

## Introduction

### Bodies That Leak

*American Masculinity and  
Antiprophyllactic Citizenship*

In July 2013, transgender military intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison after she released thousands of classified documents to WikiLeaks three years earlier. Among the most significant records Manning leaked was a video titled “Collateral Murder,” which depicted the U.S. military’s indiscriminate killing of Iraqi civilians during a 2007 airstrike in Baghdad. In leaking sensitive information, Manning was accused of compromising the nation’s defenses, damaging the United States’ global reputation and revealing military tactics that could jeopardize the country’s ability to protect itself against foreign powers. But for Manning, the opposite was true. Understanding the nation’s overdeveloped defenses as a liability rather than a strength, Manning made clear that her primary patriotic duty was not to help fortify our systems of security but rather to hold the United States accountable to the global community and to its own citizens. Put another way, to spring a “leak” in our nation’s figurative armor may very well have been the only way to participate in the creation of a nation worth defending. Manning’s act of principled dissent—her willingness to compromise the “security” of the nation for the sake of the nation—is a provocative example of what I refer to throughout this book as *antiprophyllactic citizenship*. In this model, the nation earns its vitality through an attitude of openness, an embrace of vulnerability, and willingness, when necessary, to revolt.

*Vulnerable Constitutions* argues that one of the central features of antiprophyllactic citizenship is its sustained encounter with queerness and disability.

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Though Manning came out publicly as a transgender woman following her sentencing, she was continually misgendered in early press coverage by journalists who were either unaware of or insensitive to her chosen name and pronouns.<sup>1</sup> Those who did take her trans identity seriously tended to present it as evidence of her impaired judgment. During the initial hearings, for example, Manning’s lawyers attempted to use her recent diagnosis of gender identity disorder and its related stresses to make a case for her “diminished capacity” during the time of the document leak. Throughout the trial, Manning’s mental health remained a focal point with various psychiatrists and clinical psychologists testifying that Manning “showed signs of mental instability” and delivering diagnoses that included mild fetal alcohol syndrome, “postadolescent idealism,” and mild Asperger’s syndrome.<sup>2</sup> These assessments followed an incident preceding the leak in which Manning was discovered “sitting on the floor in a fetal position in a storage room,” having etched the phrase “I WANT” into a vinyl chair with an army knife.<sup>3</sup> Manning was thus introduced to the public in a kaleidoscope of fragments, variously understood as a dangerous traitor, a national hero, a closeted gay male soldier, and, perhaps most frequently, an improperly vetted officer with undiagnosed mental health issues who should never have been granted access to sensitive information.

Against these accounts that disqualify Manning as psychologically damaged or mentally ill, we might be tempted to present a counternarrative that insists on Manning’s unimpeachable mental health. In this counternarrative, Manning’s personal life and private emotions would be irrelevant to her principled decision to become a whistle-blower. But Manning’s feelings of anxiety and depression—which she herself shared with various friends—cannot be extricated from the national context that framed the conditions of her military employment.<sup>4</sup> Against a culture that valorizes violent masculinities, produces a skyrocketing rate of transgender suicide, and requires enthusiastic complicity in the enactment of state violence, Manning’s mental distress may be the *only* rational response. While those who defended Manning’s actions tended to bracket or deny the queer and crip elements of her identity, this book is based on the assumption that these elements are far from incidental to her act of resistance. Manning emerges as an antiprophyllactic citizen not despite her queerness, her dysphoria, or her mental health status but because of them.

Without overly politicizing Manning’s deeply personal decision to transition or making presumptions regarding her mental health, we might also observe the way her act of antiprophyllactic resistance appears to have coalesced around a rejection of the demands of hegemonic masculinity. Indeed, the

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ideal of manhood that most men are taught to strive for and emulate could be described as inherently *prophylactic*. We require male bodies to be invulnerable, impenetrable, and impervious to injury. To this end, a “real man” must be heterosexually functional and physically fit. In addition to maintaining the boundaries of his physical body, he must also control and contain his emotional response to the world, and particularly to other men. Thus a related claim that this book makes is that an antiprophylactic model of citizenship provides tools for challenging normative masculinities and, in some cases, imagining alternative queer-crip models of masculine expression.

Like the other figures I examine in this book, Manning stages an overt rejection of the demands of prophylactic masculinity. However, unlike those figures, she does not identify as male and refuses to present a redemptive narrative that recenters the masculine body as the primary site of resistance to authority. Her story demonstrates that a commitment to antiprophylactic citizenship need not necessarily be attached to cismale bodies or masculine gender expressions. I open with this example not to present Manning as a representative figure of antiprophylactic masculinity but rather to highlight from the outset both the potential and the limits of antiprophylactic *masculinity* as a concept. The men who populate this book are often attempting to redefine masculinity through antiprophylaxis, using the concept to generate new masculinities and new homosocial bonds. But Manning’s trans-femininity may ultimately represent a more radical horizon—or perhaps a truer commitment to antiprophylaxis—than the overtly masculine visions that dominate the book. My readings in the chapters that follow do not reflect an unqualified celebration of antiprophylactic masculinity, nor are they solely critical of it. I am interested, instead, in the necessary ambivalence that is generated from the masculinization of vulnerability, receptivity, and physical susceptibility. Mapping the varied shapes that antiprophylactic masculinity has taken over the course of the twentieth century reveals a history of both complicity and resistance, with these men both relying on and rejecting their era’s reigning hegemonic ideals.

