheless used work in and around the house to affirm manhood. Furthermore, retired men constructed places *at* and *away* from home where they could distance themselves from women. Some retired men built dens and garage workshops where they could be alone, while other aging men rented offices and commuted to the city. These men did not work; they just wanted to escape.⁵⁵⁰

Retired men often remarked how they worked on repairs, chores, or projects, but they generally avoided associations with what might be interpreted as women's "housework." Men's approach to household tasks brought them to the frontiers of their homes. Retirees often envisioned themselves making contributions in the "garden" or "yard" -- not necessarily in the home itself. Irving Salomon, who interviewed retirees for a book called *Retire and Be Happy* during the early 1950s, met older men who were always working "around a home": they were

⁵⁴⁹ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 124.

⁵⁵⁰ Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 260. On escape as a theme in the history of manhood, see Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 59-70, 87-89, 251-257, 309-325; and Haring, "The 'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 734, 752.

"repairing furniture," "regrad[ing] the lawn," "put[ing] up storage shelves," "working in the garden," "work[ing] in the yard," and/or simply "do[ing] odd chores around the house."⁵⁵¹ Sociologist Clark Tibbitts described in a 1954 edition of the *American Sociological Review* how older men "turn to repair and maintenance of the home" once they retire.⁵⁵² In *Business Week's* 1952 survey of retired men's choice activities, 64 percent listed working on the house or garden as the principal way they spent their time.⁵⁵³ Moreover, men would cook meals, but only if they could use outdoor barbecue grills. In the suburbs, according to the *Esquire Handbook for Hosts*, "When a barbecue goes into operation, it automatically becomes a masculine project." "After all, outdoor cooking is a man's job," the handbook noted.⁵⁵⁴ Men envisioned the yards that surrounded their homes as their domain.

Men also relied on personal recreation to further distinguish themselves from women.⁵⁵⁵ While their wives cooked dinner or vacuumed the floor, men often napped on the couch, idly read the daily newspaper, or listened to the radio. When retired men thought about leisure, many enjoyed solitary pursuits that could easily be done at home. Reading books and newspapers,

⁵⁵¹ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 75, 197, 186, 200.

⁵⁵² Clark Tibbitts, "Retirement Problems in American Society," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 306; see also Haring, "'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 744.

⁵⁵³ "Retirement Not Always Happy," 52; "Planning for Retirement," *Today's Health*, January 1958, 15.

⁵⁵⁴ Quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 246.

⁵⁵⁵ See also Haring, "'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 734-761. Most analyses of gender divisions and leisure practices focus on public settings. See Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Kimmel, *Manhood in America*. For a key study that critiques historians' framing of public and private space, see George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

listening to the radio, or napping did not necessarily require a trip to the local park or the store. Nor did these activities cost much, if anything. In a study of aging men's attitudes towards retirement activities conducted by the University of Chicago, 58 percent of former factory workers and 39 percent of former supervisory personnel noted that retired men wanted to spend their time "taking it easy." In Cleveland, nearly 20 percent of retired men listed "loafing" as their daily activity of choice.⁵⁵⁶

Content to relax, some men were angered when women questioned their decisions. A retired man complained that his wife ordered him on errands whenever he turned on the radio. Another retiree wanted to spend his time reading the newspaper, but his wife disliked seeing him at home all the time. A retired man told Irving Salomon, "I thought when I retired I would enjoy my life sitting around the house. Within a few months, my wife started nagging me nearly all the time."⁵⁵⁷ Raymond Kaighn, another advice author, met a retired office manager who told him, "She is always telling me what to do." The nagging wife upset the man because he was once the boss in his office.⁵⁵⁸

The nagging wife was a familiar theme in American culture during the 1950s. For instance, in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954), the main character, LB Jeffries (James Stewart), justifies not marrying his long-time girlfriend Lisa Fremont (Grace Kelly) because he worries about coming home everyday to a "nagging wife." A sympathetic male friend corrected

⁵⁵⁶ Ernest W. Burgess, Lawrence G. Corey, Peter C. Pineo, and Richard T. Thornbury, "Occupational Differences Toward Aging and Retirement," *Journal of Gerontology*, 31:2 (April 1958). The authors conducted their study at the Standard Oil Company of Indiana. The second statistic appears in "Retirement Not Always Happy," 52.

⁵⁵⁷ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 152.

⁵⁵⁸ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 89.

Jeffries by saying, "Wives don't nag, Jeff. They 'discuss.'" For Jeffries, nagging wives embodied the trappings of domesticity. If he married Lisa, would she become a nuisance to him, especially since she was so refined and he was not? Confined to a wheelchair with a broken leg, Jeffries could only look out his apartment window and watch his neighbors' lives unfold. He witnesses one couple who argues constantly. Jeffries soon discovers that the husband has murdered his wife and smuggled her out of their apartment. The film cites her nagging as the probable cause for the murder.⁵⁵⁹

The portrait of agitated women in retirement advice books complicates popular views of women in the 1950s. For instance, discussions of retired men's wives can be used to challenge Betty Freidan's argument that domesticity stifled women.⁵⁶⁰ When retired men entered full-time domestic living, they encountered assertive women. Women "nagged," ordered men out of the house, and retained authority over household labor. The work of retirement advice authors, such as Gifford R. Hart, Thomas Collins, and Raymond Kaighn, also reminds historians that many women of the 1950s predominantly busied themselves with household work. Joanne Meyerowitz's assertion -- that 1950s publications focused on women's jobs, careers, and professional achievements -- did not reflect the experiences of older women who lived in retiree households.⁵⁶¹ Given the diversity of women's experiences in the 1950s, including along age lines, it is no surprise that men and women were struggling to make sense of gender identities and boundaries. Hart, Collins, and Kaighn, among other male writers, emphasized that postwar

⁵⁵⁹ *Rear Window*, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock, Universal Pictures, 1954.

⁵⁶⁰ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963; New York: Dell, 1975).

⁵⁶¹ Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960*, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 229, 231-237.

womanhood was rooted in domesticity and the home. Retirement advice became a site where men upheld women's associations with domesticity. However, they unexpectedly encountered assertive women within domestic space. During the 1950s, retirement advice authors struggled with the absence of easily defined gender roles in postwar society. In retirement, men seemed to lack a clearly defined male identity, while women's actions at home defied ideas about feminine submission or isolation.

To create a male space within the house and escape from women's alleged nagging and assertiveness, retired men sometimes built "dens" in their homes. Different from communal recreation rooms, these dens were places of solitude for older men. Many men wanted a room of the house that was their own, a place where these aging lions could retreat from the vacuum, the pots and pans, and the gossip emanating from the kitchen. Since the home constituted a feminized space, men used dens to isolate themselves from the feminine meanings attached to the rest of the house. They could literally enter a room, close the door, and separate the sexes.⁵⁶² Wives encouraged husbands to build these spaces. The wife of one retired man said: "I think that a retired man should have a room that is all his own -- a den, if you want to call it that -- where he can go in and shut the door, and be out of his wife's sight for part of the day . . . What he is doing in there need be none of her concern; nor should her occupation during that time be any of his. They will be seeing plenty of each other as it is."⁵⁶³

In addition to spending time in home offices, older men used garages and basements as places where they could separate themselves. As Kristen Haring writes, these places provided "a

⁵⁶² Similar themes appear in Haring, "'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 752.

⁵⁶³ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 92; Harold R. Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement* (Boston: Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1953), 131.

masculine refuge in an increasingly feminized household" during the postwar years.⁵⁶⁴ Many retired men sought out the activity and solitude of tinkering in small workshops. In retirement, the garage or the basement became a new "workplace" for the aging man: men used these manly spaces to work with tools, often building furniture or making repairs on household items. As early as the 1930s, architects regarded garages as "essential" components of a house, but they did not become standard in new home construction until the 1950s and 1960s.⁵⁶⁵ In contrast with other "proper" rooms in the home, garages, basements, and attics held a "rugged" and "manly" appeal for men.⁵⁶⁶ Garage and basement workshops not only provided retired men with their own spaces; they also allowed older men to regain a sense of manly usefulness and self-importance. A retired man's wife reported: "I don't know what my husband would do shut up for hours in a den. He is not a bookish man; nor does he like to write. But he does like to tinker, and he does well with tools. You should see his workshop in the basement of our house. That is where you will find him every day right after breakfast."⁵⁶⁷ The frequent discussions of dens and garages indicate how experts envisioned middle-class incomes and homes as prerequisites for manhood during the postwar years.

Despite the emphasis on separating men's and women's activities within the house, experts recognized the need for sociability among husbands and wives. To coexist in the same house on a consistent basis, men and women needed activities they could do together. While

⁵⁶⁴ Haring, "'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 753.

⁵⁶⁵ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 252; Haring, "'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 753.

⁵⁶⁶ Haring, "'Freer Men' of Ham Radio," 753.

⁵⁶⁷ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 93; see also Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 175, 177; Pollack, *Positive Experiences in Retirement*, 25.

experts delineated "work" along gender lines, certain leisure practices could be more easily shared. Especially when the activities involved the house itself, husbands and wives could do things together. The house was the one item they shared. Leisure that included both men and women required careful planning, however. Experts cautioned that men and women would struggle to find activities they both could take pleasure in. If a man thought he and his wife could enjoy a woodworking class, he was mistaken. Paul Boynton noted, "She goes along like a martyr, watches you show off with a hammer and a saw, tries valiantly to get into the spirit of the thing, and hits her thumb with the hammer."⁵⁶⁸

According to retired men and retirement scholars, most wives wanted their husbands to get out of the house. Experts suggested that women should urge their retired husbands to find activities that would take them away from the house, at least part of the day. Retired men often told interviewers how their wives "appreciated it" when they left the house, or how wives "wished" they would find something productive to do. Although many older men preferred to relax quietly at home, they complained how their wives wanted them to be more active. A retired man noted, "Whenever I sat around, my wife . . . would complain." He preferred to lounge around the house, but his wife sternly disapproved. A retired man told Raymond Kaighn that "It is smart to have a hobby that takes you out of the house for part of the time. A wife appreciates that." In the 1951 film *As Young As You Feel*, a retired man tells a friend in the local park how his wife loudly ordered him to leave the house. "Get out of the house!" she reportedly

⁵⁶⁸ Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 111.

shouted at the man. To underscore her seriousness, and get him moving, the man's wife even threw a hat at him.⁵⁶⁹

Amidst anxieties about tension in the home, retirement experts helped aging men reassert their authority over uneasy wives and households by consigning women to specific roles in men's retirement. To affirm women's roles as caregivers and assistants to their husbands, experts urged women to adopt roles as part-time retirement counselors -- helping uncertain husbands find their footing in a time of uncertainty. As men struggled to adjust, women were to provide a steady anchor. Women were expected not to worsen husbands' anxieties. Wives of retired men had only one task, according to one observer: "It is her responsibility for easing him out of his active habits into his new tapering ways of life, with the least possible upset." Irving Salomon told older men to expect wives' support once they retired. "Her understanding and cooperation," he wrote, "particularly when you first retire, may determine the success of your retirement. The continuation of her cooperation and encouragement will be another prop when and if, at some later time, you should waver."⁵⁷⁰ While many women certainly helped their husbands adjust to retirement, observers assumed that most women resented retirees' constant presence in the home. Only rarely did male retirement observers discuss retired men's wives in positive terms.

