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“Gender, Sexual, and Racial Trouble: The Crossroads of North American Freemasonry in the Twenty-First Century”

Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia and Paul J. Rich

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Guillermo de Los Reyes Heredia. Mexican. Associate Professor of University of Houston. Associate Director of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania (2004). E-mail: jgdelosr@central.uh.edu.

Paul Rich. American. President of the Policy Studies Organization, Washington, D.C. and Adjunct Professor, George Mason University. Visiting Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University. E-mail: paulrich@gmail.com.

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Resumen

Este ensayo plantea algunas preguntas sobre el estado actual del género, la raza y la sexualidad en la masonería estadounidense. El objetivo de este artículo es arrojar luz sobre este tema descuidado y contribuir a la discusión creciente y muy necesaria en el género, la sexualidad y la masonería. Aquí se argumenta que los discursos sobre la tradición, la masculinidad y la antigüedad han mantenido a las mujeres, las minorías étnicas y los hombres abiertamente homosexuales fuera de la participación en la logia. Primero se va a discutir el aspecto racial, centrándose en la *Prince Hall Freemasonry*. Por otra parte, se analizará el papel que ha jugado la masculinidad en la masonería y cómo los masones han reaccionado a ella. Luego, se explorará brevemente el papel que han desempeñado las mujeres en la masonería y la forma en que se han mantenido fuera de la principal corriente masónica, junto con otras minorías sexuales.

Abstract

This essay poses some questions on the current state of gender, race, and sexuality in American Freemasonry. The aim of this article is to shed light on this neglected topic and contribute to the growing and much needed discussion on gender, sexuality and Freemasonry. It is argued here that the discourses on tradition, masculinity, and antiquity have kept women, ethnic minorities, and openly homosexual men outside the lodge room. We will first discuss the racial aspect, focusing on Prince Hall Freemasonry. Furthermore, we will analyse the role that masculinity has played on Freemasonry and how the Masons have reacted to it. Then, we will briefly explore the role that women have played on Freemasonry and how they have been kept outside the Masonic main stream, along with other sexual minorities.

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“Gender, Sexual, and Racial Trouble: The Crossroads of North American Freemasonry in the Twenty-First Century”¹

Guillermo de los Reyes Heredia and Paul J. Rich

Gender, sexuality and race, three issues which are high on the United States’ political agenda and indisputably on the world agenda as well, are controversial issues in North American fraternalism and in particular in Freemasonry. To sustain an argument that fraternal groups contribute to democratization, it would seem that at least some case would have to be made for their contributions to progress in the movement towards racial, gender and sexual equity². After all, much fraternal ritual proclaims ideals of universal brotherhood. Yet, as will be seen, the evidence is hardly conclusive that human rights in the practical sense of sitting next to a woman, an African-American, or a non-heterosexual person have permeated American lodgedom.

The purpose of this essay is to pose some questions on the current state of gender, race, and sexuality in American Freemasonry. We aim to shed light on this neglected topic and contribute to the growing and much needed discussion on the topic. We argue that the discourses on tradition, masculinity, and antiquity have kept women, ethnic minorities, and openly homosexual men outside the lode room. We will first discuss the racial aspect, focusing on Prince Hall Freemasonry. Furthermore, we will analyze the role that masculinity has played on Freemasonry and how the Masons have reacted to it. Then, we will briefly explore the role that women have played on Freemasonry and how they have been kept outside the Masonic main stream, along with other sexual minorities.

Racial Trouble: Brothers without Brotherhood

Racial integration has not yet come to American fraternalism in any significant way. Most African-Americans who are Masons are members of a separate Masonic movement named after its founder, an eighteenth-century Bostonian named Prince Hall. Quite apart from the racial aspects of the Prince Hall-black issues, there is also a serious historiographical debate about the status of black Masonry, and another long running debate about the standing of women Masons, let alone non heterosexual individuals. While much of the challenge to the admission of African-Americans to Masonry arises out of concealed racial prejudice, part of the reason for the opposition to their membership comes out of an effort to find ‘truth’ in history, an age-old pursuit. The two-centuries-old debate over the legitimacy of the role of Prince Hall and his followers in Freemasonry, and over whether the Prince Hall tradition confirms the legitimacy of black lodges, is not only fascinating, but relates to the much more general controversies dealing

¹ The authors would like to thank Trevor Boffone for assisting on this article.

