

COMMENTARY / CULTURE

Are Men Necessary?



On my way out of a local fitness center, I happened across a used book dispenser and, like I always do, peered inside. The cover of one of those books, “Are Men Necessary?” by Maureen Dowd was indeed an attention getter if ever there was one. Although I was amused by it, some may find the book’s title off putting. Yes, I get that.

Which brings us to the issue of men these days - more to the point, arguments for and against the “necessity” of men as Dowd put it.

Let’s start by applying the (non-procreation) “necessity” test to a partial list of “men” as we think about the behaviors of some (note that I didn’t say “all”) men these days.

How about the “necessity” of that terrible Vladimir Putin? I think not!

How about the “necessity” of that miscreant who opened fire recently in that New York City subway? Absolutely not!

How about the “necessity” of, as Maureen wrote, “The snarling pack of male Republicans ripping apart a poised, brainy Black woman at a U.S. Judiciary committee hearing.” Nope!

How about the men who stormed the nation’s Capital last year? Forget it.

Or the “man” who slapped the joke out of the mouth and smile off the face of another man during the recent Oscars? Yeah, right!

C’mon, you know my answer to these rhetorical questions, don’t you?

Now back to Maureen Dowd, call me nutty or eccentric, but the truth is that I have an affinity for Pulitzer Prize winners, especially writers. And, like bees to honey, I’m drawn to those who not only

are brilliant writers, but also who publish to provoke, who call out hypocrisy. For me Dowd checks the box on those qualities and is at the top of my list of favorite Pulitzer Prize winners.

As a longtime Dowd follower, I always keep within reach a dictionary, a volume of English literature and yellow highlighter when reading her column. She’s a vocabulary builder extraordinaire, and with pinpoint accuracy can draw striking comparisons between seriously flawed contemporary public figures and out of the page characters in, for example, Shakespeare’s tragedy, King Lear.

A columnist at The New York Times, Dowd was named a Woman of the Year by Glamour magazine in 1996 and won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for distinguished commentary. Her columns are distinguished by an acerbic writing style, displaying criticism of powerful figures.

She tends to refer to her subjects by nicknames, for example, former President George W. Bush as “W,” former Vice President Dick Cheney as “Vice” and former President Obama as “Spock” or “Barry.”

Not one to mince words, Dowd slices deftly through an individual’s hypocrisy as skillfully as she carves up a steak with that same person the evening before at a high-end Washington DC restaurant.

Which takes us to more evidence of men behaving badly.

In, “Why Are 90% of All Murderers Men?” Daylin Brown, professor and writer with the Good Men Project, shared some eye-opening statistics.

Data shows that 90% of all murderers in the United States are men, and almost 99% of all rapists are men.

In the U.S., men account for almost 82% of all vandalism, 83% of all arson, and 80% of all general violent crime.

“In our society, we have es-

tablished the idea that violence is the domain of men,” wrote Brown. “We absorb this through cultural messaging from conversations, entertainment, advertising and from our friends and families.”

Brown admits that violence is a complex problem, and the relationship between masculinity and violence is complex with many inextricably linked factors. Those factors? He shared some from research by the American Psychological Association and a report from the World Health Organization.

Expression of anger. Experts believe that the most prominent factor in male violence has to do with many men not really knowing what to do when they feel anger or frustration.

Gender identity pressure. Our world is ale dominated. For this reason, many men feel pressure to acquire power and status in this male-dominated hierarchy.

Encouragement of the emotionless man. We encourage a superficial type of stoicism in men, but a sense of empathy in women. We’re taught that “real men” don’t express emotions. Most men are not violent, but those who are usually lack strategies for dealing with their emotions.

Overexposure to violence. Men are exposed to violence in film, violent language in music and in peer groups. This means that men learn from other men that violence is a viable solution to their problems.

Solutions? The first thing we can do is to be more effective bystanders suggests Brown. “One of the things I tell my men friends is that there is no “bro code” to sexual assault, and I will drive them to the police station myself. We



Maureen Dowd

need to be more vigilant when we see our friends talking or acting in troublesome ways BEFORE situations become violent.”

On a systematic level, Brown suggests that we need more programs that teach boys and young men exactly what healthy masculinity should look like.

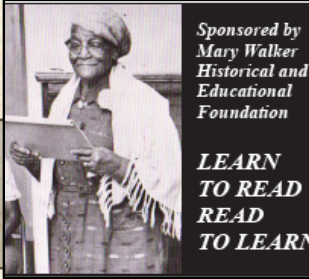
Seconding the need for a more systemic approach, author Elwood Watson urges society to place a greater focus on the innate characteristics of men, such as intelligence, sensitivity, curiosity, flexibility, strength and resilience. Humm, those sound to me a lot like innate female characteristics, yes?

Just asking.

© Terry Howard is an award-winning writer and storyteller. He is also a contributing writer with the Chattanooga News Chronicle, The American Diversity Report, The Douglas County Sentinel, Blackmarket.com, Hometown Advantage, co-founder of the “26 Tiny Paint Brushes” writers’ guild, and recipient of the 2019 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award.

This Week in African American History

Richard Allen, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1891)



By Daniel Payne

Born into slavery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on February 14, 1760, Richard Allen went on to become an educator, writer, minister and founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Benjamin Chew, a Quaker lawyer, owned the Allen family, which included Richard’s parents and three other children. Chew eventually sold the Allen family to Stokeley Sturgis, a Delaware planter. At age 17 Allen was converted to Methodism by an itinerant preacher. Allen’s master, Stokeley Sturgis, was said to have been influenced by Allen to become a Methodist as well. After his conversion, Sturgis offered his slaves the opportunity to buy their way out of slavery. In 1783, by working at odd jobs for five years, Allen managed to purchase his freedom for \$2,000. In the meantime, Allen began to preach in Methodist churches and meetings in the Baltimore area. Through his Methodist connections Allen was invited to return to Philadelphia in 1786. Upon arriving in the city he joined St. George’s Methodist Episcopal Church, where he became active in teaching and preaching.

As the number of African Americans attending St. George’s increased, racial tensions mounted. Allen preached at 5:00 a.m. in

special services on Sunday mornings to approximately 50 African American Methodists. When they attended the regular morning service, segregated seating was instituted. With this segregation Allen became convinced that a separate church was necessary for the black congregants. In 1787 Allen and a number of other African American Methodists walked out and formed a separate church that would become Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first Methodist church in the United States specifically for African Americans. Seven years later, on July 29, 1794, Bethel was dedicated by Bishop Francis Asbury. Richard Allen served Bethel Church as its pastor, and he was ordained a deacon by Asbury in 1799.

Other African American Methodist churches were formed in New York, New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. On April 9, 1816, after two decades of conflict with white Methodism, Allen and other African American Methodist preachers hosted a meeting in Philadelphia to bring these churches together and to form a new denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Allen was elected bishop, and with his consecration became the first African American bishop in the United States. By the time Allen died at



his home on March 26, 1831, the AME church was well-established in the United States and supported missions in several countries overseas. Allen cared passionately about education and opened a day school for African American children. He abhorred slavery,

worked actively for abolition, and maintained his home as a stop on the Underground Railroad. He was committed to self-determination for African Americans in the United States, and eventually opposed all colonization plans for African Americans in other countries.