

[straight talk]

# Disoriented

Caught between foppishness and brutishness, Americans struggle to recapture masculinity.

By Steve Sailer

EVERY YEAR, Americans coin countless clever words and phrases, the vast majority of which soon sink into oblivion. A few appeal to the press's obsessions and become almost omnipresent. Last year, it was "jump the shark," which, for reasons too tedious to repeat, describes the point at which a TV series begins to decline. This year, it's "metrosexual," a term coined back in 1994 to refer to a man who likes the finer things in life, yet who is (surprise!) a heterosexual. It leapt into media prominence with a June 22 *New York Times* article called "Metrosexuals Come Out."

In the distant past, a man who dressed stylishly and enjoyed art, theater, and sophisticated music would have been praised as a "gentleman," but today his sexual orientation is automatically called into question. The average person's "gaydar" has become so sensitive that a long list of traits associated with civilized living are now assumed to be *prima facie* evidence of homosexuality.

Journalists love to use the word "metrosexual" in articles about the season's other sensation, the Bravo channel's makeover show "Queer Eye for the

Straight Guy," in which five witty gay men refine (no doubt only temporarily) some straight slob's entire look and lifestyle. Of course, the underlying assumption of "Queer Eye" is not that metrosexuals are abundant but that they are scarce.

Is there really a trend among America's straight guys toward acting like elegant homosexuals as the hype implies? Do the young men of America want to grow up to be Frasier and Niles Crane?

AS PREVIOUSLY **CLUELESS STRAIGHT GUYS** DEVELOP MORE PRECISE GAYDARS, ARE THEY **FLEEING EVERYTHING SOPHISTICATED**?

Or is the opposite happening? The *Times* article claimed that metrosexuals (also known as "fauxmosexuals" and, due to their love of shopping, "buysexuals") like being mistaken for gay, but that must be a minority taste, to say the least. These days, nobody wants to be called a "homophobe," but the intense discomfort most modern men feel when their

sexual orientation is doubted was captured in the classic "Seinfeld" episode in which Jerry strenuously denies being gay but feels socially obliged to protest his own protest by repeatedly interjecting, "Not that there's anything wrong with that!"

As previously clueless straight guys develop more precise gaydars, are they instead fleeing everything sophisticated? Will the word "metrosexual" and shows like "Queer Eye" just speed the

process until coarseness becomes the defining characteristic of nearly every heterosexual man?

I've been trying to find all these metrosexuals I keep reading about. There were 40,000 people at a Bruce Springsteen concert I attended at Dodger Stadium recently, but I sure didn't see any metrosexuals.

I turned on the TV and everybody on the news was talking about Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is not, I suspect—even though he dresses neatly and combs his hair—a metrosexual.

I switched to a dating show, and the male contestants were wearing untucked T-shirts and looking like they shave only on those random days when their moms call to remind them.

On a talk show, there was poor Brad Pitt, still terrified of being thought a pretty boy. I knew a blind guy who dressed and groomed himself better than that slovenly star does. These days, apparently a man has to be as secure in his masculinity as Arnold to put on a sports coat when going on national television.

Sports jackets have endured for decades because they originated as military tunics cunningly designed with padded shoulders, nipped-in waists, and enough length to hide a spreading posterior and to make even pear-shaped officers look like intimidating specimens of martial might.

I've been wearing sport coats ever since my fashion sense permanently congealed during the first Reagan administration. Yet this manly classic now seems too metrosexual for young men to wear.

## THE TONY AWARDS CEREMONY INCREASINGLY LOOKS LIKE AN INDOOR GAY-PRIDE PARADE.

One 60-degree evening last spring at the glitzy Hollywood and Highland entertainment complex where the Academy Awards are held, my wife and I decided to count what younger guys were wearing. We found nobody under 40 wore a sports coat. And only one-fifth of the guys under 30 who were out on dates even bothered to tuck in their shirts.

Why do straight guys these days try to impress girls by dressing like Jack Klugman playing Oscar Madison?

