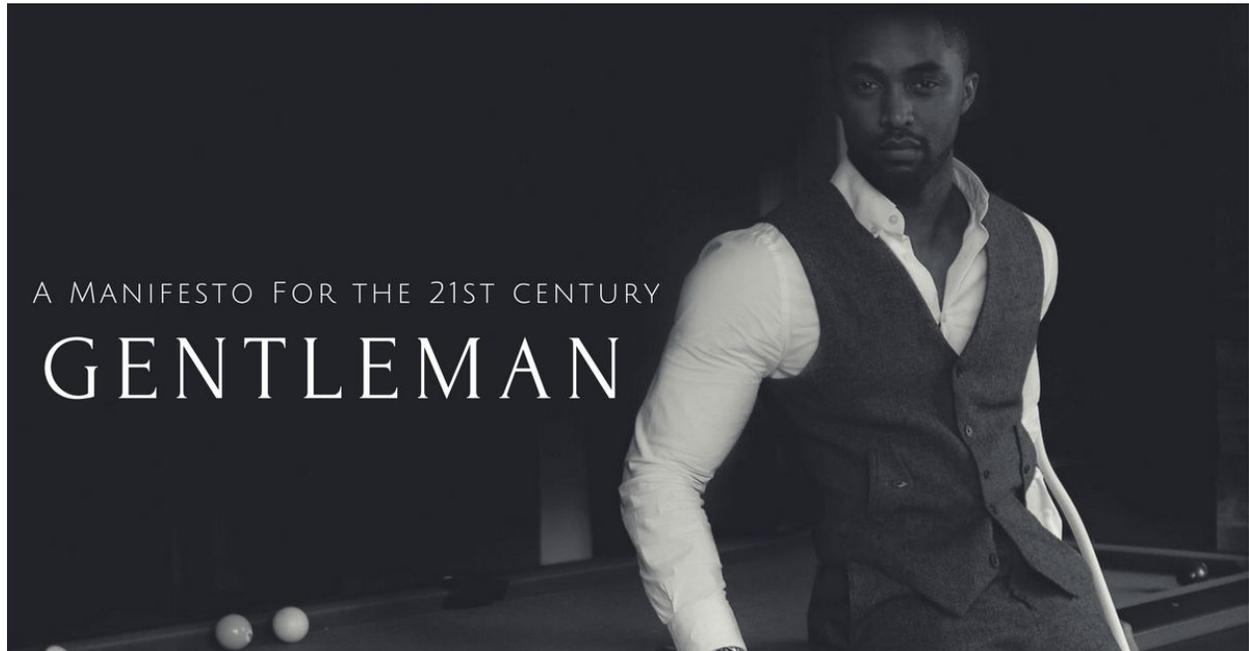


A Manifesto For The 21st Century Gentleman

Redefining Masculinity



The Beginning

I want to talk about masculinity and how we think about it in the 21st Century. You see this is something that I have long thought about. Especially, since I grew up as the oldest of three boys (young men now). In fact it was one of my earliest thoughts. My mom and dad both told me in their own ways that I needed to be mindful of how I carried myself because my brothers and the men in my extended family were watching. I didn't know what exactly this meant but this piece of information coupled with my desire not to disappoint my family name made me hyper aware of all the males around me. I began to seek male role models and naturally, my first one was my dad. He's a six two man with a deep voice and a commanding presence. He doesn't speak much but when he speaks, you have to listen. He has that type of aura about him.

I thought I had to be that exact way but for some reason it didn't feel natural to me. I was energetic and emotional. I enjoyed talking and really being nurturing. I was actually more

like my mom and no matter how much I tried to walk the way my dad walked and talk the way he did, I couldn't help but feel like a fraud so I continued to suppress my natural instincts and conform to what I thought the ideal man was. While my dad was being himself, I was frustrated I wasn't him. So in an attempt to make myself feel better, I would act out and overcompensate. I would yell at my brother, Dele for no reason just to let him know that I was in charge and when we would fight (which was often), I would make it a point to remind him who won.

The Journey

After the strong silent type didn't work for me, I tried other forms of masculinity I had seen in the media and they are as follows:

The Joker: Using jokes and laughter to mask how I feel about things

The Jock: Seeking fame through sports so that I could be the desire of women around me

The Big Shot: Achieving a high level of professional success so I could be "desirable"

The Action Hero: Trying to be the savior in every situation so I can be perceived as Prince Charming

Each of these forms of masculinity in some way or another emphasized power and showing no emotions. I was scared of my own vulnerability. To me, that translated as weakness and that's the farthest thing I wanted to be perceived as. After all, none of the men in my life talked about their feelings, so who was I to feel anything?

As I look back now, I realize how ridiculous these notions were but it stems from the current definition of masculinity that we have which is very limited and small minded. It lowers the standards for us men and doesn't create room for growth. It essentially says that masculinity equals dominance, violence, coercion, and invulnerability.

But I think it's time that we as men raised the bar and truly stepped into our manhood. For starters, let's eliminate sayings like:

"Man up, don't be a girl"

"You're such a girl, act like a man."

"A real man won't do that, don't cry, why are you crying?"

"Boys will be boys"

"That's gay"

I heard all these things multiple times and what that implanted in me was that I needed to be a physical force to be reckoned with.

However, what we don't realize is that words like these stunt our boys' growth into manhood because of the stereotypes they perpetuate and even worse, the influence they have on how we treat others.

