



# Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America

By Mark C. Carnes

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Freemasons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias—why did millions of nineteenth-century American men belong to these and other secret orders? In this engrossing study, Mark C. Carnes argues that fraternal rituals created a fantasy world antithetical to prevailing religious practices, gender roles, and institutional structures, offering a male religious counterculture that opposed an increasingly liberal and feminized Protestantism.

"[An] original and compelling study. . . . Making use of anthropology as well as social history, Carnes is probably the first outsider to take these rituals seriously. . . . Playing the role of a graceful, controlling . . . guide into these mysteries, Carnes slowly unveils his thesis, which itself has several layers of mystery."—David Leverenz, *New England Quarterly*

"An imaginative fusion of social and intellectual history. . . . Carnes's work shows the true depth of nineteenth-century male sexual anxiety and hostility toward women. In this compelling book, Carnes opens new approaches to the study of gender and helps us better understand the reorientation of American culture at the turn of the century." —Donald Yacovone, *Journal of American History*

"This is an important monograph in the field of men's history. . . . This is ambitious conceptualization—the book is a refreshingly bold statement. . . . I find most of its conclusions accurate."—Peter N. Stearns, *Journal of Ritual Studies*

"The breadth and thoroughness of this book is impressive. Carnes draws on the literature of the time, religious history and theology, child rearing and developmental psychology, women's history and gender studies, and structural and cultural anthropology."—Rosamund Orde-Powlett, *Literary Review*

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## **Editorial Review**

From Library Journal

Carnes (history, Barnard Coll., Columbia) has examined the appeal of "secret organizations" (Freemasons, etc.) and their initiation rituals to Victorian men and has discovered some very interesting things about the role they played in Victorian society. As he points out, the major activity of these groups was their initiation rituals. Carnes sees these fraternal orders as fostering a fantasy world that was in direct opposition to the religious, social, and institutional demands of Victorian society. This sort of male "counterculture" helped many men make the transition from boyhood to manhood. The book is a unique and important addition to collections on American social and cultural history.

- *Gordon Stein, Univ. of Rhode Island Lib., Kingston*

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### **About the Author**

Mark C. Carnes received his undergraduate degree from Harvard and his Ph.D. in history from Columbia University, where he studied and trained with Professor John A. Garraty. The Ann Whitney Olin Professor History at Barnard College, Columbia University, Professor Carnes has chaired both the departments of History and American Studies at Barnard. In addition to this textbook, Carnes and Garraty have co-authored "Mapping America's Past: A Historical Atlas" and are co-general editors of the 24-volume "American National Biography," for which they were awarded the Waldo Leland Prize of the American Historical Association, the Darmouth Prize of the American Library Association, and the Hawkins Prize of the American Association of Publishers. In addition, Carnes has published numerous books in American social and cultural history, including "Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies" (1995), "Novel History: Historians and Novelists Confront America's Past (and Each Other)" (2001), and "Invisible Giants: 50 Americans That Shaped the Nation but Missed the History Books" (2002). Carnes also created "Reacting to the Past," which won the Theodore Hesburgh Award, sponsored by TIAA-CREF, as the outstanding pedagogical innovation of 2004. "Garraty preaches a particular doctrine on historical writing, expounding on the details of a complex process whereby the murky abstractions of the past are distilled into clean, clear narrative. He insists that the writer's sole duty is to readers. This literary alchemy is all the more wondrous for being so devoid of artifice," Carnes observes. John A. Garraty. Holding a Ph.D. from Columbia University and an L.H.D. from Michigan State University, Professor Garraty is Gouverneur Morris Professor Emeritus of History at Columbia. He is the author, co-author, and editor of scores of books and articles, among them biographies of Silas Wright, Henry Cabot Lodge, Woodrow Wilson, George W. Perkins, and Theodore Roosevelt. Along with Mark Carnes, he is co-editor of the "American National Biography," Garraty has also contributed a volume-The New Commonwealth-to the New American Nation series and edited "Quarrels That Shaped the Constitution," He was a member of the Board of Directors of American heritage magazine and served as both vice president and head of the teaching division of the American Historical Association. His areas of research interest include the Gilded age, unemployment (in a historical sense), and the Great Depression of the 1930s. Of his collaboration with Carnes on "The American Nation," Garraty says, "Although this volume is the work of two authors, it is as nearly the product of a single historical sensibility as is possible. Mark's scholarly specialization in cultural and social issues, especially gender, complements mine in politics and the economy. The book has benefited, too, from his special interest in postwar America. Over the many years of our collaborations, one of our favorite topics of discussion has been the craft of historical writing. We share a commitment to clarity and conciseness. We strive to avoid jargon and verbiage. We believe that while the political history of the nation provides a useful narrative framework, its people are what give the story meaning."

## **Users Review**

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