² See Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, *The Confidence Gap: Business, Labor, and Government in the Public Mind* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

with going on about Masonic history and history in general. Not surprisingly, a movement devoted such as masonry to myth and legend can pose considerable difficulties for historians. To simply accept Masonic claims about the Craft's contributions to democracy would be to ignore the fact that secret ritualistic societies are generally chronicled by their members rather than 'outsiders.' There are obvious problems for scholars who are not members getting access to material. Therefore when a current controversy relies on assertions about the past, such as racial, sexual, and gender discrimination in Masonry, the 'establishment' view has enormous advantages.

The exclusion of African-American individuals from American Masonry has relied to a great extent on a denial that blacks *ever* were admitted. This is a narrow argument and one might properly ask what the relevance of eighteenth-century lodge admissions policy is today. Nevertheless, historiographical rather than moral issues have dominated the racial debate in Masonry³. Not only is there a popular culture about Masonry which the uninitiated perpetuate, but there is also a Masonic popular culture of half-truths and fabrications which Masons themselves perpetuate. Of course, speculation about the ways in which history is written and whether there can be an objective history has been going on for centuries and the issue is far larger than the alleged democratic effects of Masonry. Presumably the first cave man that came back to his den to retell a story of his prowess at hunting was accused of gilding the lily. History is used shamelessly for suspect motives by politicians, ecclesiastics and just about anyone with a cause. The Prince Hall Masons are especially well qualified to comment on this question of lack of objectivity in history because they have been the victims for decades of those Masonic historians who have wanted desperately to "prove" that black Masonry is bogus and illegitimate.

The irony of white Masonry's claims to brotherhood in the face of the adamancy with which it has remained resolutely segregated has largely and understandably been ignored by Masonic scholars, just as the fact that George Washington, a Mason, owned slaves is ignored when his Masonic leadership and high-mindedness is praised. That, as the second decade of the twenty-first century is already on course, the matter of Masonic Jim Crowism has finally become a major embarrassment to the white grand lodges in the United States deserves neither gratitude nor commendation, no more than does any other simple act of decency and honesty. It is akin to

³ Disputes over historical issues concerning Prince Hall Freemasonry have resemblances to the controversies in Mexican Masonic history. Whether it be the Craft's record in racial matters or in Mexico, the fact is that no historical topic elicits more prejudice and animosity in debate than does Masonry, or more unfounded speculation. Part of the problem is the sociological phenomena of the middle-aged Mason who turns from business to the history Craft as an avocation and is determined to make Freemasonry into a much older movement than it is. *E.g.* "Whether in ancient India, Egypt, Greece, Italy or Mexico, or among the Druids of Europe, temples of initiation have ever existed...although these great schools of the Mysteries have long dropped out of the public mind, they, or the doctrine they taught, have never ceased to exist; the enmity of official ecclesiasticism and the tendencies of a materialistic and commercial age have caused them to subside into extreme secrecy and concealment, but their initiates have never been absent from the world...it was through the activity and foresight of some of these advanced initiates that our present system of speculative Masonry is due". W. L. Wilmshurst, *The Meaning of Masonry* (New York: Bell Publishing, 1980), 64-65.

praising motorists for not running over pedestrians at intersections. Should anyone really give awards for members of a moral and altruistic organization actually behaving according to its precepts? In any event, much of the current concern and motivation on the part of white Masonic bodies is not over the hypocrisy of running fraternities without brotherhood but rather anxiety about keeping tax exemptions and avoiding scandal in the press that will force members in public service to resign⁴.

Gender Trouble: Reinforcing Masculinity

Controversy also surrounds the contributions of Masonry to the efforts to end gender and sexual bias. In fact, Masonry in its battles to keep women out of the lodge has taken some solace in the new enthusiasm for reinforcing masculinity through ritual⁵. The Dr. Spock of American masculine ritual these days is Robert Bly, whose portrayal of Iron John, the real man in a feminized culture, has become an icon⁶. If you see your neighbor dressed as a Native-American and dragging his son off into the woods, the chances are he has been impressed by Bly's arguments for male initiations and rituals. Bly proposes that there are three different initiations: male, female, and human. However, he focuses only on the male aspect. He states that: "We have defective mythologies that ignore masculine depth of feeling, assign men a place in the sky instead of earth, teach obedience to the wrong powers, work to keep men, boys, and entangle both men and women in systems of industrial domination that exclude both matriarchy and patriarchy"⁷. Bly aims to rescue or recover get back some values and privileges that men have lost over the years due to the gender and sexual revolution. Therefore his argument has been used by some men who not only share his idea, but they try to dismantle some ground that has been gained thanks to the different human rights movements.

