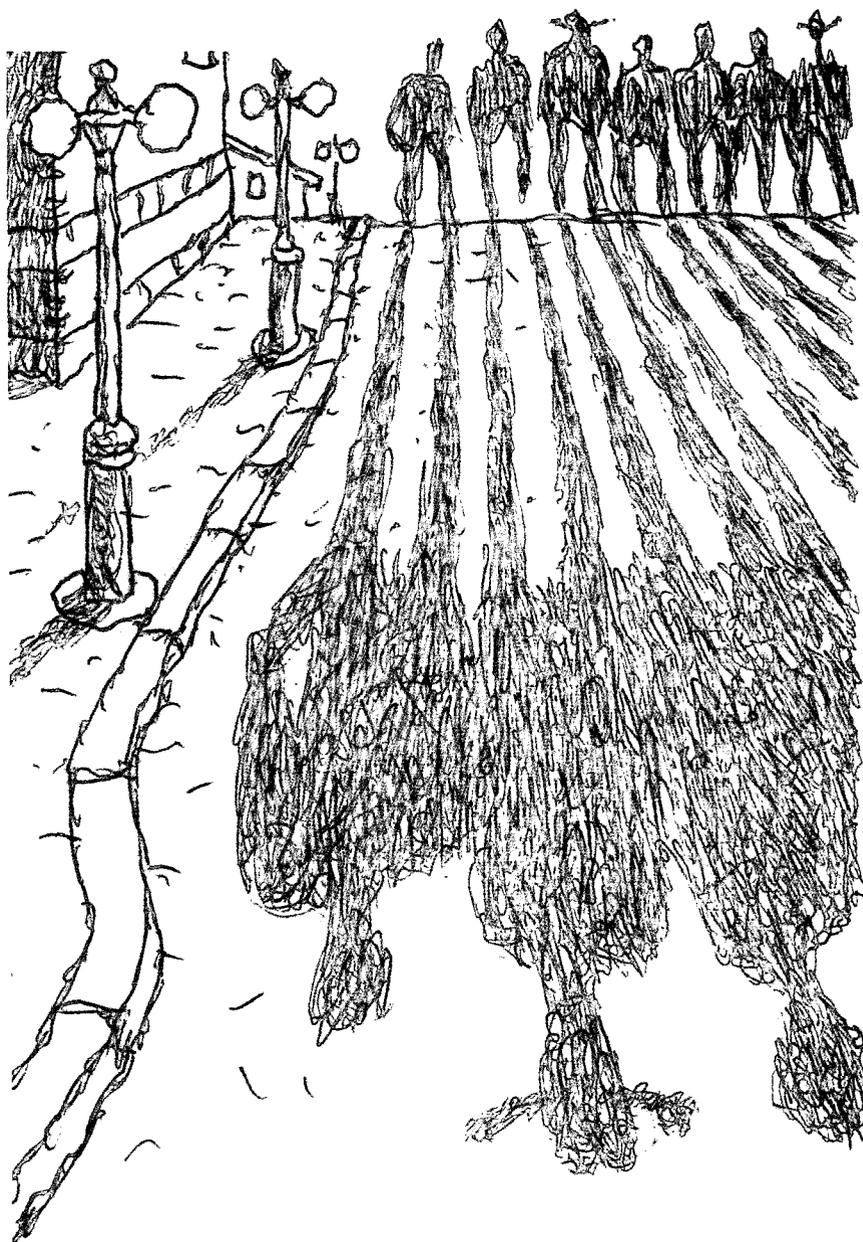


REMEMBER BRENDA BERKMAN? You probably don't, unless you're a hard-line feminist or you live in New York City. In 1978 or thereabouts, Berkman filed a class-action sex discrimination lawsuit against the New York Fire Department, complaining that she and several other women couldn't pass the physical fitness section of the city's employment examination for aspiring firefighters. In 1982, in response to Berkman's suit, a federal judge ordered the city to lower the physical standards, and Berkman and about forty other women who were now able to pass the new and easier test went ahead with their firefighting training. The overwhelming majority of them dropped out, deciding that they didn't really want to be New York City firefighters after all. Since 1982, the city's graduating classes for firefighters have contained only one or two women each and, out of a force of about eleven thousand, there are currently fewer than thirty women.