A young software developer explained to me, "For the single man on a date it is important to give the impression that he didn't try very hard to look good. This is critical to indicate alpha male status. The untucked shirt can help here."

You used to be able to count on black men to dress like grown-ups. It was always a pleasure to watch Michael Jordan and his sidekick Scottie Pippen emerge from the locker room after a game and conduct interviews in zillion-dollar suits that combined understatement and snazziness in perfect balance. They took seriously the celebrity's duty both to entertain and elevate the public's taste. But now that the thug look has spread from hip-hop to basketball, Allen Iverson and his colleagues are as edifying a sight as a police lineup.

And how about the hot new cars? A dozen years ago, there was a wave of beautiful sports cars with flowing curves, such as the Mazda Miata. Since then, however, the general trend has been toward ever more masculine, even brutalitarian SUV designs, like the Hummer and those squared-off militaristic jobs, such as the Mercedes-Benz G500,

that look like a Brinks armored car crossed with a rhinoceros. And then there are those new boxes on wheels, such as the Honda Element, that are designed to evoke a college boy's dorm room. (Just add empty pizza cartons.) The hilariously homely new Toyota Scion bears a striking resemblance to Dumpy the Dump Truck in the little boy's storybook. I guess the appeal is:

"Nobody's gonna think I'm gay when I'm driving one of these monstrosities!"

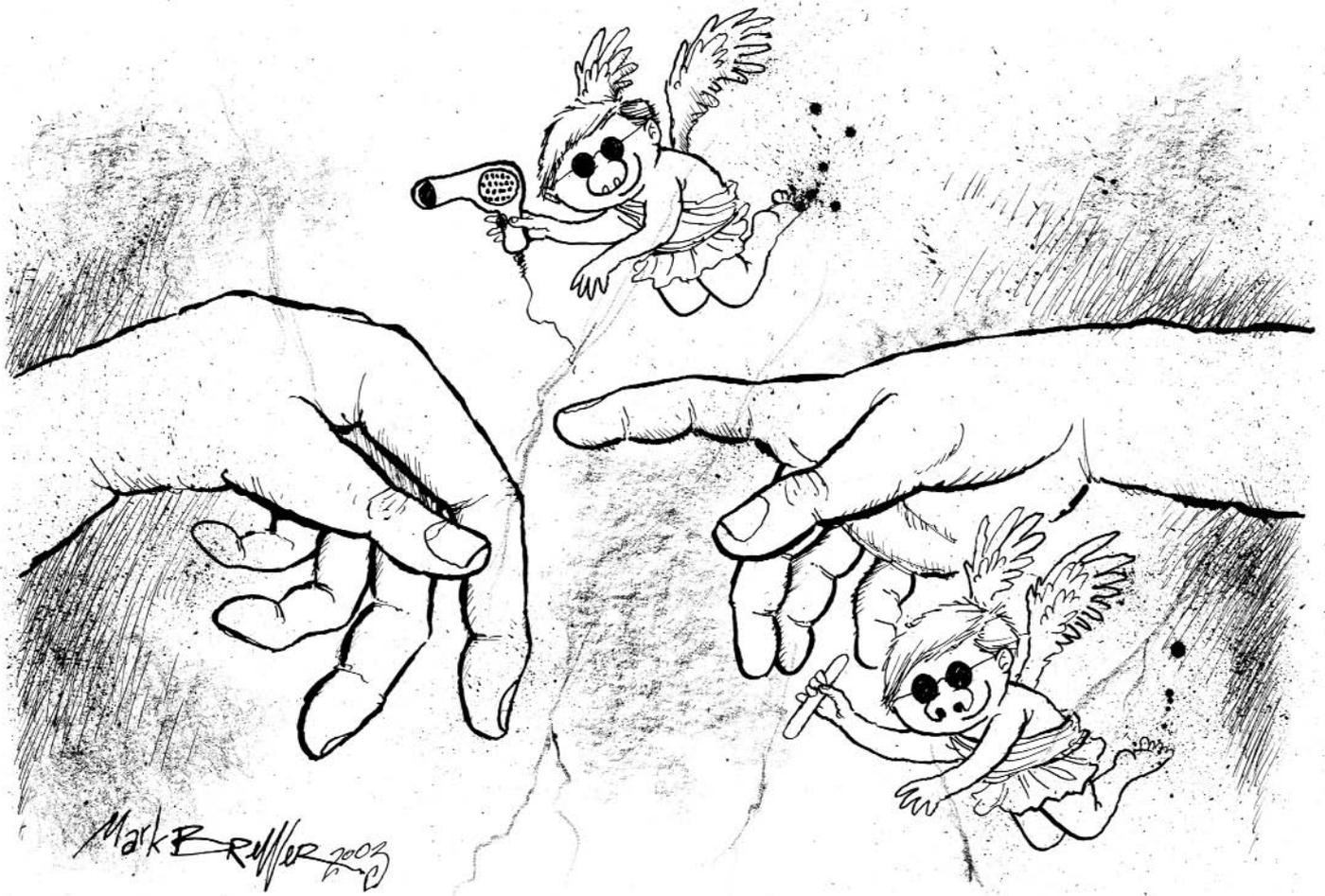
I don't care all that much about how men dress or what the cars they drive look like. But I do care about the survival of the upper reaches of arts and culture, and that is increasingly endangered by gay ghettoization and what journalist John Derbyshire calls "straight flight."