Retirement scholars seldom encouraged aging women to leave the home. In a 1952 survey of activities for men and women in later life, Evelyn Colby and John G. Forrest discussed

⁵⁶⁹ Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 35; Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 148, 152; *As Young As You Feel*, dir. by Harmon Jones, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951.

⁵⁷⁰ Walter B. Pitkin, *The Best Years: How to Enjoy Retirement* (New York: Current Books, 1946), 44; Irving Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 147. The term "helpmates" dates back to the colonial period. On wives as "helpmates," see Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

how women could bring additional money into the retired man's household by securing new work opportunities. The authors did not want to facilitate women's liberation from the drudgery of housework or ease tension between retired husbands and wives. Instead, they envisioned older women's workforce participation as a way to bolster the male-headed household. The older woman's income would help continue the standards of living accumulated during the retired man's tenure as the male breadwinner. Furthermore, the authors' discussions of occupations for aging women affirmed gendered ideas about work. Older women, the authors wrote, could find positions as babysitters, maids, cooks, housekeepers, laundresses, party planners, among other feminized occupations.⁵⁷¹

Colby and Forrest's writing on women and retirement, however, pointed to sources of gender subversion in the home -- even as the scholars hoped to see women's labors contribute to the financial stability of the male-headed household. In situations where the wife was younger than the husband, Colby and Forrest saw no reason why women should not venture out to work. While this would have supported the overall goal of keeping the male-headed household financially solvent, the sociologists' work evoked tones of women's liberation. "In many families the wife is younger than the husband," the scholars noted. "Very often, too, she has educational background that she has never attempted to use, her time being taken up with running a household and rearranging a family."⁵⁷² Now that husbands were retired and the kids were grown up, wives were free to seek work. It might be difficult to find employment (due to hiring age limits), but wives -- especially those with education -- could find various jobs. Older

⁵⁷¹ Evelyn Colby and John G. Forrest, *Ways and Means to Successful Retirement* (New York: BC Forbes and Sons Publishing, 1952), 134-142.

⁵⁷² Colby and Forrest, *Ways and Means*, 182.

educated women might work as substitute teachers, medical laboratory technicians, librarians, occupational therapists, dental hygienists, and nutritionists.⁵⁷³ Theoretically, Colby and Forrest offered women not only a means to bring additional money into the household, but also a way to become the dominant breadwinner, a new public role (that had formerly belonged to the husband), and new social contacts.

Experts most frequently discussed ways for retired men to escape from the home. However, as observers of retirement suggested, it was much easier for middle-class men to escape from the home than working-class retirees. They possessed the money to travel, as well as the ability to buy and rent distant places of retreat. Some retired middle-class men in the suburban New York City area set up offices in the city, even though they were not employed and did not complete any work. Each day, these men commuted from their homes to the offices, traveling from the feminized world of the home to the masculine public sphere. Also, they reconstructed a key part of the earlier working routine: the daily commute. A retired New York executive commuted from his suburban home to a rented office. He did not work there, but the commute allowed him to, as he put it, escape from the "woman's world." Riding the train also allowed the older man to visit his old commuting cronies. Another man did the same. He traveled from outside the city to a small office to "get out from under the carpet sweeper."⁵⁷⁴ These men reconstructed a masculine fantasy world of commuting, sociability, and office environments.

⁵⁷³ Colby and Forrest, *Ways and Means*, 182-189; see also Iphigene Bettman, "A Second Career for the Older Woman," *New York Times Magazine*, 10 October 1948, 22, 28; and "Early Planning To Retire Urged," *New York Times*, 29 June 1954, 23.

⁵⁷⁴ "How Old Executives Fade Away," *Fortune*, June 1952, 174; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 131.

This artificial workaday world allowed them to escape from the domesticity of the home, and to retain key elements of their earlier (and manlier) endeavors as workers.

Suburban houses -- with multiple rooms, garages, and basements, located on the fringes of urban areas -- provided key locations where experts remade "the problem of the old man." Retirement experts' focus on suburban homes and retirees made sense, given the rapid expansion of suburban communities after World War II. Government subsidies for mortgages and construction, as well as economic growth outside of urban centers, propelled the growth of suburbia during the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁷⁵ Between 1947 and 1953, the US suburban population increased by 43 percent, compared to an overall population increase of only 11 percent. By 1953, 19 percent of Americans (30 million) lived in suburbs. More and more Americans owned single-family dwellings: homeownership jumped from 44 percent (1940) to 62 percent (1960).⁵⁷⁶ In New Jersey, for instance, over 70 percent of the state was classified as suburban during the postwar years.⁵⁷⁷ In suburban Orange County, outside of Los Angeles, California, the population increased by 385 percent between 1940 and 1960.⁵⁷⁸ As Elaine Tyler May writes, homeownership was a "middle-class ideal" that symbolized "the good life" for all Americans in the postwar years.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁵ May, *Homeward Bound*, 169; Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 233; Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 26-29; Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 140-141.

⁵⁷⁶ These statistics can be found in Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 195.

⁵⁷⁷ Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 197.

⁵⁷⁸ McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 28.

⁵⁷⁹ May, *Homeward Bound*, 166.

However, observers of retirement failed to notice that few retired men and women could afford suburban homes. Despite the rapid expansion of suburbia, suburban houses were a weighty expense -- beyond the reach of older men and women who lived on fixed incomes. As Lizabeth Cohen suggested, young people dominated the suburban housing market, buying 70 percent of all houses sold in the 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁸⁰ Nationally, when retirees received their Social Security checks in the mail during the 1950s, they opened envelopes that contained sums totaling, on average, between 756 and 840 dollars per year. In poorer Southern states, such as Mississippi, a retired person might receive a paltry 360 dollars per year, or 30 dollars each month. Even in more affluent states, such as New York and Massachusetts, retired men received only 1,200 dollars over the course of a given year.⁵⁸¹ Throughout the US, aging men and women's incomes were very low. As Michael Herrington noted in his famous study *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962), 68 percent of men and women over 65 had incomes of less than \$1,000 per year.⁵⁸² Home costs were out of the reach of those who depended on Social Security. To buy a home at "Levittown" on Long Island, a buyer needed to be able to pay for housing costs ranging from \$7,990 to \$9,500.⁵⁸³ Outside of Newark, New Jersey, in Parsippany-Troy Hills, a family needed an estimated 2,000 dollars in annual income to support the costs of homeownership.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸⁰ Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 194-195.

⁵⁸¹ "Social Security," in *The World Book Encyclopedia*, vol. 16 (Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation, 1960), 457; Michael Herrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States* (1962; New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 110.

⁵⁸² Herrington, *Other America*, 110.

⁵⁸³ Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, 236.

⁵⁸⁴ Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 202-203.

Faced with unsure gender arrangements in the home, retired men looked beyond the household to reestablish gender boundaries. Leisure, sociability, and employment provided the main ways for aging men to escape from the feminized household. An older man in Texas, for example, embittered by retirement, vowed to spend more time with his many male friends. The Texan quickly plunged into "civic affairs" and local fraternal order activities. The man also called on his friends to go fishing, play poker, and attend horse races. "That made him feel like a man again," Giles reported.⁵⁸⁵ Like the man in Texas, many other retired men struggled to find manhood with activities that would take them away from the home.

6.2 LEISURE ACTIVITIES

How could aging men get away from the stifling domesticity of the home? What were the best ways for a retired man to spend his time now that he no longer worked? To successfully "adjust" to retirement, experts closely advised retired men about leisure practices. Since the workplace was closed to many older men, experts viewed leisure practices as the most readily accessible way for aging males to reestablish themselves as "men." Discussions of leisure activities evoked the period's familiar themes of "usefulness" and "staying busy." Retired men, experts cautioned, needed to keep themselves occupied through a rigorous regimen of physical and mental activity: sports, games, crafts, travel, and study. Despite retired men's varying health conditions and monetary means, older men worked hard at having fun in retirement.

⁵⁸⁵ Giles, *How to Retire*, 226-227; Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 122; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 148.

In their discussions of retirees' leisure practices, experts ironically refashioned manhood in old age on the foundations of youth, productivity, and affluence. The most successful older men were those who not only enjoyed many activities, but were youthful, energetic "experts" in their new "fields." The ideal retired men were former professors and businessmen who enjoyed physical activities such as golf, shuffleboard, hunting, baseball, and fishing; they also succeeded as hobbyists, collectors, and returning students. Successful retirement lifestyles, however, depended on middle-class incomes. Experts assumed that financial status was not a major concern. To participate in this culture of retirement and solidify their manhood, older men needed the economic empowerment that accompanied middle-class status.

Across class boundaries, experts envisioned leisure as an essential way for men to retain physical ability and mental acuity -- key foundations of functioning (and youthful) male bodies. To sustain masculinity in later life, experts emphasized the importance of exercise and activity. Joseph Buckley cited Joseph Lee, the "father" of the modern playground movement, who argued that "We do not cease playing because we are old; we grow old because we cease playing." To avoid "retirement shock" and the death or incapacitation that allegedly followed, older men needed activities to energize and strengthen their bodies and minds. "All of us [older men] need a certain amount of physical exercise to keep our bodies in good shape," Buckley pointed out. Men were told to exercise: "During retirement we should see to it that we get the kind of physical exercise which is beneficial to body structures and to our muscular and nervous systems."⁵⁸⁶

⁵⁸⁶ Joseph C. Buckley, *The Retirement Handbook: A Complete Planning Guide to Your Future* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 101.

