

Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth-Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement

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America. We should all be wary of romanticizing a world “without reservations,” lest we forget the terrible consequences of an era, not so long ago, when that dangerous rhetoric became reality.

Let Us Make Men: The Twentieth-Century Black Press and a Manly Vision for Racial Advancement, by D’Weston Haywood. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. x, 340 pp. Notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 paperback.

Reviewer Brian Hallstoos is associate professor of history at the University of Dubuque. His research and writing have focused on African American music, drama, and sports in the Midwest.

On the cover of D’Weston Haywood’s *Let Us Make Men* appears a photograph of three carefully groomed, impeccably attired young black men absorbed in reading. The image hints at the connections the author makes among print media, masculinity, and race leadership but belies his rigorous attention to seven central figures—Robert Abbott, W. E. B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, John Sengstacke, Robert F. Williams, Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm X—who address these connections through the black press (that is, newspapers produced by and for African Americans). Relying heavily on recently digitized (thus easily searched) newspapers and four archival collections, Haywood argues that these black publishers addressed moments of racial crisis and change “in masculine terms, a lens they applied in their papers and intended to appeal to readers’ own gendered subjectivities in hopes that readers would embrace a proper black manhood for the benefit of the race” (6).

The five chapters trace the rise and decline of the mainstream black press and its related shift from crusading for African American civil rights to adopting a more cautious role as chroniclers of others’ efforts toward such progressive ends. In chapter one the author addresses the role Robert Abbott and W. E. B. Du Bois played in shaping black leadership and masculinity through their highly influential newspapers during the mass migration of African Americans from the rural South to northern cities around World War I. Abbott’s *Chicago Defender* receives greater attention than Du Bois’s *The Crisis* in demonstrating that “newspapers could be effective tools in shaping black people’s social movements and gender ideologies, as well as effective tools in helping black men assert a public voice and manly racial leadership” (56). The second chapter focuses on Marcus Garvey and his radical newspaper, *Negro World*, which capitalized on a flourishing, postwar black consciousness that gave rise to the Harlem Renaissance. In particular, Haywood examines how the black press first elevated and later condemned Garvey

and how he tried to use masculinized rhetoric to overcome his critics, in particular Du Bois. Chapter three again focuses on the *Chicago Defender*, this time as Abbott passed his leadership of the paper on to his nephew John Sengstacke. Haywood explores Abbott's attempts to shape Sengstacke into a man capable of navigating their newspaper through the Great Depression, how the elder man's efforts conflicted with his cherished notion of the self-made man, and how the nephew accommodated his uncle's training before making the newspaper his own. The fourth chapter marks the important conservative shift of large-market black newspapers from crusaders to chroniclers by focusing on the militant activism and newspaper publishing of Robert F. Williams. As a working-class editor of a small-circulation newspaper in North Carolina, *The Crusader*, Williams "promoted an explicitly gendered advancement strategy that elevated a black manhood rooted in self-defense" (153), a stance the black press criticized or ignored in favor of Dr. Martin Luther King's nonviolent approach. The final chapter explores how the newspaper *Muhammad Speaks* promoted Nation of Islam leader Elijah Muhammad's agenda for racial advancement and the organization's media campaign to display redeemed black manhood. Focusing on subscription drives and salesmen, tensions between Muhammad and Malcolm X (who formed and later lost control of *Muhammad Speaks*), and the challenge television posed to newspapers in influencing African American communities, Haywood emphasizes the masculine rhetoric that shaped the rise of a radical black press.

Let Us Make Men covers new ground on the twentieth-century African American struggle for civil rights to make important, well-crafted points about gender, race, and the media. Through sustained attention to how the black press shaped gender identity, the book offers new insight on well-known figures such as Robert Abbott and Malcolm X and on the central role newspapers played in their leadership. Readers will find a series of lively, interconnected stories that draw on a rich array of sources (most intimately woven into the account on Sengstacke's tutelage). The chapter on Marcus Garvey provides a provocative point of comparison with President Trump vis-à-vis his contentious relationship with the media. Haywood's two-chapter focus on the nationally influential *Chicago Defender* most obviously connects with Iowa history and provides a lens through which to consider the efforts of John L. Thompson and later James B. Morris in shaping black masculinity and male leadership through their *Iowa Bystander*. Scholarly attention to the way women received and responded to the masculinizing dynamics of this black newspaper out of Des Moines would push Haywood's research in a welcome and regionally specific direction.