⁴ It is only a matter of time before the exclusion of women will also prove to be a thorny problem, since lawsuits against private clubs that exclude women have been successful.

⁵ There are a small group of scholars who have a distinct feeling of *deja vu* about male initiation. They are that hardy little clan who has been interested in American fraternal organizations. They have produced some good books about American fraternalism, -although the authors have not reaped Iron John rewards. A list would include Lynn Dumenil's *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880 - 1930* (1984) and Marc C. Carris' *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (1989). "The importance of clubs, lodges, and taverns as alternatives to marriage lay not only in time spent beyond the company of one's wife, but also in the structure and content of the new institutions. Recent historians have pointed out that fraternal orders posed 'an alternative to domesticity. One scholar, Mary Ann Clawson, has studied the form and the ideology of these lodges and observed that fraternalism was based on 'the same overarching metaphor of the family' as the domestic model, but that it created 'fictive fraternal bonds' in place of the blood ties and marriage bonds of the home. Historian Mark Carnes analyzed the content of fraternal ritual and found that, at one level, it had the function of 'effacing' a man's real kin (especially mothers and wives), replacing them with an all-male family that provided love, intimacy, nurture, and support. Wives recognized their competitors, and they organized a national campaign against the fraternal movement." E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (BasicBooks/Harper Collins, 1993), 143. See Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton (New Jersey): Princeton University Press, 1989).

⁶ Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men* (Shaftesbury (England) and Rockport (Massachusetts): Element, 1992).

⁷ Bly, *Iron John*, x.

Masonry, if not the ultimate male initiation rite, is among the oldest. But not everyone would agree that what the world needs most is the continuance of ceremonies to bolster the male ego. That was certainly one of the lodge's function in nineteenth-century America, a time when, "men devised experiences that helped transform the impulsive passions of the boy into the purposeful energies of the man"⁸. Mary Ingham in her book *Men: The Male Myth Exposed*, argues that the male search for initiation "stems largely from insecurity, the need to try and prove that they are male and that they are strong, because they lack the inner ego strength to feel it"⁹. As far as Ingham is concerned, the end result is to "add another layer of insensitivity." In her view, one of the most hopeful signs of the times is a father's recent description of holding his child for the first time: "It felt fantastic - the closest to being female." She adds that men, "...have got to shatter the myth of masculinity which stifles their expression of their real needs"¹⁰.

Bly on the other hand asserts that American salvation is via male ritual, that, "[t]he ancient practice of initiation then - still very much alive in our genetic structure - offers a third way through, between the two 'natural' roads of manic excitement and victim excitement. A mentor or 'male mother' enters the landscape. Behind him, a being of impersonal intensity stands, which in our story is the Wild Man, or Iron John"¹¹.

The new masculine ritualism rejects present-day ceremonies associated with entering adulthood as tepid. Driver's licenses or college diplomas will not do. Nor, apparently, first communion, Bar Mitzvah, or confirmation¹². Something much stronger is wanted: "We need wilderness and extravagance"¹³. Bly claims the troubles in modern life are because, 'having abandoned initiation, our society has difficulty in leading boys toward manhood. Mythologically, we can say that the Great Father in his primitive form blocks the young men on their path, and the Great Mother in her primitive form blocks the young men also. ...The main reason I think is our own ignorance of initiation, and our dismissal of its value"¹⁴. His suggestion that new initiations need to be invented has been followed taken up, and it is now possible to purchase do-it-yourself manuals for initiating youths into manhood¹⁵. The Masons hope that some of the male initiation interest will add members to their ranks, and that Masons and feminists would disagree about Bly and about the usefulness of male ritualism. The current clamor over male rituals assumes as virtuous without discussion certain supposedly masculine traits. But twenty years before the appearance of Iron John, David Jonas and Doris Klein explored masculinity in *Man-Child: A Study of the Infantilization of Man* (1970) and warned that not all traits of children, let alone traits dubbed feminine, should be viewed as undesirable:

⁸ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 21.