For retired men, staying "young" and preserving manhood were synonymous. Some experts and retirees envisioned physical activity as a fountain of youth, capable of helping a man keep his vigor and vim as he reached his twilight years. The important ties between masculinity and exercise had been centerpieces of middle-class culture in the United States since the turn of the twentieth century. Around 1900, "muscular Christians," elite politicians, and self-anointed exercise experts emphasized how rigorous workouts on a consistent basis could bolster manhood in the face of industrialization and urbanization. If men did not take care of their bodies, they risked disease, decay, downward mobility, and death.⁵⁸⁷ Activity could strengthen the body and insulate older men from the dangers of "growing old." William Leslie, for instance, who lived in Santa Barbara, California, occupied his time with intense physical activities such as roller skating and dancing. Leslie pursued these rigorous activities because he believed they helped him stay young. Others agreed, noting they "subscribe[d] with a rebel yell" to Leslie's contention that exercise preserved youth. Men needed to be careful, however: "one man's activity is another's funeral."⁵⁸⁸

Some retiree sports activities seemed to muddle class lines, emphasizing community participation. Many "oldsters" seized opportunities to play sports such as baseball, facilitating the growth of city-wide baseball leagues for older men. Retirement writers discussed aging ball players with a mix of surprise and admiration. In Florida, where warm weather permitted year-round play, baseball became a centerpiece of retirement culture. St. Petersburg, Florida, featured popular retiree baseball leagues. Experts marveled at the fact that so many aging men could play

⁵⁸⁷ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*; Rotundo, *American Manhood*; Putney, *Muscular Christianity*; Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, & the Perfect Man*; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*.

⁵⁸⁸ Pitkin, *Best Years*, 54.

the game so expertly: "As is to be expected, these oldsters do not run very fast or throw very well; but they bat and catch nearly as well as anyone and usually use good judgment in their play."⁵⁸⁹ Experts marveled at teams that featured men in their seventies and eighties. They watched as older men "sassed" umpires who made bad calls. In the crowd, "vociferous" retirees watched the action. The games could be intense. An "ever-alert local undertaker" supposedly sat in the stands on occasion.⁵⁹⁰

Golf and shuffleboard offered a low-impact workout, becoming popular retiree activities during the 1950s. The sports brought men out of doors, providing low-intensity exercise and sociability. Executives bragged about the amount of golf they played, and so many men (and women) were playing that the "total age of some of the foursomes on the golf course would add up to over three hundred years."⁵⁹¹ "The tourist facilities in Florida and Southern California are thronged in the midwinter season with elderly folks playing outdoor games," Raymond Kaighn wrote. "Shuffleboard appears to be about the mildest form of exercise, and is extremely popular for men and women alike."⁵⁹²

Golf and shuffleboard were so popular among retired men that experts warned them to be mindful of their intensity. "Some try to duplicate the frenzy of their working days" by playing a

⁵⁸⁹ Henry S. Curtis, "The Other Half of the Playground Movement," *Recreation*, August 1947, 247.

⁵⁹⁰ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 49.

⁵⁹¹ Harold R. Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement* (Boston: Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, 1953), 212; Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 49.

⁵⁹² Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 49; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 260; Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 4; GC Hoyt, "The Life of the Retired in a Trailer Park," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 365.

lot of golf, *Newsweek* noted in 1954.⁵⁹³ This was unwise. Golf was supposed to help men relax.⁵⁹⁴ The aging journalism professor and author Walter Pitkin traveled to Florida during the 1940s, where he quickly developed a "loathing" for shuffleboard. Men played shuffleboard too seriously: "No doubt it is a noble game and fascinating to those it fascinates. But the grim mouth haunts me. The stern assault of the court every morning after breakfast is like Custer's Last Stand. The player must go on, though he sees no hope. He mutters . . . that perhaps after

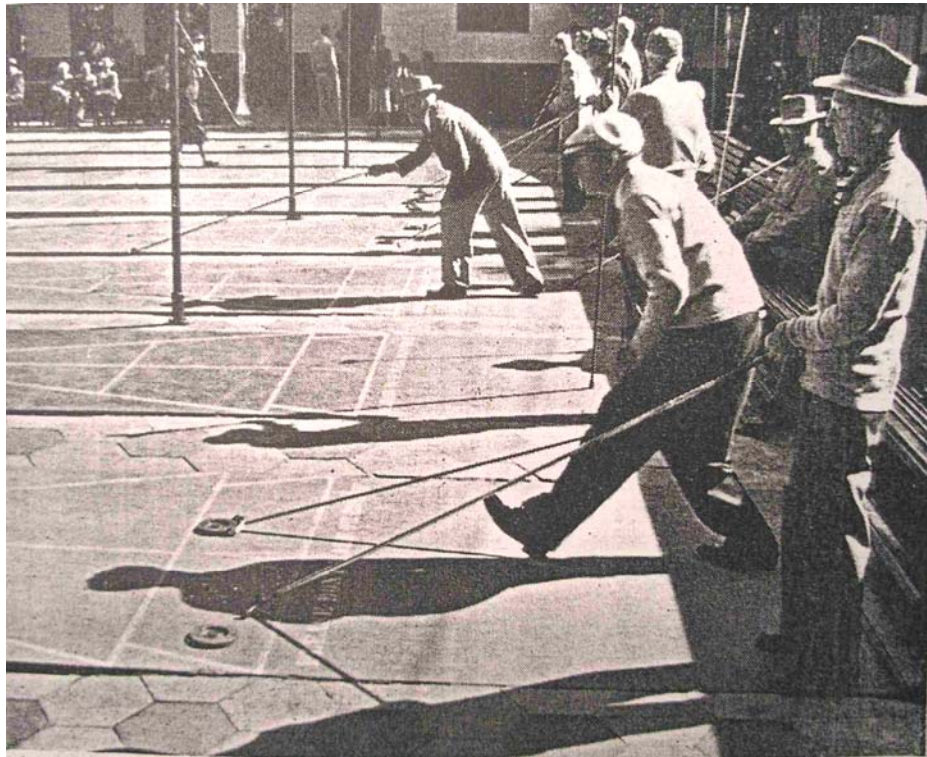


Figure 4. Retired men playing shuffleboard in Texas. *Recreation*, July 1943, 224.

⁵⁹³ "When and How Retirement?" *Newsweek*, 12 July 1954, 49.

⁵⁹⁴ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 100.

all the battles worth fighting are those we must lose."⁵⁹⁵ For these men, shuffleboard and golf were more than mere leisure; it was war.

When writers asked aging men what they planned to do when they retired, men often said they "want to catch up" on hunting and fishing.⁵⁹⁶ Retired men and experts viewed hunting and fishing as particularly masculine. Hunting evoked the bygone days of the western frontier, where men once struggled to prove their mettle. Though often confined to urban settings, retired men ventured off to the woods. Aging men could find manhood by becoming a "sportsman." Experts focused exclusively on middle-class men and their hunting prowess. A retired professor in Louisiana loved to hunt and fish. He hunted hawks in particular. Marvin S. Pittman, who wrote for a journal called *Recreation*, admired the professor's prowess. The professor was "a real sportsman." Even when driving along country roads, the professor would stop upon seeing a bird. He would pull over, produce a gun, and shoot: "Before the bird knows it, he is only another notch on the professor's game log, which acquires hundreds of new notches every year." "This sport with the gun . . . relaxes the nerves and strengthens the body of the professor," according to Pittman.⁵⁹⁷ The professor was also known as a "master fisherman."⁵⁹⁸ In retirement, older men had an opportunity to become real sportsmen. "At last a man would have time to hunt and fish," Pittman remarked, "not the little bits and moments of these ancient, traditional past times which

⁵⁹⁵ Pitkin, *Best Years*, 55-56.

⁵⁹⁶ "What To Do For Retirement," *Business Week*, 14 April 1951, 36; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 65. On the links between masculinity and hunting, see Lisa Fine, "Rights of Men, Rites of Passage: Hunting and Masculinity at Reo Motors of Lansing, Michigan, 1945-1975," in *Boys and Their Toys? Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America*, ed. Roger Horowitz (New York: Routledge, 2001), 251-271.

⁵⁹⁷ Marvin S. Pittman, "After Retirement -- What?" *Recreation*, July 1943, 223.

⁵⁹⁸ Pittman, "After Retirement," 223.

weekend and vacations now afford, but those long stretches for which every true fisherman and hunter always yearn."⁵⁹⁹ The outdoors provided an important site where aging men thought it would be possible to reinvent manhood. While middle-class men were once mental workers and professionals, in retirement they could become woodsmen of the frontier, testing their mettle by hunting and fishing in the rugged environs of the wild.

While both older men and women pursued leisure in retirement, experts were careful to delineate gender boundaries. Sociologist LC Michelon, who studied a retiree trailer park in Florida during the early 1950s that catered to both working-class and middle-class men and women, was careful to demarcate how men often surpassed women in athleticism and skill in various games and sports. He was also careful to show how men and women preferred different activities. Leisure in retirement upheld sexual difference. In fishing, for example, retired men "excel[led] over women . . . in both interest and skill."⁶⁰⁰ Women excelled in feminine activities: painting, ceramics, and sewing. Men, however, enjoyed "hobby-shop activities" that allowed them to use tools.⁶⁰¹

To avoid boredom, older men of the often-discussed middle class typically combined numerous leisure activities in their retirement lifestyles. For example, a retired barber combined fishing with haircutting for friends on Saturdays. His friends combined fishing with travel,

⁵⁹⁹ Bloomberg, "Automation Predicts Change," 23; see also Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 100-101; Alonzo F. Myers, "Essential Elements of a Good Retirement Plan," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 31:8 (April 1958), 323; Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 100; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 131, 260; LC Michelon, "The New Leisure Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 375; Ethel Sabin Smith, *The Dynamics of Aging* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1956), 132; Pollack, *Positive Experiences in Retirement*, 25; "What To Do For Retirement," 36; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 65, 67. "Retirement Without A Wrench," *Business Week*, 29 May 1954, 70.

⁶⁰⁰ Michelon, "New Leisure Class," 377.

⁶⁰¹ Michelon, "New Leisure Class," 376-377.

square dancing, cards, shuffleboard, and movies.⁶⁰² Paul Boynton talked with a retired man who enjoyed not only gardening, but also carpentering and boat building. Another man collected guns, worked on home improvement projects, and fancied himself as an inventor.⁶⁰³ An eighty-two year-old man enjoyed reading history, golfing, fishing, woodwork, and gardening. Moreover, the man maintained numerous social commitments through his church.⁶⁰⁴ Retired men deliberately kept themselves busy.

Ideal retirement activities helped an older man to be "productive." Gifford R. Hart wrote that retired men needed "interests of a serious, constructive character" if they were to enjoy a "successful" retirement. Leisure activities needed to "[p]erform some useful function," "produce a financial result of some sort," and "make some use of the retired man's principal skill or experience." Robert J. Havighurst told a conference at the University of Chicago in 1959 that the "activity theory" of retirement was more beneficial to aging men than what he called the "rocking chair" idea. He remarked that older men "must look for in retirement the same satisfactions he received from his work life." Retirement activities needed to produce personal and economic dividends. "Make sure you'll get the rewards, tangible or intangible, you anticipate," *Changing Times* noted in 1953.⁶⁰⁵

Scholars told older men to prepare for their retirement by studying leisure activities as possible future jobs. Retirement observers urged men to approach retirement with an executive's

⁶⁰² More and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 4.

