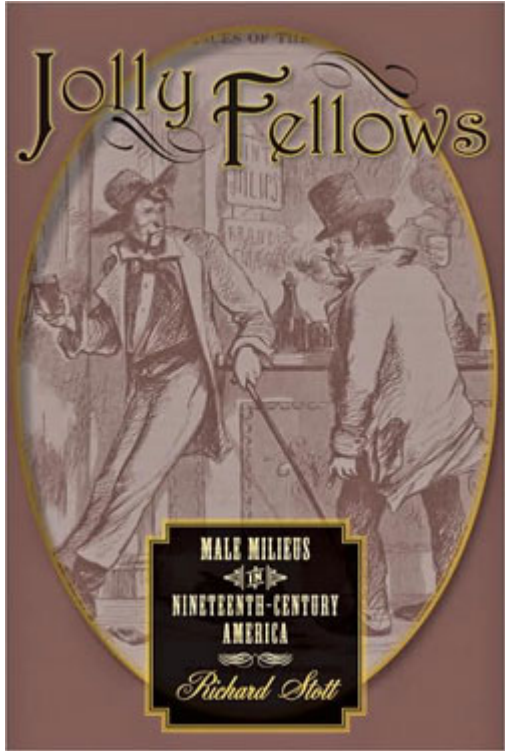
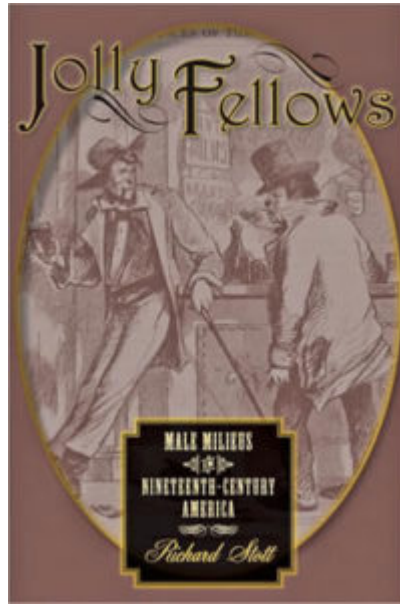


“The man that isn’t jolly after drinking is just a driveling idiot, to my thinking”



As an undergraduate at Wake Forest University, I joined the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. While I appreciated little of the national fraternity’s history, I was always curious about the remnants of its nineteenth-century heritage that persisted in songs, stories, and symbols. As per one song, a DKE was to be a “gentleman, scholar, and jolly good-fellow,” but beyond some hearty drinking, I never quite grasped what a jolly good fellow should be . . . until now. Richard Stott’s *Jolly Fellows* sheds light on late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century jolly fellowship—“that male comportment that consisted of not just fighting but also heavy drinking, gambling and playing pranks” (1)—as well as the physical



contexts in which it was performed.

Stott begins in the tavern, the eighteenth-century epicenter of jolly fellowship and, well into the 1800s, increasingly the target of critics who condemned the disorder of male culture. Stott seems to date jolly fellowship to pre-modern Europe and colonial America, but as the quote in the title of this review indicates, even Euripides grasped the relationship of jolly fellowship and alcoholic consumption. The impetus of an “American” version of jolly fellowship, however, was “service in the American army during the Revolution [which] had stimulated drinking, gambling, and unruly behavior in general” (9). Throughout the 1810s, both whites and blacks participated in this unruliness, which Stott considers the natural state of men: “Such behavior required no explanation; it was just the way men were” (63).

Gambling, fighting, drinking, and pranks became symbolic of jolly fellows’ reaction to reformers’ efforts, and the gentility and middle-class values that reform represented.

In response to the excesses of manly disorderliness, some Americans attempted to reform jolly manhood into “subdued manhood” by promoting self-governance over self-expression. The rise of reform frustrated men who “were caught in the transition between an age when male revelry was customary and an age when manly respectability was the standard” (93). Pockets of jolly fellowship persisted, particularly in cities and on the frontiers where men remained undisciplined and unruly. Stott explores New York’s Bowery and the California Gold Rush as evidence of the most extreme pockets, but he also includes military action as outlets for unruly manhood: “The incentive [to escape the tedium of everyday life] may have been especially important in the Mexican-American War because the personal moral reforms of the previous thirty years had for many men robbed everyday existence of some of its zest” (131).

Gambling, fighting, drinking, and pranks became symbolic of jolly fellows’ reaction to reformers’ efforts, and the gentility and middle-class values that reform represented. Popular entertainment in the forms of southwestern

literature and minstrelsy embraced the imagery of jolly fellowship and inspired a new generation of men to resurrect it in the Wild West of the 1870s. Many of this new generation of jolly fellows—sportsmen who promoted themselves as hunters, gamblers, and adventurers—made it a professional pursuit.

But in the 1880s and 1890s, reform movements that had been stalled by the Civil War and Reconstruction found new energy, and by the turn of the twentieth century, jolly fellowship was widely proclaimed dead by men like Teddy Roosevelt who mourned its loss. It found expression in vaudeville, literature, and newspaper cartoons, instilling in American culture an appreciation for the bad boy even as the bad boy disappeared. The new expressions complicated manliness by drawing upon racial comparisons; vaudeville in particular tried to preserve the remnants of white jolly manhood by mocking black manhood.