⁹ Mary Ingham, *Men: The Male Myth Exposed* (London: Century Publishing, 1984),114.

¹⁰ Ingham, *Men*, 243.

¹¹ Bly, *Iron John*, 36.

¹² See Katherine I Prior, *Initiation Customs* (New York: Thomson, 1993).

¹³ Bly, *Iron John*, 55.

¹⁴ Bly, *Iron John*, 182.

¹⁵ E.g. Bernard Weiner, *Boy Into Man: A Father's Guide to Initiation of Teenager Sons* (San Francisco: Transformation Press, 1992).

...we realize that the word infantilization may conjure up a disparaging image, as a parent admonishing a youngster not to be childish implies undesirable comportment. We should like to reiterate that we are using the word as a description of a process that has two edges. While man's social immaturity and difficulties may be laid to it on the one hand, on the other man's highest achievements are also the attributes of the childlike capacity to learn, the delight in discovery, and the creative curiosity that have become essential parts of man's make-up. What is more, the necessity of protecting human young throughout their prolonged period of helplessness has led to the emergence of a striving toward morality and ideals that is an indirect benefit of the same process¹⁶.

Nevertheless, male initiation and bonding has replaced the New Age emphasis in the 1970s and 1980s on a male liberationism emphasizing freedom from masculine roles¹⁷. Instead of seeking to explore behavior formerly associated with women, American men since the nineties have been urged to enhance their maleness. There is a fear of losing the so-called white male privilege. Professor Hal Foster has described this development as "celebration of the masochistic man" and relates it to the growth of "the cult of abjection" with an oscillation between sensitivity and sadism, adding "God save the women who get caught in between"¹⁸.

A corollary to the new male ritualism is male chauvinism. Women are again relegated to the home and in danger of political disenfranchisement. They will be surprised to learn how, once again¹⁹, at least according to Martin Green in *The Adventurous Male* (1993), "politics is a male group phenomenon" and that "Seymour Lipset's *Political Man* naturally deals with men and not

¹⁶ David Jonas and Doris Klein, *Man-Child: A Study of the Infantilization of Man* (New York: Mc-Graw Hill, 1970), 347.

¹⁷ "By the mid-1970s, men's conferences were being held and organizations formed to respond to a growing list of male concerns, ranging from divorce and alimony rights, parenting, and job situations to sexual fulfillment and, especially, gay rights, which dominated the early movement. A men's liberation movement had been born. The basic focus was recognition of the shortcomings of playing the traditional masculine role of always getting ahead and staying cool." Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs (New Jersey): Prentice-Hall, 1979), 286.

¹⁸ Hal Foster, "Cult of Despair", *New York Times*, 30 December 1994, A17. "Related to the celebration of the masochistic man is the success of failure: in the last few years, an esthetic of the pathetic -an ethic of the loser- has emerged in contemporary art and music...With its initial contempt for pop success and good looks, grunge music tapped into this resignation." Foster, "Cult of Despair". See Paul Rich and Guillermo de los Reyes, "Upstaging the Masons: The Promise keepers and Fraternal Orders," in *The Promise Keepers: Essays on Masculinity and Christianity*, ed. Dane S. Claussen (Jefferson (North Carolina) and London (England): McFarland & Company, 2000), 35 - 37.

¹⁹ However, even without considering the male 'backlash' that Iron John may represent, the progress made in achieving sexual equality is open to doubt: "Taken as more or less functioning wholes, the institutional structures of the United States and other societies are organized along lines of gender. The law, politics, religion, the academy, the state, and the economy are institutions historically developed by men, currently dominated by men, and symbolically interpreted from the standpoint of men in leading positions, both in the present and historically. These institutions have been defined by the absence of women...In site of many changes bringing women into all institutions, and the reclaiming of women's history that shows their earlier important articulation, males still dominate the central institutions." Joan Acker, "Gendered Institutions: From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions," *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no.5 (1992): 567.

with women”²⁰. This goes against opinions that sometimes masculine assertiveness is a sign of immaturity: “We have become familiar with the resistance of boys and men to being identified with a woman. Whatever the source of the suggestion of identification, it is regarded as alien, repugnant, and it creates a xenophobic anxiety”²¹. Leaders of the so-called Aquarian Revolution of the 1980s, with its emphasis on feminism, would be amazed at this reversal of directions²².