⁶⁰³ Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 110.

⁶⁰⁴ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 67.

⁶⁰⁵ "How To Retire," *Changing Times*, February 1953, 42; Hart, *Retirement*, 82; Havighurst, "Impact of Retirement," 14; David Riesman, "Some Clinical and Cultural Aspects of Aging," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 381.

approach to problem solving in the office. Men, after all, would rely heavily on these activities to define their retirement "careers." Retirement preparation resembled a job hunt. As Elon H. Moore asked gerontologists in 1946, "To what then shall an individual retire . . . ? Whatever his choice, the prospective retiree should make a careful job analysis of his intended activity and then determine his interest in such activity."⁶⁰⁶ Experts urged retirees not to choose their retirement activities too quickly.

Once they had retired, many older men organized their leisure activities into new daily and weekly routines. Just as routines defined their working lives, aging men brought this attitude with them into retirement. In lieu of work, retired men pursued rigorous routines of leisure; the best retired men resembled harried executives who occupied nearly every hour of the day with an intense routine of varied activities. Robert Havighurst wrote, "He [the retired man] may make a routine out of his leisure to fill the void left by the loss of routines centered about his job."⁶⁰⁷ "RES" retired from his job as a factory superintendent to a demanding new routine. During his working years, RES did not enjoy leisure. Worried he would hate retirement, the former superintendent organized a program "much as he did at his job."⁶⁰⁸ He described the progression of a typical week during a conversation with advice author Irving Salomon:

MONDAY:

Morning: Reading Sunday's New York Times. (He never had time to really read it on a Sunday.)

Afternoon: To the farm. (He and another man own a ninety-acre farm, forty-two miles out of town.)

⁶⁰⁶ Elon H. Moore, "Preparation for Retirement," *Journal of Gerontology*, 1:2 (April 1946), 209; "What Will You Do When You Retire?" *Changing Times*, March 1956, 18

⁶⁰⁷ Robert J. Havighurst, "Flexibility and the Social Roles of the Retired," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 310.

⁶⁰⁸ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 72.

Evening: (And it is noted that although he planned evenings, they are all the same.) Television, picture show, friends, cards, etc.

TUESDAY:

Morning: Reading. Primarily, technical publications.

Afternoon: Exercise/and or grandchildren.

WEDNESDAY:

Morning: Reading of books

Afternoon: Helping at the YMCA

THURSDAY:

Morning: At desk taking care of personal matters and miscellaneous reading.

Lunch: With friends

Afternoon: Ball game or movie

FRIDAY:

All day: Work at the farm.

SATURDAY:

Morning: Take care of grandchildren.

Afternoon: Visit friends, go to a show, take a ride with wife.

For emergency when insufficient to do, start a workshop, or more time for YMCA.⁶⁰⁹

Once he was just a factory superintendent, but now he was a Renaissance man. RES's new routine hinged on a diverse array of activities, ranging from pursuits that stimulated his mind (reading and socializing) to those that allowed him to acquire additional income (farming). He also busied himself with volunteer work or visits with his grandchildren. Another retired man, eager to describe his new routine for Irving Salomon, noted how he even drove women in his neighborhood to the local "mental institution" when needed.⁶¹⁰ We do not know if these allegedly unsteady women were married to retired men.

⁶⁰⁹ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 72-73.

⁶¹⁰ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 72-73, 188.

Despite experts' frequent discussions of the dividends to be derived from leisure, some older men dismissed recreation as "childish" or "womanish," appropriate only for "sissies." Aging men worried about stigmas attached to not working, despising the perception they were "playing" every hour of the day. Against the backdrop of World War II and the Cold War, which put a premium on men who could serve national interests, aging men worried about losing their "usefulness." Men also worried about not living up to new cultural standards that celebrated the attainment of middle-class status and affluence. Older men preferred the terms "outside-of-work interests" to describe their leisure activities. The term "hobbies" connoted a lack of seriousness.⁶¹¹

As suggested by male retirement advice authors, many retired working-class men did not view recreation as "womanish." Among the older working-class men discussed by a small minority of retirement observers during the 1950s, many re-envisioned retirement as an opportunity to free themselves from the troubles and pressures of the working world. Retired working men suggested that personal freedom from work was highly desirable. No longer tied to machines and assembly lines, retired working-class men savored the chance to live on their own terms. Now they could finally explore other interests. The sociologist Warner Bloomberg, Jr., talked with aging working-class men in a mass production factory who told him they were eager to retire. "There was so much to do in life besides work in a factory!" some exclaimed. "At last a man could furnish his home and landscape his yard, and even be able to 'piddle' at it instead of having to drive himself to get done all that he could on a one- or two-day weekend." Men also

⁶¹¹ Preston, *Should I Retire?* 76; Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 75.

told of plans to fish, hunt, and travel. They cherished the possibilities found through independence.⁶¹²

A move to the Sunbelt states of Florida or California symbolized a major expression of personal freedom. No longer bound to the North, for example, retired men began moving south during the 1950s in greater numbers. *Business Week* polled retirees in 1951 and discovered that "many" wanted to move to Florida. Between 1940 and 1950, the US census showed that substantial numbers of older men and women were moving to the Sunbelt states. California gained 130,000 new older residents, while Florida and Arizona gained 66,000 and 8,900 respectively.⁶¹³ Even if they did not permanently relocate, many aging men and women took vacations in the Sunbelt. Observers often talked with retired men who spent part of their time in California or Florida. Florida and California were "thronged" with older men and women. If they had the means, many retired men wanted to take advantage of their freedom. An aging man told the sociologist Alonzo F. Myers that he did "not want to die in Pittsburgh." He wanted to live out his years under the warm Florida sun.⁶¹⁴

Moving to Florida was not a privilege exercised by only middle-class or working-class men. Due to the expansion of retiree trailer parks in the Sunbelt states, aging working-class men were also able to enjoy the chance to live under the warm Florida sun -- much like aging

⁶¹² Warner Bloomberg, Jr., "Automation Predicts Change," in *The New Frontiers of Aging*, ed. Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbitts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 22-23.

⁶¹³ Homer L. Hitt, "The Role of Migration in Population Change Among the Aged," *American Sociological Review*, 19:2 (April 1954), 196.

⁶¹⁴ "What To Do For Retirement," *Business Week*, 14 April 1951, 36; Robert H. Guest, "Work Careers and Aspirations of Automobile Workers," *American Sociological Review*, 19:2 (April 1954), 162; Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 49; Sally Doyle, "Retiring Postman to Miss Friends -- and Dogs -- on Route," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 April 1953, 12; Preston, *Should I Retire?* 52; Alonzo F. Myers, "Essential Elements of a Good Retirement Plan," *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 31:8 (April 1958), 322.

executives and professionals could. In a 1954 survey of a Florida trailer park that catered to retired men and women, sociologists discovered a cross-class mixture of couples. Men who once worked in occupations such as factory work (30.9 percent), farming (24.7 percent), retail (22.2 percent), and managerial work (8.2 percent) lived in the park's 100 trailer units. Many of these men and women had relocated to Florida from the East and Midwest.⁶¹⁵ There were also assisted living facilities that drew aging men with few economic resources. At Moosehaven, a fraternal home operated by the Loyal Order of Moose in Jacksonville, Florida, the majority of the residents came from "the ranks of labor."⁶¹⁶

Due to physical decline in later life, which could prevent some men from enjoying golf, shuffleboard, or baseball, experts recognized the need for activities that relied less on the body and utilized the mind to a greater degree. Some experts suggested that retired men could reinvent themselves as hobby enthusiasts. Collecting and other crafts, experts suggested, were more worthy pursuits than other less-serious undertakings, such as lawn bowling or sitting in the park. Hobbies such as collecting and crafts did more than simply pass the time; rather, these activities helped retired men nurture a new expertise, new skills with their hands, and often meet other older men who shared their interests. Serious hobbies allowed older men to have "both [their] minds and [their] hands full."⁶¹⁷ In collecting, there was much to explore: stamps, coins, ship models, furniture, and firearms, to name a few. Collecting did not require extensive physical movement, ability, or strength. Many activities, retirement advice author George

⁶¹⁵ GC Hoyt, "The Life of the Retired in a Trailer Park," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 363.

⁶¹⁶ Robert W. Kleemeier, "Moosehaven: Congregate Living in a Community of the Retired," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 348.

⁶¹⁷ Preston, *Should I Retire?* 77.

Preston remarked, could "be done from a wheelchair." Most importantly, hobbies kept men mentally and socially engaged. Collecting led to social contacts: "No matter what you collect other people are collecting the same things. See to it that part of your collecting includes collecting other collectors."⁶¹⁸ Hobbies provided retired men with absorbing new activities -- much as their jobs had once done for them.

Some men, as they faced retirement, wanted to challenge themselves academically. During the 1950s, some aging men returned to school for new courses of study. Through study, retired men could challenge themselves with new ideas, learn new skills, or update earlier knowledge. In addition to body strength and health, men linked mental acuity to manhood. Even if older men could not afford to attend night school or college, there were ways to stimulate thinking. "The Public Library is said to be the poor man's university," Joseph Buckley concluded. In addition to fiction, retired men were interested in technical subjects and "how-to-do-it." Rather than view retirement as the end, education provided some older men with opportunities for growth. "One of the pleasant aspects of retirement," Buckley wrote, "is the time and opportunity it affords to catch up on one's reading."⁶¹⁹

Experts most appreciated hobbies that could be firmly defined as masculine. Guns provided the collector's item of choice for older men. In addition to the importance of guns in hunting, guns could affirm the masculinity of the collector. Gun collecting and repair, according to George H. Preston, were an "ideal retirement activity." In addition to viewing gun ownership as something natural for men to do, experts most appreciated men who possessed knowledge of

⁶¹⁸ Preston, *Should I Retire?* 74-75.

⁶¹⁹ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 98, 96.

guns. Preston viewed this hobby as a "fascinating" choice for retired men.⁶²⁰ Experts viewed guns as unquestionably masculine.