Finally, *Vulnerable Constitutions* argues that this model of masculinity and citizenship is historically contingent, having emerged alongside evolving scientific and medical conversations regarding deviant genders and sexualities. It makes the case that certain American fantasies of belonging and embodiment—from Jack London to Samuel Delany—have been profoundly influenced by the invention of sexual science and the medicalization of queer sexual and gender expressions. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the authors under examination in this book are celebrating the power

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of medicalization itself—to the contrary, in their works, a division often emerges between the prophylactic power of diagnosis and an alternative ethics of corporeal vulnerability in which the damaged or contaminated body is celebrated as exceeding, evading, or even transcending the doctor’s gaze. In these visions, perverse sexuality, physical precarity, and bodily contamination become regenerating and robust enterprises, solidifying the bonds of American brotherhood through a renewed emphasis on vulnerability, receptivity, and risk. Thus these texts present two related but distinct versions of biopolitics—one regulatory and the other affirmative.<sup>5</sup> It is my argument in this book that antiprophyllactic citizenship relies on a continually evolving dialectical relationship between the two. In its sustained focus on the queer body as an object of medical diagnosis, *Vulnerable Constitutions* thus engages one of the most undertheorized intersections between queerness and disability.

### *Masculinity as a Biosocial Enactment*

We tend to think of masculinity as a single standard that individual men try (and often fail) to live up to. Thus Michael Kimmel’s classic definition of masculinity as “homosocial enactment” describes relationships between men within a patriarchal culture as inherently competitive.<sup>6</sup> For Kimmel, it is not enough to simply be born with male privilege; instead, manhood must be continually tested, and approval is earned through repeated performances that demonstrate proximity to a hegemonic ideal. While one’s proximity to that ideal can be influenced by a number of factors, including intersectionalities of race, class, sexuality, and ability, even the most privileged of men are haunted by their failure to fully measure up to the hegemonic standard; one can always be outmanned (and thus unmanned) by someone slightly more successful, more muscular, or more in control of his emotions and environment. In this schema, masculinity is both individual and generic; it transforms men into isolated competitors striving toward the same abstract goal.

Importantly, this view has its roots in psychoanalytic theory, with many early scholars of masculinity taking inspiration from Freudian models that understood men to be continually compensating for their castration anxieties and unresolved Oedipal conflicts. In an extended Freudian turn, for example, Kimmel describes masculinity as a “flight from the feminine” that is informed by little boys’ need to renounce their identification with the mother under symbolic threat of castration by the father (*Gender of Desire*, 31–32). Later theorists of masculinity have taken a more nuanced psychoanalytic approach. Drawing from Judith Butler’s definition of gender as a series of

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repetitions for which there is no authentic original, C. J. Pascoe argues that normative masculinity requires the “daily interactional work of repudiating the threatening specter of the fag” who occupies the abject negative space of masculinity’s “constitutive outside” (81, 14).<sup>7</sup> Through the prism of psychoanalysis, masculinity is fundamentally melancholic, endlessly preoccupied with how the meager biology of the male body measures up to a larger-than-life (and necessarily unattainable) phallic ideal.

What, then, would a masculinity look like that refuses the psychoanalytic model, treats the phallic ideal with indifference, and revels in the idiosyncratic biology of the body? Susan Bordo hints at this non-Freudian, non-melancholic vision of masculinity in *The Male Body* when she distinguishes between the symbolic authority of the phallus and the “biometaphors” we use to add rhetorical flourish to the male anatomy, from the ubiquitous “throbbing member” of the romance novel genre to the “colorful crests” of male birds during mating season (88). While these biometaphors may feel phallic to the extent that they are connected to bodily competitions among men, they differ from the psychoanalytic phallus because they are anchored to the specificities of the material body. Bordo explains:

Unlike [biometaphors], the phallus stands, not for the superior fitness of an individual male over other men, but for a *generic* male superiority—not only over females but also over other species. And unlike the biometaphors, the phallus stands for a superiority that is not just biological, but partakes of an authority beyond (and often in contest with) the power, needs, and desires of the body. The biometaphors symbolize qualities (such as sexual or reproductive potency, superior aggressiveness, the capacity to give pleasure) whose value is not unique to human cultures but is shared by many other species. The phallus, on the other hand, proclaims its kinship with higher values—with the values of “civilization” rather than “nature,” with the Man who is made in God’s image, not *Homo sapiens*, the human primate. (89)

If the performance anxiety encoded in the phallic ideal creates a masculinity that is individual and generic, then the masculinity of the biometaphor emerges, by contrast, as collective and heterogeneous, emerging directly from the body’s organic materiality. Here, biological variation can lead to competitive clashing; however, no single individual is categorically superior and no single standard is externally imposed. Against usual psychoanalytic

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mechanisms of repression and deferral, the biometaphor is committed to a communal, if unruly, portrait of masculinity-as-species.