These male-centered approaches and discourses have permeated American society. Furthermore, they have had a tremendous impact on the ways in which women have been incorporated into main stream culture. Freemasonry was not the exception. Thus, in American Freemasonry there has been a significant resistance to the incorporation of women to the Masonic lodges. In fact, unlike in Europe and Latin American, there is no female Freemasonry in the United States. There is not even a serious debate or movement to include women into the lodges. Women are part of co-masonic group such as the Eastern Star, but they are far away from an invitation to become Freemasons.

The Masons and Maleness: Sorry Ladies, you don’t belong here

Unquestionably Freemasonry and kindred societies have played a major function in the life of the American male. The revival of an interest in male ritualism gives hope to those Masons who see the movement as an exclusively male one. Although there are Masonic auxiliaries that admit women, the Masons have been resolute in keeping women out of the lodge²³. In this

²⁰ Martin Green, *The Adventurous Male: Chapters in the History of the White Male Mind* (University Park (Pennsylvania): Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 145. Here he is relying heavily on Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups* (New York: Vintage, 1970). “In fact, Tiger says, armies, sports, secret societies, training patterns, and economic and religious power-structures all offer data to prove the importance of this male bonding. These activities are linked to each other by the importance of the kind of bonding in all of them. For instance, the basis of most sports is a preparation for or rehearsal of war. The same is more obviously true of hunting. Initiation ceremonies, with their pains and humiliations, separate the initiate from home and family and generate strong new bonds that enable adventurers - for we hardly need to point out that all these are forms of adventure...Tiger suggests that we could call secret political societies the demi-monde of politics. The two things - the demimonde and the secret societies- are both partial withdrawals from the light of social day and are often felt by women (the guardians of that daylight) as inimical.” Green, *The Adventurous Male*, 145.

²¹ Gregory Rochlin, *The Masculine Dilemma: A Psychology of Masculinity* (Boston and Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1980), 271.

²² “Women hold up half the sky says a Chinese proverb. Women represent the greatest single force for political renewal in a civilization thoroughly out of balance. Just as individuals are enriched by developing both the masculine and feminine sides of the self (independence and nurturance, intellect and intuition), so the society is benefiting from a change in the balance of power between the sexes. The power of women is the powder keg of our time. As women enlarge their influence in policymaking and government, their yin perspective will push out the boundaries of the old yang paradigm/”. Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980’s*, (London: Paladin, 1988), 246 - 247.

²³ There are “unrecognized” co-masonic lodges and there are rare instances of women being initiated into “regular” Masonic lodges, usually after having eavesdropped or overheard the ritual. See A. Bryan Hawkes, “Some Lady Masons”, *Masonic Square* 12, no.2 (1986): 60 - 62. “The United Grand Lodge of England and, presumably the other Grand Lodges in fraternal association with it, has made no secret of the fact that it is violently opposed to Women's Freemasonry as being alien to its Constitution.” Enid L. Scott, *Women and Freemasonry* (Enfield (England), 1988).

respect, Carnes points out that, “The rituals of the Masons and other orders completely dominated lodge meetings, and they were focused in great measure on men’s feelings about women. In particular, these rites dwelt implicitly on men’s discomfort with their female-dominated upbringing and expressed the wish for an all-male family -a wish that was fulfilled both in the outcome of the ritual and in the fact of lodge membership”²⁴. But the rituals are subject to varying interpretations, which Carnes makes clear: “An examination of fraternal literature suggests how difficult it was for men to break away from their mothers and to renounce the restricted gender role associated with female domesticity. Poems, guidebooks, and novels consistently endorsed maternal nurture and criticized wives, even though one purpose of such publications was to mitigate wives’ opposition to the orders... Fraternal ritualists and writers confirmed that maternal attachment had left a deep and enduring emotional imprint”²⁵. Consequently this strategy contributed to reaffirm maleness within Masonic walls, making Freemasonry an organization in which masculinity is one of the most important characteristics *par excellence*. Masculinity and maleness have permeated the rituals and the ways in which Masons interact with each other in a socially exclusive male space and male world in which women do not participate. The extraordinary work done by William D. Moore on the Masonic lodge rooms shows the role that masculinity plays on Masonic spaces. Hence, Moore argues:

[W]hile traditional social structures were attacked by liberal theology and the changes wrought by industrial capitalism, the Masonic lodge room through its use of furnishings and ritual continued to express order and masculinity in an understandable manner. As corporate identity fell in the surrounding culture, lodge furnishings continued to emphasize the site where members were obligated. The lodge room then can be understood as a place in which masculine values which were disappearing in the outside world were preserved. It was a theater in which millions of American men entertained each other by acting out morality plays, and a hallowed space where the same men found spiritual meaning and perpetuated what they unconsciously recognized as a disappearing social order²⁶.