Men regarded leisure practices as an important way to reinvent manhood in retirement. Men believed that physical and mental activity -- of varying type and intensity -- would help men remain youthful and productive as they aged. To be "men," males needed to stay physically active and busy -- despite retirement and physical decline. Older men also organized their leisure activities into new routines, recreating a key aspect of their earlier working lives. While both working- and middle-class men pursued retirement leisure, experts still spoke most frequently about retired professionals and their choices and expectations regarding leisure.

6.3 SOCIAL CLUBS FOR THE RETIRED

Older men, and women, looked to social clubs as key leisure sites. In addition to relying on personal forms of leisure for exercise and relaxation, retired men looked to collective sites for leisure and sociability. Social organizations such as Golden Age Clubs and Old Guard Clubs provided much-desired contact with other older men and women. Through these organizations, aging men and women could talk with each other, participate in numerous activities, and feel like they were members of a community.

Retired men and women, as well as municipal governments, churches, and schools, carefully organized social activities along gender lines. Men and women shared the Golden Age Club, but retired men (who were often anxious to distance themselves from wives) utilized the

⁶²⁰ Preston, *Should I Retire?* 73.

male-exclusive Old Guard as a site that could be firmly delineated as masculine. Men enjoyed the cards and talk found at the Golden Age Clubs, but they also, with some frequency, embraced the competition and homosocial surroundings accentuated by the Old Guard.

The retired men and women's social clubs of the 1940s and 1950s blurred class boundaries. When communities organized social activities and organizations for older people, they typically drew in participants from working- and middle-class backgrounds. In the sources, observers sometimes made direct references to organizations' cross-class compositions.

Oskar Shulze started the first Golden Age Club in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1940. Numerous Golden Age Clubs soon appeared around Cleveland, and new clubs spread throughout the United States within only a few years. By the early 1950s, observers of retirement trends frequently discussed their significance in the lives of retired men and women. The federal government, the *New York Times*, gerontologists, and sociologists all celebrated the success and potential of the Golden Age Clubs.⁶²¹ They provided aging men and women with many social outlets and activities to occupy their time.

Who organized and sponsored the Golden Age Clubs? A variety of local institutions supported them. Local churches, municipal governments, or recreation agencies provided meeting places, as well as staff members who helped with activities and planning. At the Ossining, New York, Golden Age Club, undergraduates from a nearby college coordinated activities each week. Meetings took place at the Ossining Recreation Commission's hall. There, the Golden Age Club began in 1946, when Andrew A. Sargis, superintendent of the commission,

⁶²¹ Oskar Shulze, "Recreation for the Aged," *Journal of Gerontology*, 4:4 (October 1949), 310; Merrill Folsom, "Ossining Oldsters' Club So Good Other Cities Rush to Emulate It," *New York Times*, 24 February 1951, 15; "When the Older Citizens, Themselves, Carry the Ball," *Aging* (published by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), January 1954, 3.

met a group of older men languishing on the steps of a local church. Sargis and "the boys" started the Golden Age Club together. Membership varied; some groups (such as the Ossining group) featured as many as ninety members.⁶²²

Golden Age Clubs constituted a flexible site where retired men and women could socialize and enjoy themselves. Members could explore many activities one or more days per week. Oskar Shulze noted that Golden Age Club meetings often began in the early afternoon. Proceedings began with small talk over checkers, cards, or dominoes. The majority preferred these entertainments. Other members headed for the television. Some men and women who arrived at the start of a meeting would visit in the lounge and talk. Next, Golden Age Club meetings proceeded into group activities: singing, parties, crafts, movies, dancing, lectures, amateur theatre, or planning for outings. In the final third of a meeting, older men and women enjoyed refreshments. Members loved the refreshments because it allowed them to have a meal with a group of friends -- rather than alone at home. Meetings usually ended before 5:00 p.m., allowing the members to walk home before dark. The "club season" lasted between September and May, but in the summer members continued to spend time together through weekly picnics, boat trips, and sight-seeing tours.⁶²³

Observers who studied the Golden Age Clubs often remarked how the members were invigorated by the social opportunities and activities. The clubs were "therapeutic" for

⁶²² Folsom, "Ossining Oldsters' Club," 15.

⁶²³ Shulze, "Recreation for the Aged," 311; Folsom, "Ossining Oldsters' Club," 15; "When the Older Citizens," 3. Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib, *The Nature of Retirement* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 178; Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 93. Golden Age Clubs did not have a monopoly on heterosocial leisure activities for the retired. For example, Older Adult Klubs were a different (and smaller) organization, but featured similar activities. See Howard G. Danford, *Recreation in the American Community* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 12.

retirees.⁶²⁴ Journalist Merrill Folsom, who visited the Ossining, New York, Golden Age Club in 1951, met a retired actor who thrived on the activities and social environment. The eighty-eight year-old thespian was so energized by the club that he often spontaneously launched into Shakespearean monologues. He was, Folsom reported, "[a]lways ready to recite Hamlet." When asked about his ongoing dedication to the theatre, the aging actor wryly noted, "Some people think I'm acting my last scene. It's not so. I'm just getting ready for the final scene in front of St. Peter."⁶²⁵

Golden Age Clubs offered educational opportunities, which retirees enjoyed. The clubs offered men and women, many of whom were working class, "educational value," since members could talk with so many other retirees, hear various lectures, participate in dramatics, and explore handicrafts. "Mr. N.," a member of one of the Golden Age Clubs in Cleveland, once told a visitor: "Isn't it wonderful that we have our club! You see, my parents were very poor; therefore, I could go to school only three years. Then I had to go to work and ever since my life has been hard work. I never had time to study. Now I am lucky that I have my club where I can learn so many things."⁶²⁶

While the Golden Age Clubs were open to both men and women, the organization sometimes featured local "women's auxiliaries." The purpose of the auxiliaries was not clear. The Ossining Golden Age Club featured a "golden age auxiliary of women" who specifically worked on crafts.⁶²⁷ It was common for recreation centers and social clubs to organize men and

⁶²⁴ Riesman, "Some Clinical and Cultural Aspects of Aging," 381.

⁶²⁵ Folsom, "Ossining Oldsters' Club," 15.

⁶²⁶ Shulze, "Recreation for the Aged," 311-312.

⁶²⁷ Folsom, "Ossining Oldsters' Club," 15.

women's activities along gender lines. Just as retired men and male advice writers viewed leisure in gendered terms, so did social club organizers.

While material related to gender difference in leisure practice within the Golden Age Clubs is admittedly scant, evidence from community recreation centers, which fostered a similar social environment, suggests that programmers and retirees organized activities along gender lines. In Philadelphia, a writer for *Recreation* visited a community center that catered to older men and women. She carefully noted how men and women chose different activities, affirming their choices as natural. "We find that men are adept at playing games and finding things to fill their leisure (smoking, checkers, horseshoes, watching excavations, sitting around the store or square, politics)," she wrote. However, "Women have spent their young years being housewives and mothers, with their major handwork sewing." When communities designed facilities for the aged, the observer suggested, the program should include a workshop for men and a kitchen for women.⁶²⁸ Another observer noted that recreation centers should provide bocce ball for aging men, while offering places where older women could explore jewelry making and dressmaking.⁶²⁹

Despite the gendered content of many leisure activities at social clubs and recreation centers, clubs provided widowed men and women with vital social contacts. Sociability, as experts sometimes remarked, precluded more intense feelings of isolation after the loss of a spouse. For widowed men and women, social clubs brought them out of their homes at least part of the week. In 1952, a retired man described how he lost his wife and his home. He could not

⁶²⁸ Jeanne H. Barnes, "Not Too Old To Enjoy Life," *Recreation*, September 1944, 312-313.

⁶²⁹ "Recreation for Older People," *Recreation*, October 1940, 432.

take care of himself. Widowhood brought the man into his son's household. The Golden Age Club provided him a sorely needed social outlet. "Last year I lost my wife," the retired man remarked. "I am now living with my son and his family. They try to be kind, but their friends are young and I am only in the way. In my Golden Age Club, I take part in activities with folks my own age and am happy."⁶³⁰

For older men, the Golden Age Clubs allowed them to leave their homes and socialize with other retired men and women. But during the late 1940s and 1950s, when older men were very eager to draw firmer boundaries between the masculine and the feminine because of expanding employment for married women and a new emphasis on domesticity, heterosociability did not affirm strong boundaries between masculinity and femininity. The presence of women in the Golden Age Clubs, despite the ways the organization (and other sites such as recreation centers) were careful to organize various activities along gender lines, did not allow men to view the clubs as firmly masculine organizations. Golden Age Clubs perhaps muddled the boundaries of gender for some retired men.

To create social spaces that were more firmly masculine, some retired men turned towards an organization called the Old Guard Club. Unlike the Golden Age Clubs, only aging men could join the Old Guard. The organization, founded by Samuel Johnson, a medical doctor, espoused the idea that friendships among older men guaranteed a gentler transition from work to retirement, as well as the idea that homosociability kept men mentally engaged as they aged. Joseph Buckley discussed how the Old Guard "cultivate[d] good fellowship" and "preserve[d] mental alertness." In the process, they could feel younger and live longer. As Samuel Johnson

⁶³⁰ "Fun Doesn't Stop At Sixty," *Recreation*, December 1952, 416.

wrote: "If a man does not make new acquaintances as he advances through life, he will soon find himself alone. A man, sir, must keep his friendship in constant repair."⁶³¹

The organization first appeared in Summit, New Jersey, in 1930, and the group steadily expanded during the 1940s and 1950s. By 1951, the Old Guard boasted of 23 chapters in 8 states; some of the clubs featured as many as 250 members. In addition to over 16 clubs in New Jersey, Old Guard organizations could be found in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Texas, and Florida. Nationally, there were 5,100 men in the group during 1959. To join, men needed to be at least 50 years old and retired. The Old Guard typically held meetings in YMCA buildings. While the organization was small in comparison to the Golden Age Clubs, retirement writers and scholars often cited the Old Guard as a major site where older men socialized; they wanted to see the Guard expand. Observers celebrated Old Guard members as men who "refused to take their retirement lying down."⁶³²

Men viewed the Old Guard Clubs as an important way to overcome social isolation. Irving Salomon described how retirement was, for some, a release from daily routines, but how for others it meant isolation. "Retirement often points toward solitude by change of direction from active duties and the daily contact one has had with others," Salomon wrote. "Imposes a situation which is rather bewildering and frustrating. And, to some, a feeling of oppressive loneliness and solitude, as age advances and friends pass away." In response, aging men needed to take up Dr. Johnson's advice: "Association with those of one's own age has its distinct virtues,

⁶³¹ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 94-95; Boynton, *Six Ways to Retire*, 124; Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 268.