Consider theater. Pundit Mark Steyn recently wrote of "the difference between the Broadway of Rodgers and Hammerstein and the Broadway of Stephen Sondheim":

The former was the great central throughway of American popular culture, the latter is a shriveled little self-regarding gay ghetto. Don't get me wrong, I love show tunes—and, as a result, I'm always assumed to be gay. I don't particularly mind that—I bought some Judy Garland DVDs in New York the other week and the guy was all flirty with me, which girl salesclerks hardly ever are these days. But a lot of chaps aren't so keen on that sort of thing, and eventually institutions reach a kind of gay tipping point after which straight men just steer clear. The Broadway of Stephen Sondheim may be, as its admirers claim, better, sharper, more sophisticated, but it's also underattended.

Thus, the Tony Awards ceremony increasingly looks like an indoor gay-pride parade. One of the big winners this year was "Take Me Out," about a gay baseball player and included three locker room shower scenes.

Obviously, there is a lot of gay talent on Broadway, but there isn't enough to compensate for the huge decline in straight participation. That's a big reason why the quantity and quality of Broadway plays has declined so dramatically, or even theatrically.



MARK BREWER

Somewhere out there are straight youths with the gifts to become the next Richard Rodgers, Bob Fosse, and Gene Kelly, but they aren't going to go into musical theater now that all their buddies know the score about Broadway. Instead, they will show off their straightness by dressing like slobs and listening to gangsta rap. When they grow up, they will go to Hollywood instead and help make movies about blowing stuff up and then buy yellow Hummers with their huge paychecks.

The aristocratic and religious arts that make up the high culture of Western Civilization were part of a thousand-year project to restrain and redefine the unbridled masculinity of all those Conan the Barbarians who poured into the old Roman Empire at the beginning of the Dark Ages. The aptly named Vandals

and their cohorts were slowly converted into knights, who were supposed to know not only how to fight, but also how to appreciate the finer forms of music, painting, sculpture, theater, dance, conversation, and dress.

Inevitably, the arts attracted a higher proportion of male homosexuals than did fighting, hunting, or plowing. But nobody particularly noticed because all attention was focused on matters of class. If you wanted your family to move up in society, you (or your children) needed to learn something about the arts.

Because we Americans claim to be a classless society, the social pressures to study the traditional aristocratic arts were always less in America and are declining even more. Ballet schools, for example, need male dancers to partner

all the little girls who want to be ballerinas, but they have given up on finding enough American boys. Instead, they try to recruit lads from immigrant families from more class-ridden lands that are attracted to the old snob appeal of ballet.