The lodge room, according to Moore, became then an important space that preserved masculinity along with other important values that were at risk outside of that room. Thus, in the masonic imaginary, the need to protect such space became an important value that any Mason

“I must make it clear at the outset that this booklet has been compiled entirely for the interest of my fellow women Freemasons”. Scott, *Women and Freemasonry*, 4. See Harry Carr, “Women and Freemasonry”, in *World of Freemasonry: The Collected Papers and Talks of Harry Carr*, ed. Harry Carr. (London: Lewis Masonic, 1983), 280 - 287.

²⁴ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 203, citing Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 110 - 125.

²⁵ Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*, 118.

²⁶ William D. Moore, “Masonic Lodge Rooms and their Furnishings, 1870 - 1930,” *Heredom, The Transactions of The Scottish Rite Research Society* 2 (1993): 125. See also, William Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

had to practice. To Moore, any element of the lodge room became relevant to the discourse on masculinity and tradition, “The furnishings used in the lodge room buttressed the Masons’ construction of their fantastic realm. By appropriating the stylistic forms of the past, the Masons identified themselves with individuals and cultures that had come before them. By occupying massive ceremonial chairs, these men found a concrete role for themselves in a world that was in flux”²⁷. The discourses of tradition and masculinity within the lodge room have developed the idea that Freemasonry is a male institution among Masons in the United States.

Women in Freemasonry: A Brief Discussion

Therefore, there is a generally held opinion that Freemasonry is an adamantly male institution, but historically that is untrue. Those who claim, to the intense irritation of some Masons, that women were involved in the very beginnings of Masonry have evidence to sustain their position. There is for example a record from 1408 where newly initiated Masons swore to obey “the Master, or Dame, or any other ruling Freemason.” In the records of the Lodge of Mary’s Chapel in Edinburgh, dated 1683, the lodge was actually presided over by a Dame or Mistress. The records of the Grand Lodge of York in 1693 speak about male and female initiates²⁸.

By the eighteenth century the anecdotes about women Masons take on a different tone. The women now are interlopers who become Masons by accident and are made members to protect the secrets. A woman who found out the secrets by spying was initiated in a lodge in the English town of Barking in 1714. Another woman who eavesdropped on a lodge ceremony, the Hon. Mrs. Elizabeth Aldworth, the daughter of the first Viscount Doneraile, was initiated in 1712 when she was discovered, and the fact is recorded on her tombstone²⁹.

Margaret Jacob and Janet Burke’s works have shown that women played a key role in several important enclaves of eighteenth-century French high society, including the *salons* and the *loges d’adoption*³⁰. According to their research such lodges were created as early as 1744, under the tutelage of male lodges. The purpose of these lodges was to welcome women of the aristocracy who, like Madame de Lamballe, were already attending Masonic events³¹. Another contribution that sheds light on the study of European women and Freemasonry is the work of Laure Caille who proposes that women were pivotal in Freemasonry during the Enlightenment because they developed degrees in the hierarchy of the lodges that promoted radical ideas that

²⁷ Moore, “Masonic Lodge Rooms”, 125.

²⁸ Neville Cryer, “Women and Freemasonry”, *News of the Grand Lodge of New York*, May 1995, 20. See Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²⁹ Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*.

³⁰ Burke, Janet and Margaret Jacob, “French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship,” *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 3 (1996): 513 - 549.

³¹ Le Collectif des Cahiers, *Les Femmes En Franc-maçonnerie* (Paris : Oxus, 2011), 39 - 40.

had a significant impact during their times. Caille argues that women participated in Freemasonry's new form of sociability in Europe³².