⁶³² Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 95; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 97, 99; Joseph G. Haff, "Retirement Club Eyes US Record," *New York Times*, 13 September 1959, 123.

as a tonic for loneliness, a quickener of stagnated thinking, a brightener of the gloom which often afflicts old age, a spur to lagging endeavors in any chosen line of old age activity. Nothing can be more conducive to give zest to living than such intercourse and regular contact with one's own class."⁶³³ (While Salomon used the word "class," he meant gender.) Through social contacts with other older men, retired men would be energized and thus able to protect their health.

Socially, the Old Guard allowed men to construct an exclusively masculine space. The typical meeting combined homosociability with structured procedural matters, business, and entertainment. During the first part of a meeting, the men met socially and "informally." The actual meeting began with ten minutes of singing, moving then into business matters. Guests were introduced and welcomed by an executive committee, and birthdays were announced. Members also provided reports on the progress (or decline) of members who were ill. Members read correspondence from other clubs, as well as summarized new and old "business." For activities, the Old Guard often featured guest speakers, often members who spoke on topics from "his own background and experience." A retired history professor, for example, gave a talk on the American Revolution. In addition, Old Guard members enjoyed fishing and movies. Finally, the men played the usual shuffleboard games.⁶³⁴

Old Guard Clubs boasted of a cross-class membership, comprising working-class, middle-class, and even men of the economic elite. A range of men from the comfortable classes -- bankers, chemists, engineers, editors, attorneys, manufacturers, merchants, clergymen, doctors, and salesmen -- all joined the Old Guard. But the group also brought in men from working-class

⁶³³ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 97-98; quote taken from Haff, "Retirement Club Eyes US Record," 123.

⁶³⁴ Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 99; Haff, "Retirement Club Eyes Us Record," 123.

occupations. When Irving Salomon visited an Old Guard meeting in New Jersey, he remarked, "Here you see men who are executives of large organizations, men in "Who's Who," a bank president or an ex-governor, sitting next to and fraternizing with the man who was a former policeman, a barber, or a bricklayer."⁶³⁵

Manly competition infused the organization's culture. First, chapters competed against one another for members. During the late 1950s, *New York Times* reporter Joseph G. Haff wrote about a competition for members between the Point Pleasant, New Jersey, chapter and the Minneapolis chapter -- the largest in the United States. The men of the Old Guard of Greater Point Pleasant saw their club as a rugged upstart, challenging the largest of the Old Guard for national prominence. (Haff did not report whether or not the Minneapolis group acknowledged the competition with the New Jersey men.) The men of Point Pleasant, however, were still 6 short of surpassing the Minnesota group when Haff visited. But the group had certainly grown, from 4 to 516 men.⁶³⁶

Second, Old Guard chapters competed in sports. The Point Pleasant chapter bragged that the older men on its bowling team could handle any challenger -- of any age. They regularly, according to Joseph Haff, competed against teams where the average age was "thirty years under their own." This surprised the *New York Times* reporter, especially since two men on the Old Guard Team were seventy-one years old. Besides bowling, Old Guard Clubs often challenged each other on the shuffleboard courts. Point Pleasant's Old Guard shuffleboard team bragged they had never been defeated by another team. Within the chapters, members competed against

⁶³⁵ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 94-95; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 99.

⁶³⁶ Haff, "Retirement Club Eyes US Record," 123.

each other "to determine the club's champion." In the Old Guard Clubs, aging men could -- every week -- flex their muscles on the shuffleboard court.⁶³⁷

When Old Guard men named their chapters, the name choices suggested how they wanted to view manhood in later life. Old Guard chapters used a variety of names: In Evanston, Illinois, men organized the "Retired Live Wires"; in Oak Park, Illinois, men called themselves the "Borrowed Time Club"; older men in Montclair, New Jersey, started the "Dunworkin Club"; and the "Old Timers' Club" appealed to men in East Orange, New Jersey.⁶³⁸ The names, such as the "Dunworkin Club" or the "Retired Live Wires," celebrated, rather than lamented, how retired men no longer worked. Some men defied their advancing years, as suggested by the men in Oak Park who called themselves the "Borrowed Time Club." Aging men tried to defy their anxieties about aging and retirement with comic, rebellious labels.

Social clubs for retired men and women were popular during the 1940s and 1950s. As retirement became common, retirees busied themselves with numerous social organizations. The Golden Age Clubs were the most prominent. These groups offered weekly opportunities for heterosocial leisure, which many older men and women embraced. Club activities provided a much-needed social site away from the home. The prevalence of heterosocial leisure, however, created a counter-current. Preoccupied with creating male-exclusive social spaces, some retired men looked to the Old Guard Club. The Old Guard provided homosocial leisure and manly competition.

⁶³⁷ Haff, "Retirement Club Eyes US Record," 123.

⁶³⁸ Hall, *Some Observations on Executive Retirement*, 268; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 104.

6.4 RETIREMENT RESISTANCE: EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Despite the many possibilities attached to leisure activities, many retired men decided they could only organize masculinity around working and the workplace. Employment provided retired men with the most familiar way to reconstruct differences between the masculine and the feminine. During the 1940s and 1950s, some older men "retired" from retirement by going back to work. Though retired, some older men, especially former executives, looked for new job opportunities, preferring in most cases to stay within their earlier field of employment. Leisure did not easily replace work as a way to occupy one's time everyday. Professional men often dismissed the idea of retirement after confronting life without work. Not all older men enjoyed shuffleboard, fishing, or tinkering.⁶³⁹

Available statistical data indicates that substantial numbers of retired men wanted to return to work. In a 1952 *Business Week* survey of retired men in Cleveland, over 10 percent of their sample had returned to work full-time. Also, 16 percent worked part-time. Even among the retired men who were not currently employed (perhaps due to health reasons or troubles with hiring age limits), 37 percent noted they would prefer to work.⁶⁴⁰ In Jacob Tuckman and Irving Lorge's 1953 survey of retired men in the New York City needle trades, they found that 36 percent did not plan to retire unless they became ill.⁶⁴¹ In a 1954 survey conducted by Penn State University, significant numbers of aging men reported they planned to remain employed.

⁶³⁹ Kenneth Walker, *Living Your Later Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), 99.

⁶⁴⁰ "Retirement Not Always Happy," *Business Week*, 5 April 1952, 48.

⁶⁴¹ Jacob Tuckman and Irving Lorge, *Retirement and the Industrial Worker: Prospect and Reality* (New York: Teachers College Columbia University, 1953), 21.

Nearly 59 percent planned to continue working full-time for their current firm. Almost 22 percent planned to work full-time, but in another occupation. Over 62 percent anticipated part-time work in their current field, while 32 percent expected to work part-time elsewhere.⁶⁴² While the numbers varied from study to study, available data shows that between 10 and 50 percent of aging men in various occupations planned to work instead of retire at age 65.

For many older professional men, "hobbies" could not suffice as a foundation for manhood. Men -- especially from the middle class -- envisioned work and leisure as dissimilar concepts. In the 1940s and 1950s, when usefulness and service remained at a premium in American culture, many retirees could not envision themselves without work. "For me hobbies are like desserts," an aging executive remarked in 1954. "I have to have some meat and potatoes of work for my main fare."⁶⁴³ Many professional men -- used to the busy routines of the corporate office -- viewed retirement as "loafing" and "a stupid way to live."⁶⁴⁴ While retirement observers defined leisure as a way to demonstrate manhood during the 1940s and 1950s, other men rejected retirement and went back to work.

By doing so, older middle-class men emphasized that youth, productivity, and middle-class status were the foundations of manhood. To be men, males needed employment or entrepreneur status if they intended to be truly productive. Furthermore, older men wanted work so they could preserve identities as middle-class professionals and executives.

⁶⁴² Joseph H. Britton and Jean O. Britton, "Work and Retirement for Older University Alumni," *Journal of Gerontology*, 9:4 (October 1954), 471.

⁶⁴³ Harold R. Hall, "Activity Programming for Retirement By Executives," *Journal of Gerontology*, 9:2 (April 1954), 217.

⁶⁴⁴ Kaighn, *How to Retire and Like It*, 126; "What Will You Do When You Retire?" *Changing Times*, March 1956, 18.

Aging professional men resisted retirement by rejoining the workforce. Eager to remain working, some men offered up their services during their retirement ceremonies. After twenty-four years of teaching at City College's (New York City) Bureau of Business Research, administrators retired Dr. Ernest S. Bradford. He had reached the mandatory retirement age of seventy years old. During the well-attended retirement luncheon to honor Bradford for his years of service to the college, the professor offered his experience to "any college which needs a young man on its staff." Apparently, someone at the luncheon forwarded his bold declaration to administrators at Manhattan College. Very quickly, Dr. Bradford was teaching once again. Manhattan College made him Professor of Business. Bradford did not see himself as an "old man," ready for retirement. Rather, he thought of himself as a young man -- ready and able to work. When Milton Bernet retired as vice president for Mountain States Telephone and Telegraph Company, he bragged how his phone began ringing with new job offers. "I have had a number of jobs offered to me . . . I intend to accept one of them. I wouldn't think of retiring from productive work," Bernet concluded.⁶⁴⁵

Other men took out ads in newspapers, soliciting employers for job offers. As several examples suggest, retired men preferred to remain in their previous occupations. Continuity between kinds of work factored into retired men's conceptualizations of masculinity. "I regret this retirement," a former public relations man complained. "I am in perfect, vigorous health, and I am tired of golf and play, and north and south resorts, and I find that my efforts at "do-gooding" do not keep me keen." Nothing but employment in his old line of work would suffice: "I wish again to work, and work hard, at business." He took out a large advertisement in a

⁶⁴⁵ "Takes Teaching Job at 70," *New York Times*, 22 July 1947, 25; "Should You Be Forced To Retire at 65?" *US News & World Report*, 13 September 1957, 97.

newspaper, offering up his experience. The ad blared: "THIS ADVERTISEMENT IS DIRECTED TO THE PRESIDENT OF A CORPORATION WHOSE PROSPEROUS BUSINESS LIFE DEPENDS UPON THE ESTEEM AND GOODWILL of the general public." The man urged any employer in need of a good PR man to contact him. The older man even offered to work without pay. Other men tried the same tactic: "Retirement is a bore," a retired man wrote in his own newspaper notice. "I want to work again. Reputation unquestionable. If you have an opening I'd like to talk it over."⁶⁴⁶

Some retired men used letter writing to inquire about job opportunities. Possibly unable to find available jobs through other means, men called on employers by mail. A skilled worker in watch repair faced retirement at age sixty-five. Despite the pension he would receive, the aging man wanted to sustain ties to his trade. He also wanted to earn extra money. Anticipating a move to Florida, the man tried to jump start his job hunt by writing letters to jewelry stores in Jacksonville, Miami, and Tampa. He explained that he would soon retire from his current job, but would the company consider hiring him as a repairman? "A part-time job would be quite satisfactory," the older man explained. "Could you use a man such as myself in your watch and clock repair department?"⁶⁴⁷

However, hiring age limits often prevented many retired men from working again. In Houston, an estimated 52 percent of job notices in early 1952 contained age requirements. In Columbus, Ohio, 4/5 of employer requests for workers asked for men under the age of 45, while

⁶⁴⁶ Elon H. Moore and Gordon F. Streib, *The Nature of Retirement* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1959), 35 (emphasis in original); LC Michelon, "The New Leisure Class," *American Journal of Sociology*, 59:4 (January 1954), 372.

