

"M Y T H O P O E T I C" M E N

Remember how the women's movement appeared in its early days? Images of bra burners, easy enough to ridicule, belied the seriousness of feminism and the impact "women's lib" eventually would have on American consumer commerce, to say nothing of society at large.

That may be just the lesson to keep in mind when you see grown men beating drums, dancing with joyful abandon in the woods, and shrieking with grief over their "spiritual wound."

Inspired largely by poet Robert Bly, whose *Iron John: A Book About Men* stunned the publishing world by shooting to the top of the best-seller lists early this year, men in "council" meetings across the nation have turned to Native American and African tribal rituals to help them "connect with and honor each other as men."

This "mythopoetic" men's movement has spawned at least two significant national publications—*Man!* and *Wingspan*—that carry advertising for a dizzying array of retreats and seminars; videotapes, audio cassettes and books on male psychology and spirituality; and drums and other ritual gear of American Indian and African design. Some of the more portable goods—the books and tapes, for instance—are sold at men's gatherings, but most of the ads provide information for ordering by phone or mail.

A reader survey conducted by *Man!*, a mythopoetic quarterly with a press run of 10,000 copies and a paid circulation of 4,000, reveals a readership worth coveting for its quality, if not its quantity: 84% college graduates, an average income of \$54K; 31% over \$70K; 42% professional.

More telling psychographic data on mythopoetic men are hard to come by. True enough, mythopoetic men are concerned about the environment (husbanding the earth, as they've begun to call it), but so was Teddy Roosevelt. They long for peace, but workshops on the "warrior spirit" indicate a possible or partial affinity with Ronald Reagan's concept of peace through strength. Indeed, 1,500 men attending a day-long session with Robert Bly in Washington, D.C., in early February were sharply and passionately divided on Desert Storm.

Perhaps age is the key. In or approaching their middle years, they're likely to be confronting their mortality, asking "is this all there is?" and searching for a more meaningful way to handle the gaping disappointments of midlife than buying a new sports car or chasing a young secretary.

Though devoid of drums, ritual and mythopoetic jargon, a least two current

commercials—from John Hancock and Shearson Lehman Brothers—portray mature men embracing the essential idea of the men's movement: money isn't everything. One shows a fiftyish owner of a trucking company confiding to his broker that he wants to give it all up and go to Paris to become a chef. The other has a grandfatherly executive asking how he can restructure his portfolio. His goal: a "very rewarding" \$11,000-a-year job working with kids.

—Jack Kammer



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