Of course, the psychoanalytic phallus is the direct descendent of the species biometaphor, and the two are not always easily disentangled. As a “powerful symbol of male sexual potency” (Bordo, 88), the biometaphor does not exactly eschew patriarchal power. Rather than a vision of queer ecological diversity (like the one documented in Joan Roughgarden’s *Evolution’s Rainbow*), we are left with something closer to evolutionary psychology and its problematic assertions about the “hard-wired” nature of male sexual conquest and feminine receptivity. In Bordo’s own account, the biometaphor does not represent an exuberant alternative to the phallus as much as it reveals the phallus’s ambivalent prehistory. To embrace a masculinity-in-the-flesh does not require one to reject “generic male superiority” and its “authority beyond” the “needs and desires of the body” (89). But it does create a noticeable gap that calls into question the relationship between the concrete materiality of the male body and the abstract nature of the privileges men are assumed to inherit. It does not automatically reinforce the phallic ideal, but it doesn’t necessarily subvert it either.

It is precisely this ambivalence of the biometaphor that makes it a fitting illustration of the kind of masculinity I take as the subject of this book. Like the rhetorical flourish of the “throbbing member,” Bordo’s quintessential biometaphor of the human animal, this masculinity strikes a delicate balance between vulnerability and bravado. It boasts virility but is also, sometimes painfully, sensitive and exposed. The writers I examine in *Vulnerable Constitutions* do not register this duality as a contradiction. Celebrating the male body’s capacity for sensation, intimacy, and receptivity (over hegemonic masculinity’s commitment to mastery, aggression, and self-protection), they have a stake in redefining manhood as a site of collective consciousness that moves beyond the level of the individual. Against the traditional view of masculinity as a competitive site of “homosocial enactment,” these writers refashion masculinity as a collaborative site of *biosocial* enactment.

Following Paul Rabinow’s coining of the term in 1996, Nikolas Rose defines “biosociality” as the “forms of collectivization organized around the commonality of a shared somatic or genetic status” (134). Importantly, these forms of collectivization can go beyond genetics to incorporate a variety of diagnostic framings and health practices, even expanding into what Rose terms “biological citizenship” (134). As norms of political responsibility become increasingly governed by protocols related to the health and vitality of the body, we have come to articulate both our selfhood and our relationship

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to the state through vocabularies of biomedicine. The concept of biological citizenship can be used, for example, to describe projects as diverse as the eugenic regulation of fertility, the demands of AIDS activists in the early 1990s, or the ever-expanding digital technologies (like the Fitbit) through which we record and circulate our own vital statistics. With some notable exceptions, however, we have had few conversations that consider the status of masculinity in the era of biological citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

While biological citizenship most frequently describes practices of medical self-surveillance and shared conformity to medical norms, I examine the way a number of American writers have located a masculinizing power in the overt *rejection* of clinical authority and its prophylactic prohibitions. I refer to this unique form of biosociality as *antiprophylactic citizenship*. In these visions, the physical boundaries of the body are taken to parallel the figurative borders of the nation. However, against the traditional view that the masculine body (and nation) should remain impermeable and impenetrable, antiprophylactic citizenship imagines the possibilities of a masculine body that shows little regard for physical boundaries or national borders. Porous and permeable, it is defined by its receptivity to potentially contaminating outsiders.

These commitments to antiprophylaxis and physical receptivity are categorically different from the masculine bottom values described in Leo Bersani's foundational essay "Is the Rectum a Grave?" (1987), even as they share some important similarities.<sup>9</sup> Both, for example, share a preoccupation with violated boundaries and a related desire to sully the phallic ideal of masculine impenetrability. Written at the peak of the AIDS epidemic, as a homophobic media continued to proliferate images that framed anal-receptive sex as a site of death and disease, Bersani's essay locates a powerful psychoanalytic value in queer sexuality's proximity to the Freudian death drive. Invoking the "intolerable image of a grown man, legs high in the air, unable to refuse the suicidal ecstasy of being a woman," Bersani concludes that "the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal . . . of proud subjectivity is buried" (222). To allow oneself to be penetrated, then, is to access the sublime "self-shattering" pleasure related to the "radical disintegration and humiliation of the self" (212). Through the masochistic embrace of submission, the male body revels in its capacity to be temporarily violated.

Of course, many critics have noted that, far from undoing or "burying" the male ego, Bersani's model relies on the very phallic model it appears to reject. As Tan Hoang Nguyen observes, "The joyful abdication of power only makes sense in the context of those with something to give up"

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(12).<sup>10</sup> Not everyone, in other words, can enjoy the “suicidal ecstasy of being a woman,” least of all, perhaps, those who live their lives as women. Moreover, Bersani masculinizes this form of masochism when he describes it as “the *jouissance* of exploded limits,” and “the ecstatic suffering into which the human organism momentarily plunges when it is ‘pressed’ beyond a certain threshold of endurance” (217). Emphasizing valorized masculine qualities of endurance, fearlessness, and boundary-pushing, Bersani’s outlaw sexualities do not so much suggest the “suicidal ecstasy of being a woman” as they do the necessity of taking it like a man.<sup>11</sup>