⁶⁴⁷ Thomas Collins, *The Golden Years: An Invitation to Retirement* (New York: John Day Company, 1956), 61.

2/5 were for men under 35.⁶⁴⁸ Age limits struck hard at former industrial workers. "Jim" was a typical retired man who could not find a new job during the postwar period. While business was good, no factory would hire him, even on a part-time basis. Jim had a good record with his previous company; he was a "trained" and "experienced" warehouse worker, with over twenty years spent on the job. But no hiring officer bothered to ask him about his record. Jim was deemed too old. "Employers in his town and in those around preferred to hire young men," an observer concluded.⁶⁴⁹

Older men and experts believed that work offered health benefits to aging men. Some retired men who went back to work claimed that labor bolstered their health and prolonged their lives. Walter Pitkin described a retired man who became a depressed and distraught hypochondriac. Without work to occupy his mind, the former businessman was a "total wreck, breaking to pieces on the sands of time." The older man's former colleagues, however, quickly "came to the rescue." They invented a problem at work, and invited the aging man to help them resolve it. Returning to work brought the man out of his depression. Pitkin happily noted, "He is now pretty well, thank you."⁶⁵⁰

To inspire work-minded retirees to become more active, advice writers encouraged men to turn their hobbies into full-time businesses. Retirement advice writers admired and frequently wrote about men who started successful entrepreneurial ventures. In 1944, retiree Roy Adams

⁶⁴⁸ "Man Living Longer But Working Less," *New York Times*, 1 July 1952, 19.

⁶⁴⁹ US Bureau of Employment Security (Dir. Robert C. Goodwin), *Workers Are Young Longer: A Report of the Findings and Implications of the Public Employment Service Studies of Older Workers in Five Cities*, booklet (Washington, DC: US Bureau of Employment Security, 1952), 3, in vertical files ("Age and Employment"), ILIR, UIUC.

⁶⁵⁰ Walter B. Pitkin, *The Best Years: How to Enjoy Retirement* (New York: Current Books, 1946), 113.

began building tables in his garage. His wife sold the pieces to local stores. "Business was so good"; the man found investors. Business grew considerably. The couple even moved the operation to a larger building on a different site.⁶⁵¹ In Florida, Paul Bryant also found success in the furniture business, turning his affinity for antiques into a manufacturing concern. He built a small factory to make copies of early American furnishings.⁶⁵² In addition to woodworking ventures, another retired man found success making, surprisingly, mail-order salads. The older man enjoyed creating salad recipes. Initially, the man's hobby was to supply friends with "original" salad mixes. Then, he began selling salad through the mail. Oddly, the mail-order salad business took off. The salad chef became a mogul, enjoying a business with over 1,000 mail-order customers.⁶⁵³

Farming was a favorite enterprise among retirees.⁶⁵⁴ Some retired men wanted to get back to the land, as if to escape from the urban/industrial/corporate surroundings of their earlier years. In addition, they wanted to bolster their incomes. Some operations were substantial. Dan Belding, an aging executive at an advertising firm, bought a citrus ranch near San Diego. Operating the ranch constituted his plan for a "productive" retirement.⁶⁵⁵ A retired postal worker

⁶⁵¹ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 81.

⁶⁵² "Down in Florida, Retired Men Find New Careers Making Furniture," *Aging* (published by the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare), November 1953, 2.

⁶⁵³ Buckley, *Retirement Handbook*, 82.

⁶⁵⁴ Pollack, *Positive Experiences in Retirement*, 40; "What Will You Do When You Retire?" 18; Salomon, *Retire and Be Happy*, 72-73.

⁶⁵⁵ "One Man's Retirement Program," *Newsweek*, 12 July 1954, 48. See also Warner Bloomberg, Jr., "Automation Predicts Change: For the Older Worker," in *The New Frontiers of Aging*, ed. Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbitts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957), 23.

owned a twelve-acre farm. Between April and November, the ranch kept him busy. However, the seasonal work provided some time to rest.⁶⁵⁶

Retired executives often started their own consulting businesses when they retired. In the 1940s, Alfred L. Hart retired from his executive position with General Electric. He soon disliked retirement. Initially, he tried farming, but he found it exceedingly demanding. Hart, however, did not retreat to the rocking chair. "Still full of business drive," the aging man formed, with the aid of numerous retired colleagues, a consulting firm. By the 1950s, Hart's firm boasted of a staff of fifty "top management men" with a combined 2,000 years of experience. They advised business and government on "practically everything," according to *Fortune*.⁶⁵⁷

During the 1940s and 1950s, older men viewed retirement as a crucial site where manhood needed to be carefully reestablished. However, retirement never became securely masculine. Experts envisioned manhood within contradictory contexts. As men aged and retired from their employment, manhood still depended on staying mentally and physically youthful, remaining productive, and retaining upper-class affluence and suburban standards of living. Aging bodies and fixed incomes proved to be unstable foundations for masculinity, however. Retired men struggled to solidify manhood within the homes they shared with women. They built places in their homes where they could isolate themselves from their wives, as well as relied on working in the house to stay busy, productive, and useful. In order to escape from domestic space, retirees depended on leisure and recreation. Sports provided a way out of the

⁶⁵⁶ Moore and Streib, *Nature of Retirement*, 3.

⁶⁵⁷ "How Old Executives Fade Away," *Fortune*, June 1952, 174.

home and a way for men to exercise their bodies and minds. However, golf, baseball, shuffleboard, fishing, hunting, and collecting never became adequate substitutes for employment as the foundation for daily life. Many men, especially executives, rejected retirement and went back to work. Play, many retirees concluded, could never impart the manly satisfaction that work did.

Middle-class status became, in the postwar period, a key foundation for manhood in the United States. Amidst postwar upward mobility, expanding suburban communities, a new emphasis on a mass middle class in popular culture, observers of retirement assumed that retirees of the present and future were executives and professionals: they were men who were overwhelmingly concerned with questions of personal fulfillment, within a context of economic stability. Postwar discussions of retirement furthered the influence of the middle class in American culture, as experts sought them out and gave voice to their opinions on aging, work, gender, and retirement. For the remainder of the twentieth century, the centrality of youth, productivity, and middle-class status as foundations for manhood have continued to shape anxieties about aging and gender.

7.0 CONCLUSION : THE PROBLEM OF SYLVESTER STALLONE

Sly, today I got up and looked at the man these 51 years have made. The hair is gray, the waist is gone . . . Is no one interested in men my age? Then there you were, smiling on the cover, inviting me back to my life as a man.

James Alexander (2005)⁶⁵⁸

Men are still fearful that "growing old" imperils their manhood. In his new magazine, *Sly*, the aging actor/director/screenwriter Sylvester Stallone, once famous for his blockbuster *Rocky* and *Rambo* film series, takes aim against the anxieties of older men like James Alexander. Stallone, and the men who read the magazine, are struggling to guarantee manhood in later life. *Sly* offers men a formula for the preservation of masculinity: the magazine tells men that rigorous exercise and strict dieting can safeguard manhood as they age. Or as Stallone puts it, aging men can "be [their] best at 40, 50, and beyond" if they work out with a "Rocky-style regimen" and eat properly.⁶⁵⁹ In addition, Sylvester Stallone tells his readers what kinds of hygiene and hair products he uses so they might "build an age-defying medicine cabinet" for themselves.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵⁸ James Alexander, letter to the editor, *Sly*, May/June 2005, 12.

⁶⁵⁹ Advertisements, *Sly*, May/June 2005, 25, 33.

⁶⁶⁰ "Sly's Stuff," *Sly*, May/June 2005, 32.

Despite several decades of advice regarding the preservation of manhood in their later years, many older men continue to view "growing old" as a hostile phase of life. They are fighting this battle against aging on many fronts: at the gym, at the grocery store, and in front of the bathroom mirror.

Sly draws attention to the ongoing influence of the manhood and aging discourses that took shape during the 1940s and 1950s. While aging and retirement were gendered male after World War II, experts affirmed youth, physical activity, upward mobility, and productivity as foundations of male identities. This pattern has persisted since the post-World War II years, continually challenging older men to protect manhood despite their aging bodies, retirement from work, and fixed incomes. Old age and retirement never became arenas that upheld manhood; male power and identity remain uncertain.

Stallone prescribes a painstaking physical construction program to sustain the youthful body as a foundation for manhood, echoing the admonitions of his late-nineteenth century forbearers Bernarr McFadden and Eugene Sandow. Against the backdrop of a volatile nineteenth-century economy, and women's political activism, Sandow and McFadden once argued that physical strength and brawny bodies allowed modern males to establish manhood. In response to the enduring tensions between masculinity and aging, Stallone and his fans have adopted a similar approach. A man wrote that the magazine could be the "anti-aging bible for Baby Boomers." "Sly, I'm 48," writes Perry Miller. "I'm in the best shape of my life, and I work hard to stay that way."⁶⁶¹ Harkening back to men of the late-nineteenth century, older men in the present-day US are eager to solidify manhood by building bodily strength. Because the

⁶⁶¹ Perry Miller, letter to the editor, *Sly*, May/June 2005, 12; Chris Franklin, letter to the editor, *Sly*, May/June 2005, 12.

foundations for manhood in old age remain so complex and contradictory, many men have re-embraced physicality in later life as a way to affirm masculinity. Since ideals of manhood remain at odds with the realities of "growing old" in the modern United States (the average life span for men is now seventy-five, and fixed incomes remain a reality for most older Americans), some men are once again looking to physical culture as an arena where manhood can be made and secured. While Stallone could be recognized for promoting health and wellness, *Sly* is a guidebook for the protection of male authority and power in later life. Underscoring this new emphasis on physicality in later life, former president George HW Bush parachuted from a plane to celebrate his 80th birthday in 2004 (repeating how he commemorated his 75th birthday).⁶⁶² Like Sylvester Stallone and the men who read *Sly*, the aging president remains determined to prove his toughness.