After her hire, Berkman and some of her cohorts engaged in nearly two decades of guerrilla warfare against their male coworkers. The women charged that the men were committing a catalogue of horrors and hate crimes against them, including rape, tire-slashing, death threats, tear-gas assaults, urinating into women's boots, and leaving a female firefighter alone in a burning house. None of these charges quite made it to the courts, or even to the serious union administrative stage. But they were reported in rich and credulous detail by feminist journalists and historians (one of them called physical fitness a "social construct"), and Berkman became a heroine on the websites of the National Organization for Women and groups of that ilk. She also became something of a political activist, snagging an appointment as a White

Return of the Guy

Men were pronounced economically and evolutionarily finished in the late 1990s. But *Charlotte Allen* says that manhood is back in fashion.



We want our firefighters to be able to carry victims out of harm's way in their arms if need be, and our soldiers to be able to go hand to hand against a murderous enemy. Sorry, but sometimes, perhaps most of the time, those are jobs that only a guy can do.

House fellow during the Clinton years, and last summer she publicly backed Democrat Mark Green's unsuccessful candidacy for mayor of New York.

Then this thing called September 11 happened. The World Trade Center towers were bombed into twin incinerators of carnage, suffering, and rubble. New York City firefighters were suddenly everywhere on the scene and in the public consciousness. Make that *firemen*. Firemen lost their lives by the hundreds, including Fire Chief Pete Ganci; they hurled themselves into the flames and smoke and collapsing steel girders to pull out the dazed living; they slept in their clothes for a few hours in nearby buildings, when they got any sleep at all. We will never forget the photos of them: the brawny young man in his helmet carrying the wounded young woman in his arms; the grizzled, mustachioed veteran fireman pausing a moment to peer up at an American flag that someone had planted at the site. These men were heroes, and even the worldly *New Yorker* magazine devoted several covers to honoring them.

To her credit, Brenda Berkman, now a lieutenant stationed at a lower Manhattan firehouse, worked herself to exhaustion side by side with the men in the aftermath of the bombing. And guess what—there were no complaints from her about harassment or opposi-

tion to affirmative action or social constructs. There was only camaraderie: "I want to make sure everyone knows how grateful I am" for the public's support of the New York firefighters, male and female, she told a feminist news service a few days later. Her personal website quietly disappeared from the Internet.

IN THE FURNACES of September 11, there was suddenly forged a new social trend: the return of the guy. (Remember that it was four *guys* who rushed the terrorists who commandeered United Airlines Flight 93, wrenching it to the ground near Pittsburgh.) This trend was continued in the war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. No one, even NOW, was heard to gripe that there were no women reported among the U.S. Special Forces troops fighting hand to hand with militant supporters of Osama bin Laden during the days after the Taliban fled Kabul. "For the first time in a long time, American heroes are not movie actors or sports figures or celebrity scandal-survivors," political commentator Andrew Sullivan wrote in the *Sunday Times* of London. "They are cops and firemen and special forces soldiers." Their sex is male, and they do the kind of work that calls on specifically male attributes and virtues: physical strength, tough fatherly leadership (think of

Rudolph Giuliani), brotherly bonding into fighting units, courage, and blunt compassion. Welcome back, guys.

For decades, even before the rise of the radical feminist revolution during the late 1960s, scholars and pundits alike had been tracking and often bemoaning what they viewed as the increasing obsolescence of the male of the human species. As early as the 1950s, sociologist David Riesman (*The Lonely Crowd*) and urbanologist William Hollingsworth Whyte (*The Organization Man*) worried that the rugged and tight-lipped individualism that had been the hallmark of American manhood from the Revolution through World War II seemed to be dissolving into bland suburban conformity and that men's loyalties seemed to be shifting to faceless, goal-less, amorphous business organizations rather than self and immediate family.

When the women's movement came along a decade later, Gloria Steinem famously deemed the male sex utterly useless: "A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle." Other feminist theorists condemned marriage as female enslavement and pronounced the presence of a father in the household as unnecessary at best and oppressive and abusively "patriarchal" at worst. They preached divorce as liberation.

Even conservative social theorists

who supported the traditional family tended to agree that, as the basis of America's economy shifted during the twentieth century, first away from hard outdoor work in agriculture and then away from hard indoor work in factories, to service industries and desk jobs calling on mental skills that women could supply as well as men, there were likely to be fewer and fewer places for men who weren't especially intellectual to vent their natural male aggression and use their natural male physical strengths constructively. This idea was helped along by the sociobiologists of the 1970s and the evolutionary psychologists of the 1990s, who pointed to plenty of examples in the animal kingdom of male species whose sole function in life was to impregnate as many females as possible as quickly as possible and then be killed off as superfluous eaters, either by the female herself or by stronger rival males.