Like Bersani, the writers I examine in this book are often engaged in a complicated attempt to remasculinize masochism. However, unlike Bersani, their visions of antiprophyllactic citizenship reject psychoanalytic definitions of masculinity, being preoccupied instead with the biopolitical contexts of physical receptivity. Biopolitics refers to the way the state power has increasingly come to be exercised not through the threat of violence, punishment, or death but through the rise of expert knowledge about bodies and populations and the expansions of techniques designed to optimize human life. Because biopolitics exerts power through the *production* of sexualities rather than their repression or prohibition, it represents an explicit departure from psychoanalysis. Developing this concept in *Society Must Be Defended*, Michel Foucault famously observed that while the traditional “right of sovereignty was the right to take life or let live,” biopolitical control rests instead on the “right to make live and to let die” (241). It is the “take life or let live” dimensions of the epidemic that Bersani is most preoccupied with in his essay. He shares, for example, a newspaper clipping in which an older man is pictured threatening his adult son with a shotgun. The headline reads: “I’d shoot my son if he had AIDS, says vicar!” Inspired by media like this, Bersani sought to “account for the murderous representations of homosexuals unleashed and ‘legitimized’ by AIDS” (221). But through a biopolitical lens, the violence of AIDS is not solely measured in “murderous” homophobic threats made against gay men (as alarming and relevant as those threats are) but in the government’s “let die” attitude toward a huge swath of the queer population as officials conspicuously neglected the public health crisis. In his psychoanalytic turn, then, Bersani dodges his essay’s original biopolitical context, drawing out the epidemic’s figurative dimensions while overlooking its literal ones. When Bersani advocates self-annihilation, he is not advocating physical death or debility (rendered in the growing casualties of the AIDS epidemic or the government’s homophobic neglect of the public health crisis); he is celebrating the death drive and the interior psychic experience of “self-shattering” it enables. But without the heroic masculinity

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of ecstatic bottomhood enabled by Bersani's psychoanalytic detour—a masculinity that is necessarily, in Bersani's definition, isolated, individual, and antisocial—we are left with the precarious lives, collective experience, and social movements of those living with and dying from HIV/AIDS.

In this respect, the antiprophyllactic masculinities that populate this book share more in common with the rhetorics of bug chasing and barebacking documented in Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy*. While “barebacking” simply refers to anal-receptive sex without a condom, its emergence as a coherent concept and practice makes sense only in a world already shaped by the AIDS epidemic, and thus, as Dean argues, it cannot be understood outside the public health panics that developed in response. Barebackers are assumed to imperil their communities through their pursuit of risky personal pleasures. Occupying an even more maligned cultural status, “bug chasers” actively seek out HIV infection, inviting the virus into their bodies with the hopes of seroconversion. Despite these differences, both groups are framed through a rhetoric of suicidal (and homicidal) recklessness, creating lines of transmission that threaten to poison or decimate an otherwise thriving gay community.

But, as Dean points out, these accusations rest on a false equivalence between HIV and death as well as on the ableist assumption that a life of disability is no life at all. Adopting the mantra “infected but not ill,” (68) barebacking and bug chasing subcultures push back against these narratives by reclaiming the virus as a source of vitality and biosocial connection. Against the feminization of the bottom, barebackers “embrace risk as a test of masculinity” (51) in ways that allow HIV-positive status to signify as a type of “battle scar” (52). Bug chasers further literalize the masculinizing socialities of the virus by imagining a boundaryless “bug brotherhood” created through acts of “breeding” between men (83). As Dean observes, through bug chasing, the “feature that distinguishes gay culture from national, ethnic, or religious cultures—namely, that no one is born into gay culture and therefore that each individual must discover or invent it for him- or herself—is dissolved by gay men's breeding the virus among themselves and . . . between generations” (83). Here, the rectum functions not as a “grave” but as a “womb,” birthing new forms of masculinity through the viral circulation of queer biological life. In privileging the biopolitical context of barebacking, Dean reveals the way the subculture's ethical commitments to intimacy, fraternity, and even masculinity take shape not despite barebackers' resistance to health norms but precisely because of them.

Thus my inquiry into antiprophyllactic citizenship is indebted to the work of scholars of queer masculinity—including Tim Dean, David Savran, Darieck Scott, Tan Hoang Nguyen, and Amber Musser—who have called

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for new ways of conceptualizing male receptivity and its relationship to politicized forms of sensation, including masochism. I join these theorists in speculating on what it might mean to take seriously male vulnerability *as* vulnerability. Forging biosocial bonds through the dispersal of sensation rather than through the prophylactic channels of inheritance, through physical generation rather than through psychic repression, antiprophyllactic citizenship presents a lateralized “viral” mode of political belonging—a bug brotherhood of sorts—that is imagined to transcend linear bloodlines. Open-ended and receptive, it represents a generative breaching of the barriers that separate body from environment and citizen from citizen.

Foregrounding the “viral” as a major, if often overlooked, model for conceptualizing American citizenship, my study also takes inspiration from the growing literature on the cultural politics of immunity. Scholars including Priscilla Wald, Ed Cohen, Robert Esposito, Mel Chen, Alexis Shotwell, Beth Ferri, and Neel Ahuja have revitalized critical conversations on the cultural politics of immunity over the past several years, approaching the concept through the lens of new materialism, affect, disability, and the human/animal divide.<sup>12</sup> In her book *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (2008), Priscilla Wald forwards a concept of “imagined immunities” (inspired by Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities”) as a way to theorize “communal belonging in epidemiological terms” (47). These recent formulations expand and complicate the foundational literature that developed in response to the AIDS epidemic, which speculated on how national fantasies of viral transmission have come to be intertwined with anxieties around global exchange and metaphors of military defense.<sup>13</sup> We are accustomed, in other words, to envisioning biological immunity as a process that protects the body against threatening foreign invaders and other contaminating agents.