This dissertation argues that "the problem of the old man" began around the turn of the twentieth century, as the life expectancy for men began to significantly increase. During the first half of the twentieth century, men's average life span increased by twenty-one years. In 1900, a man might live to 46; by 1960, he could expect to live to 67. At the same time, just as men were living longer, industrial employers redefined work around the principles of mass production, speed, and youth. To staff new assembly lines and machinery that demanded physical endurance, quickness, and brawn, manufacturers increasingly turned towards younger men. Youth became a perquisite for manhood, just as the average life span in the United States was expanding. "Old age" became a source of worry about the economic and social foundations of manhood, as well as an arena where men struggled to define gender. Since manhood depended

⁶⁶² "Bush Sr. Celebrates 80th Birthday in High Style," *Washington Post*, 14 June 2004, A2.

on labor, what would manhood mean if employers would no longer hire men in their later years? Old age constituted a new twentieth-century site where males struggled to define the boundaries of gender identities. Like the factory, office, or labor union, men tried to impose gender hierarchies on later life.

The earliest responses to this problem centered on working-class men. Social provision advocates, craft unionists, magazine writers, politicians, and older workers themselves explored forms of organization and agitation to demand greater access to jobs and pensions. Beginning in 1905, the same year William Osler proclaimed that older men were useless, older men organized the Anti-Age Limit League to combat hiring age limits in Chicago's industries. Pre-Committee of Industrial Organizations (CIO) unions, such as the Auto Workers Union (AWU) and the Amalgamated Association (AA), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), also critiqued employers' ageist hiring and firing policies, as well as called attention to the impact of assembly line labor on aging male bodies. Old age pensions from the state became the most accepted and popular response to the problems of the aging male breadwinner. Only pensions from the state, older workers, unionists, and pension advocates argued, could sustain the masculinity of the aging male worker. Other means of economic support -- savings, relying on children, corporate pensions, and old age homes -- failed to socially and economically uphold male independence and the integrity of marriage and the family. By 1929, before the Great Depression, most Americans had already decided that state pensions best preserved the economic foundations of manhood in old age.

During the Great Depression, widespread worries about "growing old" as a threat to manhood informed discussions of the era's famous "forgotten man." Observers suggested that the typical unemployed man was an older working-class man, marginalized by age

discrimination and assembly line speedups. Politicians responded to "the problem of the old man" by finally passing a national plan for old age insurance in 1935: the Social Security Act. Social Security was envisioned as a stop gap measure to provide older working men, especially from industrial occupations, with a modicum of economic stability. Older men demanded pensions, but these demands were only one of their responses to the depression. Since the program did not begin until 1940, aging men explored forms of organization (especially Townsend Clubs, the Committee of Industrial Organizations [CIO], and Forty Plus Clubs) to demand greater access to jobs, seniority protections, and pensions. Aging men also tried to protect manhood by exploring health advice, new foods, and private pension schemes.

During the 1940s and 1950s, on the foundations of an expanding Social Security program and a widening system of workplace pensions, the modern economic and cultural institution of retirement took shape. Americans expected older men to retire at sixty-five. However, prevailing ideals about manhood hinged on new middle-class standards of living and productivity. Also, Cold War culture emphasized the concepts of team work and service to the nation as core values. Within this context, aging postwar men struggled to define manhood. Men's uncertainties about the meanings of manhood in later life could be seen in frequent discussions of death, illness, isolation, the disruption of separated spheres for men and women, the loss of sexual ability, and uncomfortable retirement ceremonies.

Men reaffirmed youth and work as foundations of manhood in retirement, as well as affirmed middle-class lifestyles and suburban living as key components of manhood. Observers no longer discussed working-class men; they now envisioned the typical aging worker as a middle-class man -- a professional or executive. A new generation of retirement advice authors, magazine writers, sociologists, and gerontologists defined manhood within the contexts of youth,

productivity, and suburban affluence. Experts described how retired men could affirm manhood through rigorous routines of leisure, home improvement activities, physical activity, and sociability. To be "men" without the foundation of employment, retired males needed to work hard at enjoying leisure and staying young. Golf and fishing were not mere avocations; for retired men they became new professions. Some men, however, especially middle-class men, rejected retirement. Many tried to rejoin the labor force and once again secure work. Others started their own businesses. For the remainder of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, these ideals of youth, productivity, and middle-class lifestyles have provided volatile, and difficult to attain, foundations of manhood in the United States.

While the idea of retiring was male terrain during the 1940s and 1950s, old age never became masculine. Both men and women aged; they shared the life cycle stage of later life, as well as houses, parks, and recreation centers. Also, the gendered relationship between retirement and work was transformed. The steady expansion of women's presence in the workforce has complicated the idea that only men retire from their jobs or continue working during later life. Since the 1950s, more and more women have retired from long employment experiences, collecting Social Security. Between 1955 and 1967, the number of working women who were eligible for Social Security increased from 1.2 million to 4.8 million.⁶⁶³ Others have decided (or been compelled to by their economic circumstances) to remain on the job.⁶⁶⁴ In 1952, 13 percent of American women still worked in their mid-60s.⁶⁶⁵ During 1975, 41 percent between the ages

⁶⁶³ Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 162, 336.

⁶⁶⁴ See *US News & World Report 2004 Retirement Guide: Secrets of Successful Retirement* (2004).

⁶⁶⁵ Federal Security Agency, *Fact Book On Aging* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 29.

of 55 and 64 were employed; by 1990, the number of older women at work had risen to 45 percent. When women reach 65, roughly 8 percent have remained active in the labor market since 1975.⁶⁶⁶

Sly suggests how men in the present continue to follow the precedents established by the retirement experts of the 1940s and 1950s. Aging still menaces manhood because men insist that masculinity depends on youth, productivity, brawn, and affluence. To be men, older males must, at once, construct physically strong and healthy bodies, as well as sustain middle-class prosperity. Dave Janovyak, another of Sylvester Stallone's fans, found a way to do it all:

When most men my age are thinking of retirement, I'm starting a new career as a personal fitness instructor.⁶⁶⁷

Janovyak certainly expects that his new career will not only help him stay in good shape, but that it will also bolster his bank account. While this man of strength (and income) views himself as an exemplar of manhood, men of lesser monetary means or ill-health are, by implication, lesser men. Men such as Janovyak embrace a narrow and contradictory definition of manhood that depends on males' ability to sustain economic success and youthful bodies -- even as their bodies age and they face the end of their careers due to retirement. Today, as the average length of life continues to expand, many men have embraced definitions of manhood that depend on youth, productivity, material comfort, and physicality at all stages of a man's life. "The problem of the old man" remains unresolved.

⁶⁶⁶ Elizabeth T. Hill, "The Labor Force Participation of Older Women," *Monthly Labor Review*, September 2002, 39.

⁶⁶⁷ Dave Janovyak, letter to the editor, *Sly*, May/June 2005, 12.

APPENDIX A

NOTE ON SOURCES

"The problem of the old man" was often discussed among workers, executives, industry reformers, pension advocates, politicians, unionists, newspaper writers, and magazine writers. They wrote at length and frequently about older men's problems with aging, work, and retirement. With such a broad base of possible sources to draw upon, this dissertation focuses mainly on published sources. Published books were crucial: for example, studies of industry and factory labor that were written between the 1900s and 1950s; sociological analyses of older men and women's social and economic circumstances; social provision advocates' analyses of state pensions and industrial pensions; and retirees' memoirs and advice books. This extensive body of books illustrates a constant preoccupation among experts with the problems of aging and retirement as they affected men.

In addition to books, experts produced a plethora of articles in newspapers, magazines, and scholarly journals. For this study, I surveyed articles in nearly sixty periodicals. Many relevant articles are indexed in the *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature* and the electronic

JSTOR database.⁶⁶⁸ In the *Readers' Guide*, which is usually published every two years, dozens of articles can be readily located under several headings: "aging," "age and employment," "retirement," "middle-age," "old age homes," and "pensions," among other topics. JSTOR features sociology and economics articles on aging and retirement from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Throughout the various indexes and databases, articles appeared in numerous academic and popular periodicals, including the *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *Survey*, *Business Week*, *Monthly Labor Review*, and *Newsweek*. Furthermore, the online historical *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* databases -- available at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign's various libraries -- provided an efficient way to search for *New York Times* and *Chicago Daily Tribune* articles.⁶⁶⁹ Finally, the collection of the Amalgamated Association's (AA) *Amalgamated Journal* at the University of Pittsburgh's Hillman Library allowed me to follow steelworkers' responses to age discrimination and pension politics throughout the late 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s.

I visited other archives and libraries to locate additional sources. At the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University and the Archives Services Center at the University of Pittsburgh, I examined a selection of union newspapers and various personal collections. At both libraries, I reviewed periodicals related to the auto, electrical, and steel industries -- including the United Electrical Workers' (UE) *People's Press*, the *Detroit Labor News*, the *Auto Workers News*, the *United Automobile Worker*, and numerous locals' newspapers.⁶⁷⁰ At the Reuther

⁶⁶⁸ www.jstor.org.

⁶⁶⁹ Available at www.library.uiuc.edu.

⁶⁷⁰ For the Archives Service Center, see www.library.pitt.edu/libraries/archives/archives.html.

Library, I surveyed the collected papers of labor scholars, unionists, and journalists such as Joe Brown, Robert W. Dunn, and Robert L. Cruden. I also reviewed numerous autoworkers' oral histories, originally collected by Jack W. Skeels, a University of Wisconsin graduate student, during the 1950s and early 1960s.⁶⁷¹ At the University of Illinois' Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations (ILIR) on the Urbana-Champaign campus, I looked through vertical files on "retirement" and "age and employment." The Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations' collection of articles, pamphlets, and press releases provided material on older men's anxieties about pensions, ageism, and retirement lifestyles during the 1940s and 1950s.⁶⁷² Finally, the University of Illinois' Main Stacks Library yielded rare memoirs and retirement advice books, as well as additional studies of age discrimination and pensions throughout the period under study.⁶⁷³

I thank the staff members at each of these libraries for their assistance.

⁶⁷¹ www.reuther.wayne.edu.

⁶⁷² www.library.uiuc.edu/irx/.

⁶⁷³ The online catalog, which features the Main Stacks' holdings, can be found at www.library.uiuc.edu.

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American Magazine

American Sociological Review

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Boston Daily Globe

Buick Worker

Business Week

Changing Times
Chicago Daily News
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Chicago Evening Post
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Collier's
Commonweal
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Forum
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New York Times Magazine
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