MEANWHILE, the overwhelmingly male U.S. prison population soared, perhaps proving the evolutionary psychologists right about men's dysfunctionality in a postindustrial age. The high-tech revolution further reduced any premium that could be attached to physical prowess. By the 1990s, even George Gilder, although loathed by feminists for his hearty defense of marriage and traditional family structures, celebrated the emergence of the "nerd," the desk-bound brain-box with an engineering degree whose ingenuity and long hours in his cubicle would usher in decades of unprecedented silicon-based prosperity. There didn't seem to be much room in this setup for brawny jocks who weren't MIT material.

By the mid-1990s, some liberal pundits were shedding crocodile tears over the "angry white males" marginalized

by and entrapped in a "backlash" against the affirmative action schemes, represented by the likes of Brenda Berkman, that had displaced them with females and members of minority groups. Other pundits were worrying about the nation's mostly male military personnel, isolated on their bases with no wars to fight and cultivating a culture alien to (that is to say, a culture based on traditional values of courage and honor) the presumed mainstream of college professors, soccer moms, and word-processing coordinators.

The nadir for guys in American society undoubtedly came in 1999. That year, the radical feminist Susan Faludi and Rutgers anthropologist Lionel Tiger both published books (*Stiffed* for Faludi, *The Decline of Males* for Tiger), that arrived at exactly the same conclusion: Men were economically and evolutionarily through. Tiger mourned that men were becoming "outlaws, not in-laws,"—fixated on violence, pornography, and sports—because their opportunities for constructive group bonding in male-privileging economic organizations had waned with the rise of affirmative action. Faludi focused on former blue-collar guys similarly disoriented by capitalism-prompted masculine false consciousness who now had to eke out pathetic livings and avocations as X-rated film studs, gun nuts, and cadets at such bizarre single-sex institutions as—horrors!—the Citadel. Completing this dismal *fin de siècle* picture was Francis Fukuyama's *The Great Disruption*, another 1999 book, which pronounced with end-of-history certainty that the high-tech revolution and the takeover by women of the work force were, well, forever. The "crisis of masculinity"—that was a 1999 buzz-phrase.

Now, after September 11, we are all changed, and all this, like so many

other confident predictions of the future, has ended. We don't hear much about angry white males these days, or the supposedly alienated military. One of the best pieces of news comes from the U.S. Justice Department. In early October, just a few weeks after the terrorist attack, the department abruptly announced that it was dropping its support of a four-year-old sex-discrimination lawsuit brought by women who claimed that a running test for Philadelphia's transit police was unfair to female applicants.

THE TRANSIT AUTHORITY requires its officers to be able to run a mile and a half in twelve minutes—essential for chasing suspects up and down subway steps. Yes. We want them to be in top shape in order to halt and deter underground crime. We want our firefighters to be able to carry victims out of harm's way in their arms if need be, and our soldiers to be able to go hand to hand against a murderous enemy.

Sorry, Brenda Berkman (and we appreciate your efforts on September 11), but sometimes, perhaps most of the time, those are jobs that only a guy can do, and if we lower our standards because some women may feel bad about not living up to them, it is going to cost lives. It took an act of monstrous criminality to show us this, but we now know that the crisis of masculinity is over and some of the worst excesses of affirmative action may be over. We've come to appreciate that there's nothing like a guy. ♦

Charlotte Allen is a writer living in Washington, D.C.

Interview

Lionel Tiger

Is manliness really back in favor? *TWQ* Editor *Charlotte Hays* poses the question to Rutgers University anthropologist *Lionel Tiger*, author of the ground-breaking *The Decline of Males*.



TWQ: *Many people have said that since the attacks of September 11 masculinity is making a comeback. Can you comment on this?*

TIGER: It's very hard to discern because we are talking about what is really a microscopic period of time. But there's certainly no question that, if nothing else, the people who have been doing the burly guy jobs have reason for enhanced self-esteem (a term I hate), because people now clearly realize that what these men do is not only essential but dangerous. For the moment, the claim that women should be on the front lines and go into battle has

subsided. Whether this will affect the reigning orthodoxy in the universities or the social worker mentality that seeks to use the government to change behavior in fundamental ways is another question.

TWQ: *Proponents of women in combat may not want to admit that women would be at a disadvantage if fighting hand to hand against stronger men.*

TIGER: Right, and they would lose, particularly if they were fighting the kind of ground war our special forces have been engaged in in Afghanistan. Not only would they lose, but, as the Israelis have found, if you put women

in a situation like that, the men around them tend to become twice as brave and twice as reckless in order to protect them. Moreover, judging from what a lot of women in the military have said, they don't really want to be there. Women understand completely that they can do many things that are not on the front lines but are nevertheless very important.

For example, about a fifth of the officers in the Air Force are women and they serve many important functions. That's different from saying that everyone has to be able to do everything the same way equally—even if they can't.