*Jolly Fellows* provides a solid narrative of the decline of jolly fellowship in nineteenth-century America, and Stott clearly researched deeply in the primary sources. The book is chock-full of humorous and insightful anecdotal stories. But in many ways, I find this to be a very frustrating book. Evidence of the persistence of jolly fellowship is situated in New York City and the Wild West, but evidence of rejection of reform is drawn primarily from popular culture originating in the South. The text abounds with anecdotes, but the reader is left craving analysis. And while it is a book about men, it has little new to say about masculinity.

The incongruence between jolly fellowship in the cities and on the frontiers and the critique of reform that emerged in the South may not seem significant. After all, southwestern literature and minstrelsy expanded beyond the South. Still, I found it curious that Stott spent so little time on the South, particularly given the flurry of scholarship on southern men over the past decade. And I find it even more difficult to reconcile the anxieties over southern manhood expressed in those popular entertainments with the challenges to urban and frontier manhoods. As John Mayfield demonstrated, southwestern literature specifically reflected southern anxieties over shifting economic cultures and social contexts. Such an interpretation may have been applied more broadly to the national scene, but the possibility of joining regions in a common American crisis of manhood is never explored by Stott.

This is just one example of the lack of analysis throughout the book. Over and over again, I found myself saying out loud, “but why?” Many of the questions that Stott raises early for the reader should have pushed him toward more analytical insight: “Where did it [jolly fellowship] originate? Was it natural, biological? Why drinking, fighting, gambling, and pranks? And then what happened to jolly fellowship?” (2). Only the last question is truly addressed, but even this conclusion—that moral reform movements (primarily the temperance movement) and a quest for respectability ultimately did in jolly fellowship—just does not satisfy, and seems rather tepid when compared to more nuanced narratives about refinement and social change presented in the works of Bruce Dorsey, Karen Halttunen, and John F. Kasson.

The weakness of analysis must be attributed partly to this underuse of the historiography related to reform, but there are also notable historiographical gaps in masculinity studies. Men's history has exploded over the past decade, but Stott's citations do not indicate any works since 2003. Scholarship by John Mayfield, Lorri Glover, Jennifer Green, Diane Barnes, Robert Pace, Thomas Foster, and those who contributed to edited collections on southern manhood and southern masculinity would have directly complemented Stott's narrative, but he employed none. Even Amy Greenberg's excellent *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (2003) is underemployed, used simply to support Stott's interpretation of filibusters and neglecting the larger significance of Greenberg's model of martial manhood versus restrained manhood.

Stott quite successfully teases the reader with provocative (and potentially important) ideas, but he consistently leaves the reader with few answers. For example, of California miners he writes that male camaraderie "was accompanied by brutality toward people of color" (145). He follows with some discussion of fighting and violent pranks that evidence this statement. But he does not engage *why* gender and race became intertwined in this manner. Indeed, early in the book, white and black men seem similarly engaged in jolly fellowship, so this shift is rather significant, particularly since near the end of the book, Stott draws a direct line to the practice of lynching: "If northern audiences could watch blacks being dismembered on stage, southern whites could enjoy the real thing" (180). Why did anxieties over the loss of (white) jolly fellowship manifest in racialized ways?

The intersection of race and gender is tantalizingly woven throughout the text, but never explored. "Miners viewed California as a land where *white* women were so few as to be inconsequential" (136; italics added), Stott writes, suggesting that the absence of white women equated with an absence of moral suasion. But what of Hispanic, Native American, and Asian women? Was their presence inconsequential to the performance and reinforcement of jolly fellowship? Early in *Jolly Fellows*, Stott makes clear that the male milieus he chose to examine were womanless or nearly womanless, but the Bowery, the Wild West, the mining camps of California, the lumber camps of the upper Midwest, the Mississippi River's boatmen culture, and the taverns of the Revolutionary era all had women, just not necessarily *white* women. It seems to me this is a notable oversight because alongside drinking, fighting, gambling, and pranks, one must also recognize the critical role of sex in jolly fellowship, a topic that received less than one-half page of attention.

Most frustrating, however, is that while *Jolly Fellows* is a book about men, it has little new to say about masculinity. The prevailing narrative of nineteenth-century American manhood found in Rotundo, Kimmel, and Bederman among others is one in which refinement and religion revised and softened manliness. Stott attempts to impose that narrative onto his story. But, in fact, Stott successfully demonstrates a different narrative: that, despite nineteenth-century reform efforts, jolly fellowship grew stronger in places like the West and the Bowery, gained notoriety and popular support in American

culture, and, according to the conclusion, persists even today (even without the emphases on fighting and gambling). Unwilling to critically challenge the prevailing narrative onto his story, Stott missed an opportunity to offer a counter-narrative to our understanding of American manhood, one in which reform fails in many ways, subdued manhood does not become hegemonic, and jolly fellowship remains a powerful form of manhood.