

What we want is good, sober men: masculinity, respectability, and temperance in the railroad brotherhoods, C. 1870-1910.

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 **"What We Want Is Good, Sober Men:" Masculinity, Respectability, and Temperance in the Railroad Brotherhoods, c. 1870-1910**

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Abstract

Focusing on the men who operated the trains and the unions that represented them, the "Big Four" railroad brotherhoods, in the decades marking the end of nineteenth- and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, this essay examines masculinity in connection with working men's drinking as well as the uses of manhood in working-class efforts to stamp out that practice. Whereas drinking figured as part of a workplace culture that fostered a "rough" style of masculinity, the railroad brotherhoods and their women's auxiliaries

deployed a "respectable" style of manhood in their efforts to win train workers over to a temperate lifestyle. Both styles of manhood, however, obscured a more complex reality. Interrogating manhood in connection with alcohol consumption and temperance provides a window onto that reality and reveals the tensions inherent in that gender construction. It also reveals how matters of culture and gender were important to the workings of political and economic institutions like trade unions and illustrates how masculinity and manhood were central to the activism and collective subjectivity of organized working men.



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