If James Bond were introduced today, the *New York Times* would probably describe him as a metrosexual rather than as a gentleman. I fear, though, that if you called him a metrosexual, he would make a witty quip, flick some invisible dust from his perfectly tailored lapels with his manicured hands, and shoot you. ■

*Steve Sailer is AC's film critic, a reporter for UPI, and a columnist for VDARE. Copyright © 2003 United Press International*

[pin-up president]

# Calling Cary Grant

There's more to being a man than talking tough.

By Clark Stooksbury

THE THIRD MILLENNIUM thus far is not a golden age of masculinity. The elite media herald the rise of “metrosexuals”—effete, heterosexual men who spend their spare time getting facials and pedicures and shopping for clothes. Popular culture, particularly commercials, depicts most other heterosexual males as overgrown children obsessed with fast food and soft drinks, computerized toys and televised sports.

When I long for healthy depictions of masculinity I resort to the golden age of film. In the movies from the '30s through the '50s, one can enjoy John Wayne, Burt Lancaster, Cary Grant, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Stewart, Clark Gable, and dozens of others. A great film for this purpose is John Ford's “How Green Was My Valley” with Donald Crisp as Gwilym Morgan, the patriarch of a Welsh coal-mining family. Crisp's character was stern and serious without being tyrannical. He commanded respect from his large family but still deferred to his wife when she put her foot down.

Neoconservatives turn to another, more up-to-date source of virility: Republican politicians. The cover of the September issue of the *American Enterprise* boldly proclaims, “Real Men: They're Back.” This theme has popped up frequently since an overwhelming number of male emergency personnel gave their lives at Ground Zero on Sept. 11.

The main feature was written by Jay Nordlinger of *National Review* who went weak in the knees over the macho men in the Bush administration—particularly the he-man at the top. Although Nordlinger extolled the president's prowess with a chain saw, he primarily praised President Bush for displaying the cheapest form of masculinity—tough talk. “He said he wanted bin Laden ‘dead or alive.’ About Saddam holdouts in Iraq, he declared, ‘Bring 'em on’—meaning our boys are ready to confront them.” Nordlinger closed by gushing over Republican manliness in an unseemly fashion. “The Democrats have to acquire a bit more testosterone if they're to compete with the GOP. ... As for the Republicans, if they had any more testosterone, they'd be the Incred-

come-hither pose. The article reported on Rumsfeld in a manner more appropriate to *People* magazine than to a respected intellectual journal. Nordlinger breathlessly revealed that Rumsfeld was a sex symbol (!) and pop-culture icon (!!): “Reports have it that people gather round to watch Rumsfeld press conferences the way they do Oprah. ... Women confide that they have ... well, un-defense-policy-like thoughts about the secretary of defense ...” Nordlinger explained that Rumsfeld was a “handsome Joe” and referred to him as the “SecDef-SexDef?”

But it isn't all about beefcake. Nordlinger was taken with Rumsfeld's forthrightness, especially in his willingness to use the word “kill.” He quoted the “SexDef” in reference to using a particu-

## NEOCONSERVATIVES TURN TO A MORE UP-TO-DATE SOURCE OF VIRILITY: REPUBLICAN POLITICIANS.

ible Hulk. House Speaker Denny Hastert was a wrestling coach, for crying out loud. That's almost overkill!”

Nordlinger had previously effused over Donald Rumsfeld in the Dec. 31, 2001 issue of *National Review*. The cover was a low point for a once serious magazine, featuring a caricature of a smiling Rumsfeld mimicking a Betty Grable,

lar kind of ordnance, “[T]hey are being used on frontline al-Qaeda and Taliban troops to try and kill them.” He is so enamored with this quote that he recycled it in the *American Enterprise*, even to the point of reusing his follow up line, “Oh.”

Of course, the immediate post-Sept.-11 period was a special time. The U.S. had won what appeared to be a clear-cut vic-