However, it is notable that the concept of immunity was not always associated with biological processes or prophylactic protection against others. Originating as a legal term related to the “shared duties” of citizenship, it was not until centuries later that immunity was reconceived as a biological phenomenon related to body’s defenses.<sup>14</sup> Playing on immunity’s history as a legal term, Derrida argues that “immunity” allegorizes the exceptionality of state power as it “suspends at least provisionally, democracy *for its own good*, so as to take care of it, so as to immunize it against a much worse and very likely assault” (*Rogues*, 33). It is at this moment that we witness the “suicide of democracy” with the sovereign’s immunity transforming into “autoimmunity”—a body turned against itself in a spectacle of self-defense gone awry.<sup>15</sup> But if, for

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Derrida, immunity points to the exceptionalism of the state in its capacity to act outside of the law, then Ed Cohen sees in immunity the inverse capacity to represent a form of “resistance” to the law that is both corporeal and political. As Cohen points out, one 1893 French medical dictionary defines immunity as a condition that, owing to “idiosyncrasies, age, constitution, acclimatization, or inoculation,” enables “some people to escape a reigning illness” (210–211). Framing contagious diseases as a “reigning” sovereign, these texts understood the immune body as a disobedient subject whose unique constitution existed just beyond the law’s reach. In these imaginings, immunity was neither the result of a military struggle against foreign invaders nor a symptom of unchecked sovereign power but rather a symptom of the sovereign’s failure to rule over a heterogeneous population.

In this way, immunity’s shared role as a legal and medical term make it an important organizing principle for my study. Because discourses of immunity have historically colluded to make it synonymous with security and defense, we might be inclined to see immunity as synonymous with the prophylactic sensibility, and thus in opposition to the forms of masculinity and citizenship I describe in this book. But a more careful consideration of immunity’s biological mechanisms reveals that it may ultimately share more in common with the antiprohylactic sensibility. Against immunity’s persistent association with the bounded body of “possessive individualism,” Cohen pulls out a counterreading that understands the immune system as evidence of the “necessary intimacy of organism and environment” (5), resulting from the body’s interdependence with the “vital contexts in which it necessarily exists” (14). After all, to become immune to a disease, one must first become porous, opening the body, temporarily, to potentially pathogenic others. It is to build a biological resistance based on the incorporation, rather than expulsion, of “foreign” matter. The construction of “immunity-as-defense,” then, obscures the extent to which immunity is based on the ability of the body to act as a “habitat, welcoming the presence of useful, commensal organisms” (29).

As Derrida notes in *Rogues*, one of the fundamental contractions of democracy lies in its aspiration toward “two incompatible things: it has wanted, on the one hand, to welcome only men, and on the condition that they be citizens, brothers, and compeers [semblables], excluding all the others, in particular bad citizens, rogues, noncitizens, and all sorts of unlike and unrecognizable others, and, on the other hand, at the same time or by turns, it has wanted to open itself up, to offer hospitality, to all those excluded” (63). For the writers I examine in this book, democratic unity is imagined precisely as this fleshy incorporation of “bad citizens, rogues, non-citizens, and . . . recog-

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nizable others.” The forms of antiprophyllactic citizenship that they champion can thus be understood as attempts to undo the contradiction of democracy by committing (or attempting to commit) fully to this second impulse of unconditional “hospitality”—the desire to make the body as well as the body politic into a “welcoming habitat.” If the paradox of autoimmunity is the way an organism’s practices of self-defense can turn destructively back upon the organism itself, then the irony of the antiprophyllactic lies in the way seemingly self-destructive or self-contaminating acts can become healthful, restorative, and crucial to the proliferation of political and biological life. As Alexis Shotwell writes in *Against Purity*, “We cannot in the end be separate from the world that constitutes us. Corporeal exceptionalism cannot be sustained because interabsorption is the way things actually are” (85). Representing a generative breaching of the barriers that separate body from environment and citizen from citizen, the “immunitary” need not signify a fortification of national boundaries. Like the “interabsorption” that is a descriptive fact of our biological entanglement with the world and with each other, immunity can also imply an antiprophyllactic ethics of incorporation. Open-ended and receptive, it reflects an approach to biological life that resists objectifications of medicine by inviting contagion rather than expelling it.

### *Revolting Men*

When disability is figured in relation to the nation and its future, it is frequently couched in a language of threat. Disability menaces the “healthy” functioning of the state, serving as a reminder of how the body politic, without proper maintenance, might ultimately turn against itself.<sup>16</sup> As Lennard Davis observes, “For the formation of the modern nation-state it was not simply language, but bodies and bodily practices that also had to be standardized, homogenized, and normalized” (*Bending over Backwards*, 106). The invention of the “average man” was especially useful to representative democracies like the United States as it helped reconcile the nation’s paradoxical commitment to both individuality and equality and solved the related conundrum of how large groupings of individuals could ever be represented by a single person (109). Because such a portrait emphasized harmony through uniformity, revolution and other forms of “social unrest” were likened to diseases that threatened the physical health of the body politic (113). This book explores how these figurations shift when anarchy and disorder become an ideal to be embraced rather than nightmare to be avoided. To celebrate the radical heterogeneity that disability represents would mean opening up

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the body—and the body politic—to that which might be understood as potentially contaminating and allowing it to morph into unpredictable shapes. While the traditional function of the state has been to produce legible populations and “sanitary” citizens, the writers I examine here are preoccupied instead with the political possibilities of the “unsanitary” or unruly citizen whose capacity for political dissent—whose “revolting masculinity”—is presented as the key to recuperating the United States’ own revolutionary origins.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the antiprophyllactic citizen reclaims the American body as radically democratic, with all of the risk and messiness that “rule of the many” implies.