There are a number of other women in the eighteenth-century who overheard Masonic secrets, hiding in clocks and cupboards, and when discovered were initiated. One of them, of Newcastle upon Tyne in England, actually later advertised her willingness to tell the secrets to anyone for a price! Nor were female Freemasons confined to Europe: in Canada in 1783 a woman who eavesdropped was initiated in 1783, buried under a tombstone with Masonic symbols, and claimed as an ancestor by a later Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New Brunswick in 1954³³.

In addition to these interesting incidents of women in the late Middle Ages becoming Masons or of women being initiated after being roused out of grandfathers' (or perhaps grandmothers') clocks, there have long been actual Masonic organizations involving women. They are international in scope and their role, as well indeed of the place of women in what have been regarded as men's secret societies, and needs more examination than can be given here. The better known women's groups with Masonic connections include the Order of the Eastern Star, the Rainbow, and the Amaranth.

There are also exclusively women's lodges outside the United States which work the full Masonic ritual and do not admit men, as well as co-Masonic lodges which admit both men and women. In many cases the male Mason's reception of female Masons is considerably less cordial than the attitude displayed towards orders like the Eastern Star which do not claim to be working the Masonic rituals. Addressing a group of women, a distinguished Freemason remarked: "When we talk about Women and Freemasonry in Britain we are compelled to discuss the two Orders firmly established here, both claiming that they use the same ritual as their husbands. They wear the same Masonic clothing, and even go so far in copying us that they call each other 'Brother.' Inevitably, they are taboo"³⁴.

Corollary: Sexual Trouble and Undemocratic Values

Masonry can hardly be described as supportive of the inclusion of African-American or women in their society. However, in the last few years there has been an attempt to a racially comprehensive integration within the lodges. This attempt has not been completely successful, but progress has been made. In the case of women, even though it has not become a major debate, yet, some discussion and debates have taken place to explore the role of women in American Freemasonry. Nevertheless, it is in the area of gender expression and sexual orientation in which Freemasonry has remained silent. Our research has shown that sexuality is not an area open to

³² Laure Caille, « La franc-maçonnerie féminine: entre adoption et émancipation », *La Pensée et les hommes* 55, no. 82 - 83 (2011): 49 - 63.

³³ Caille, « La franc-maçonnerie féminine », 21.

³⁴ Harry Carr, *Harry Carr's World of Freemasonry* (London: Lewis Masonic, 1985), 285 - 286.

discussion in American Freemasonry. We compare this silence with the military policy that until recently was in effect, Don't Ask, Don't Tell. The average member of the lodge in the United States is a white heterosexual male. Of course, there are also lodges that welcome members of other ethnic minorities: Hispanic, Asian, African-American, who are also heterosexual. But, there is no evidence that other sexual or gender expressions are welcome or discussed within the landscape of American Freemasonry (the same may be applied to other cases around the world). We do not aim to speak in favor or against such attitude. We would like to begin with an invitation to other scholars and perhaps members of the lodge to bring to light issues of sexuality within Freemasonry. The discussion of same-sex marriage in the United States is now a reality that has gained positive outcomes. Thus, sooner or later, members of the lodge will want to bring their husbands to the social events organized by the lodge.

The arguments as to why African-Americans and women have not been included and why the sexual orientation of some members has remained silent are not the only points of this brief description of the situation. Other aspect that we would like to point out in these concluding remarks is that Masonry in the United States, despite all its historical and philanthropic contributions, is an example of a voluntary organization whose present contributions to society, regardless of Masonic assertions, are questionable.

Often the popularity of associations such as Freemasonry depended more on a love of ritual and secrecy than anything else. Considering how widespread they have become, involving all kinds of people and in many countries, social scientists should give more attention to this aspect of popular and political culture. But I also raise the question of their exclusion of ethnic and sexual minorities. How does that assist democracy?

The Masons have received rather rough treatment in this article. But they are simply too good an example not to use of the problems with the Fukuyama hypothesis about the place of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in nurturing democracy³⁵. NGOs are not unanimously assured a place of honor in transition theory. In the case of Freemasonry, while individuals clearly derived benefit from joining, the strength of the case often made by Masons for Masonry - that it is consistently a beneficent and democratic influence on the *community*- is not immediately apparent. Indeed, neither is the purity of motives on the part of leaders, particularly politicians, seeking Masonic advancement. The great altruism that the Masons boast about is simply not evident in day-to-day Masonic activity, particularly on issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity.

³⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 55.

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