In his study of prerevolutionary American rhetoric, Rogan Kersh points to the “obvious difficulty in promoting ethnicity or culture as the basis for a national union” (255) as the cause of American independence rested not on the strengthening but on the *breaking* of the ethnic ties that might have otherwise bound them as subjects of English rule. This, added to the “pressing need for assistance in the independence effort from anyone willing to provide it,” defined American political union as a type of statehood that rested on something other than “shared blood” (257). Because the ethnicity that the American colonists shared with their “biological forebears” could not serve as a material justification for independence (to the contrary, it worked *against* it), arguments for independence had to rely instead on a more abstract, arguably “disembodied,” set of principles regarding colonial injustice, violated rights, and religious providence. Indeed, when Washington Irving described the United States as a “logocracy . . . a republic of words” (231), his terminology points to an important anxiety: that the substance binding American men to one another was ultimately more rhetorical than physical, issued from an abstract commitment to the spirit of democracy rather than grounded in the flesh.<sup>18</sup> Put simply, while the United States had a Constitution, it lacked a *constitution*.

But if there was an “obvious difficulty in promoting ethnicity or culture as a basis for national union,” such difficulties did not mean that whiteness was unimportant—only that it had been largely disconnected from national bloodlines. American colonists, after all, still needed something that differentiated their citizenship status from the indigenous American populations they displaced and the black populations whose enslaved labor they exploited. Mapping out the relationship between whiteness and what she terms “national manhood,” Dana Nelson considers the ways in which qualities of benevolence, professionalism, and rationality were coded as white and figured against the inherent irrationality and primitivism of America’s indigenous

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and black racial others. Important to this understanding of whiteness was its global expansiveness and lack of national specificity—an expansiveness that Nelson demonstrates through an innovative reading of Delano's fraternal attachments to the Spanish captain Benito Cereno in Melville's story of the same name.<sup>19</sup> Reading Melville's story as an example of what she terms "fraternal melancholy," Nelson understands "national manhood" through a primarily psychoanalytic framework, in which the potential for violent conflict is repressed through the formation of ritualized melancholic identifications between white men. These ritualized structures, she argues, provided opportunities for white men to understand themselves as unified, if not in body, then in spirit.

The connections Nelson draws, however, between nineteenth-century "fraternal melancholy" and late twentieth-century idealizations of U.S. presidential power, suggest a misleading historical continuity. Ending with the 1855 publication of *Benito Cereno* and resuming with the 1997 film *Air Force One*, Nelson's archive leaves a provocative gap that overlooks the impact of that evolutionary theory and sexual science on medical and cultural constructions of American masculinity. If belief in divine "Agency" helped American forefathers ground the principles of American democratic citizenship and national manhood in the absence of an appeal to biological ancestry, then the emergence of evolutionary theory in the mid-nineteenth century weakened those religious justifications, making them less viable as anchors for national belonging. Aided by the publication of case studies of sexual neurosis by figures like Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, the development of fields like sexology and criminal anthropology competed with older forms of religiously based knowledge. In this context, sexual deviance and physical degeneracy became overlapping designations, constructed by and through the same frameworks that gave rise to the body of the "normal" citizen. By the turn of the twentieth century, these medicalized frameworks had begun to reach wider audiences with literary writers adopting and adapting the scientific vocabularies of their day.

In his Marxist history of American masculinity, Kevin Floyd contextualizes the rise of sexual science alongside the emergence of Taylorism. For Floyd, the shop floor and clinic provided mirroring systems of legibility in which bodies were classified and partitioned according to their capacity for productivity, on the one hand, and their sexual drives, on the other. As desire was increasingly "scientifically abstracted, dissociated, stripped from the male body" and made a "condition of possibility for the saturation of all bodies" it now became possible to conceive of men as objects of desire rather than

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desire's exclusive subjects (60). These processes of abstraction—what Floyd identifies as sites of “loss” and “wounding” (118)—resonate powerfully alongside the American anxiety around what it means to inhabit a “logocracy.” But here I would add that the forms of medical objectification that abstracted the male body simultaneously endowed that body with physical substance. As I will go on to illustrate, even as it shook up the epistemological foundations of American brotherhood, the new science of bodies that took root provided new ways to legitimize and ground the abstractions of American democracy through recourse to the medicalized materiality of the body.<sup>20</sup> Thus while sexual science did not originate in America, I want to propose that the United States' unique genesis as a nation created a paradox for citizenship that sexual science helped resolve.

Picking up where national manhood left off, the chapters that follow progress historically and chronologically, each taking up a different moment in the twentieth century when queerness became an object of medical scrutiny. Beginning with the turn-of-the-century invention of the sexual invert, the book moves through early twentieth-century eugenic efforts to regulate women's fertility, 1950s psychiatric models of homosexuality, and millennial “post-AIDS” reclamation of viral metaphors, concluding with an exploration of the contemporary medicalization of both trans identity and low sexual desire. As my readings illustrate, when we mine these intertwined genealogies, what we discover is not simply a history of stigma but a creative refashioning of American manhood through both queerness and disability. In each of these moments, I argue, queerness has been “crippled” by vocabularies of disease, defect, and disorder and resignified by male and masculine-identified writers in ways that created a potent counternarrative of American masculinity.

My use of the term “crip” in this project, like my use of the term “queer,” should be understood not as a noun but as a verb and modifier. It points not toward a coherent identity but toward practices and inflections that move both with and against the grain of compulsory able-bodiedness and across the ability/disability binary. Pioneered by Robert McRuer, Carrie Sandahl, and Alison Kafer, crip theory moves beyond disability studies' traditional focus on inclusion and visibility, urging disability scholars to adopt theorizations that shake up the epistemological foundations of disability. Without dispensing with identity-based questions and practices, crip readings are more interested in interrogating and deconstructing the performative practices through which coercive ideals of health and able-bodiedness circulate.<sup>21</sup> Borrowing from David Halperin's delineation of how queer theory departed from gay and lesbian studies, McRuer suggests that “crip theory might function—like

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the term ‘queer’ itself—‘oppositionally and relationally but not necessarily substantively, not as a positivity but as a positionality, not as a thing, but as a resistance to the norm’” (*Crip Theory*, 31). Indeed, a cursory glance over the figures that populate this book reveals a set of bodies and archives that may not immediately read as “disabled.” What basis is there, one may object, for viewing physical injuries inflicted between men (in the case of Jack London), eugenic explanations of independent female sexual expression (in the case of Faulkner), or the psychiatrization of homosexuality (in the case of Baldwin) as examples of the literary figuration of disability? Setting aside the question of who really counts as disabled, *Vulnerable Constitutions* asks which populations have been targets of medical and social scientific regulation. Tracing these questions across the twentieth- and twenty-first-century literary imagination requires engaging with a genealogy of American masculinity as it has been articulated through the politics of capacity, debility, precarity, and diagnosis.

These writers comprise an unconventional and eclectic archive, from Jack London’s primitivist fantasies to James Baldwin’s critiques of white liberalism and Eli Clare’s self-identification as a disabled rural dyke and later as a trans man. But what all of these writers share is a unique orientation to American masculinity shaped by their identification with vulnerable or at-risk groups. Despite their diverse subject positions, each experienced disillusionment with the way abstract models of American brotherhood failed to meet the needs of a heterogeneous population. Jack London was a Socialist protesting the capitalist exploitation of working-class men; Faulkner was writing in a South devastated by the Civil War; James Baldwin was intimately aware of the gendered violence of racism; Samuel Delany witnessed the public health campaigns that targeted gay spaces rather than saving gay lives during the AIDS epidemic; and Eli Clare writes poignantly of his experience as a transgender working-class rural queer survivor of physical and sexual abuse. Fitzgerald is arguably the most conventional of the writers that I examine, but even he struggled with what it meant to take up a “feminine” sentimental mode of writing against his more “masculine” modernist contemporaries. Positioning themselves against the grain of hegemonic American culture, these writers each expose the ways standard narratives of American citizenship fail to incorporate those groups it renders disposable. They are united by their desire for an alternative account of masculinity and citizenship, one that acknowledges the toll that racism, capitalism, and heterosexism can take on the physical body as well as the psyche. Though the early figures in my study are rarely considered in relation to either queerness or disability (much less

the intersection of the two), I maintain that sexual science provided an opportunity for even the most seemingly canonical writers to rewrite the story of American masculinity as a story of queer-crip rebellion.

In particular, I propose that sexual science and evolutionary discourse provided a means to account for a uniquely American biology without reverting to lines of patrilineal descent. Though we might imagine that evolutionary theory, with its commitment to biological inheritance, would solidify the links between “father” and “son” and impose a set of rigidly hierarchical taxonomies regarding the development of the human species, many of the concepts to emerge from this Darwinian moment provided resources for thinking more eccentrically about species and citizenship. Atavism, for example, provides a nonlinear map of species evolution. Referring to vestigial tails and other evolutionary throwbacks, atavism describes the way that prehistoric ancestral traits, long dormant in the DNA, can suddenly and spontaneously biologically manifest themselves in the present. As Dana Seitler notes:

Operating less by a process of continuity than by sporadic interruption, atavism skips generations: it requires a period of latency or “intermission” before it recurs in the present. It thus belies the conception of identity as direct and individualized and of time as an unbroken continuity, instead placing human beings in a more inclusive and unpredictable history of biological origins and influences. Indeed, atavism is posed as a category of personhood that erases an immediate reproductive connection between parent and child, situating the locus of the individual’s identity in a much earlier ancestral moment that is no longer secured in the past but destined to recur. (2)

By “erasing the immediate reproductive connection between parent and child,” evolutionary discourses offered up a form of national embodiment that was not only grounded in unpredictable and unruly eruptions of the body but also, importantly, detached from national bloodlines. As a result, the vexed question of national birthright became gradually displaced by a more generalized politics of “life.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, while “national manhood” is an extremely useful lens for thinking about constructions of nineteenth-century citizenship, we need models that can also account for the enormous impact that sexual science had on American understandings of national embodiment throughout the twentieth century. As I argue in my reading of Jack London, the “fraternal melancholy” that animates the mourning of dead patriarchs requires an Oedipal

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structure that is actively set aside in London's articulation of antiprophyllactic citizenship. While I do not claim that Oedipal narratives disappear with the emergence of twentieth-century sexual science (indeed, in my chapter on James Baldwin, I make a case for the prevalence of those narratives within the texts of Cold War sexual psychiatry), the authors I examine in this book each articulate a biopolitical counternarrative of American masculinity that is resolutely antiprophyllactic. In these accounts, psychic repression (with its privileging of bonds between fathers and sons) is exchanged for the lateral sensations of male friendship.<sup>23</sup> If the melancholic identifications of the "national man" were based on the repression of American democratic heterogeneity, then the biosocial intimacies of antiprophyllactic citizenship represent its uncensored and unconditional expression. Here, the contradictory and continually mutating will of the masses is claimed as the primary virtue of American democracy.

For an example of such values, we might briefly turn to Thomas Jefferson who, in many of his writings, framed the American Constitution as a site of continual generational revision. Writing for *The Guardian*, Michael Hardt summarizes Jefferson's views on revolution:

The first key to understanding Jefferson's notion of transition is to recognize the continuous and dynamic relationship he poses between rebellion and constitution or, rather, between revolution and government. A conventional view of revolution conceives these terms in temporal sequence: rebellion is necessary to overthrow the old regime, but when it falls and the new government is formed, rebellion must cease. In contrast to this view, Jefferson insists on the virtue and necessity of periodic rebellion—even against the newly formed government . . . "God forbid we should ever be 20 years without such a rebellion," he writes. In Jefferson's view, rebellion should not become our constant condition; rather, it should eternally return.<sup>24</sup>

In Jefferson's model, the goal of democratic government is not to ensure stability across time but rather to allow room for its own periodic undoing. Like the primordial outbreaks that are "destined to recur" spontaneously in the human body, "revolution" is given here as a site of "eternal return" in which the immediate connection between "fathers" and "sons" is disavowed. Jefferson makes this point quite clearly in an 1816 letter to Samuel Kercheval that criticizes men who "look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence" and "deem them like the ark of the covenant, too sacred to be touched" (616).

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Noting that “the dead have no rights” and “no substance,” Jefferson advocates instead for the rights of “present corporeal inhabitants” of the “corporeal globe” to “make the Constitution what they think will be best for them” (617). Thus against the static and predictable channels that bloodlines take, Jefferson points to a generalized politics of “life” that has no truck with dead or absent patriarchs and whose reach extends beyond the boundaries of nation to the “corporeal globe.” To require today’s living breathing generations to follow a dead generation’s laws, Jefferson suggests, is like “requir[ing] a man to wear still the coat which fitted him as a boy” (616). In this view, if America has anything like a “national body,” it is a body whose ever-changing materiality must remain unconstrained by the laws and fashions of its predecessors. In stark contrast to the usual framing of the body politic as a spiritualized sovereign head that rules over a complicit material body, this ideal of the American Constitution (both big “C” and little) prioritizes the body’s fundamental elasticity. Imperfect and endlessly revisable, it opens itself up to periodic mutation and even revolt.

Scientific discussions of atavism are admittedly anachronistic to Jefferson’s writings, which predate the rise of evolutionary theory by half a century. But while the similarities between atavism and periodic rebellion may remain figurative, Jefferson’s experiences with the science of inoculation are likely to have directly informed his vision of an unruly American biology. Having lived through a major smallpox outbreak, Jefferson was a strong proponent of the then-controversial practice of inoculation. Because inoculation involved the deliberate transfer of infection, inoculation felt like a risky practice to many Americans who worried that these attempts to vaccinate otherwise healthy individuals would only cause the disease to spread. Protests arose to resist the practice, including the Norfolk anti-inoculation riots of 1768 and 1769, in which a prominent physician’s house was set on fire after he arranged to have inoculations performed on his family and friends. Jefferson represented the physician in court, and went on to support a bill that helped to decrease restrictions on the practice.<sup>25</sup> Thirty-seven years later, during his presidential term, Jefferson penned a letter of gratitude to “father of immunology” Edward Jenner, who developed the first smallpox vaccine, thanking him on behalf of the “whole human family” (531) for his role in eliminating the smallpox epidemic.

On the one hand, Jefferson’s alignment with medical authority and his efforts to institutionalize vaccination would seem to represent a prophylactic sensibility, protecting the population against the anticipated threat of disease and infection. But inoculation, particularly in Jefferson’s era, was also

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fundamentally antiprophyllactic to the extent that it involved the transmission of biological material across bodies and even species (indeed, the first smallpox vaccine used fluid from milkmaids' cowpox sores). Still an experimental procedure, it seemed to violate health norms in its willingness to infect an otherwise healthy individual with disease. Jefferson's attitude toward inoculation thus links national vitality to an ethics of physical receptivity and constitutional adaptability. While it may be a stretch to describe Jefferson's vision of the national body as a bug brotherhood, his vision of inoculation resonates with the bug chasing mantra: "infected but not ill" (Dean, 68). Indeed, when Jefferson critiques those who "look at constitutions with sanctimonious reverence . . . deem[ing] them . . . too sacred to be touched," (Jefferson, 616) he could just as easily be describing his attitude toward the anti-inoculation rioters set on maintaining the integrity of their physical bodies against deliberate viral transmission.<sup>26</sup> In this respect, antiprophyllactic citizenship emerges as one of the United States' founding principles.