It leads to aggressive, emotionally stunted males who harm not just themselves but their children, partners and entire communities.

If we are saying boys will be boys, we are promoting a Peter Pan ideology that simply says we must never grow up and if we are saying that, then are we saying that girls must be the only ones to grow up?

Are we saying that women must wait for us boys to mature into men and by so doing deal with immature, childish behaviors from us along the way?

Hmm...

Also, the idea that you being considered gay is an affront to one's masculinity is one we need to deeply address. It operates under the premise that there's only one path to manhood. Being gay doesn't take away your man card.

Another thing I have found common is that sometimes when men express their feelings, it is considered "gay". Basically, we are telling men that real men don't share their emotions and that gay men are not real men.

Both of which are utterly false.

I am a straight black man but it wasn't until I started traveling post college that I realized how many men around the world grow up feeling like they have to suppress a big part of their identity to fit into society's standard of masculinity.

We have given our men a pass for too long and called it the boys club but we can't approach masculinity with the same hypocrisy that we have had for centuries and expect a change.

On one hand, we are telling our BOYS to be strong, fight through the pain and never cry and then on the other hand we expect our MEN to be emotionally mature, respectful and paragons of virtue all of a sudden.

See the disconnect?

Where was the training?

Who were the guides for our boys as they transitioned into "manhood"?

This is not meant to shame us men because I know for a fact that there are plenty of good men out there but we live in a world occupied by too many boys and not enough men. There needs to be some sense of pride when it comes to manhood so I'm arguing that we promote a new type of manhood — **The 21st Century Gentleman**.

The 21st Century affords us with multiple opportunities that centuries previous to this one didn't give us namely globalization and digital media. I believe we can take advantage of all these opportunities as men by following the **4 S's (self awareness, skill development, social empathy & service to others)**.

Self Awareness

I recently read an [article](#) that said *"to be self-aware is to understand that what you say and do affects people — and to have that fact matter to you."* The article went on to say that:

self-awareness is the ability to look inside yourself, read your own behavior and feelings, and rationally consider the implications of those actions and thoughts.

We as men can't be leaders without self awareness so we must first come to terms with who we are, what we like and be ok with that independent of what others think. To do this, we must give ourselves and other men permission to express ourselves and ask questions.

Write down your key plans and priorities. Write down what you want your legacy to be and every time you feel something or want to say something, ask yourself whether it aligns with what you want you want to be remembered for.

Skill Development

Remember how I said the 21st century brought with it digital media and globalization? Well these two concepts are catalysts for us to develop our skills and one of the best ways to do this is through education and taking away teaching moments from everything we consume.

In order for men to reach their fullest potential in today's competitive world, they need to be well versed in many topics. Essentially, we should be Renaissance men. Competence in a broad range of abilities and areas of knowledge should be every man's goal and is within every man's grasp given the access to information we have via podcasts, books, YouTube, TV shows, movies, etc.

As consumers of content, we should start to use the internet to inculcate ourselves with knowledge in multiple fields including, arts, current events, geography, science, entertainment & history. Start to do this and watch as your worldview expands. No longer will we see ourselves through a narrow lens. We would not only be exposed to the endless possibilities that exist for us men but also to the different perspectives that are out there.

This leads me to my next S which is...

Social Empathy

I remember watching the [10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Woman video](#) when it came out and saying to myself, "wow I didn't know it was that bad".

The video shows an actress named Shoshana Roberts walking through various neighborhoods of New York City, wearing jeans and a black crewneck T-shirt, with a hidden camera recording her from the front. The two-minute video includes selected footage from ten hours, showcasing what has been described as "catcalls" and street harassment of Roberts by men. The behaviors included comments on Roberts' appearance, attempts to initiate conversation, angry remarks, and men following her for several minutes. There were 108 such instances.

Watching that video gave me only a small glimpse of what it was like for many women around the world to walk down the street. I felt ashamed of myself for not being aware of what was going around me on a daily basis so I brought it up with many of my guy friends and they expressed similar sentiments.

I say that we as boys and men need to do more to understand the points of views of women and we can start with the women in our everyday lives like our moms, sisters, aunts, cousins and friends.

Saying things like "can you tell me more about how you felt?" or "talk to me about what is going through your mind right now" can go a long way with improving our empathy muscles.

Service to Others

So you've done the self awareness work, improved your skills and built your empathy muscles. The next thing you need to do is to give back and you give back in the form of service. I became aware of this when my youngest brother, Tunde was born. There's a 10 year gap between us but as me and my middle brother, Dele have watched him grow up, we realized the importance of being good role models and making sure he didn't pick up on our bad habits so we stopped fighting and started to watch how we talked to each other.

We wanted to create a space for him to open up, be vulnerable and explore other sides of himself and it definitely wasn't an easy process but it is ultimately one of the most rewarding experiences Dele and I have shared with our brother and he knows that he can ask us anything without us judging him or questioning his manhood. We let him know early on that it was okay to say "I love you" and to cry. Things Dele and I didn't do much growing up.

Let's do the same for our young boys by volunteering to teach them the 4 S's.

Once again this article isn't about shaming men. I am a man after all. It's about doing right by our boys and making sure that we show them that there are multiple paths to masculinity. Our men are under siege like never before and in many cases for good reasons so let's reevaluate the icons of masculinity we have uplifted and strive to go beyond the two dimensional images that we have created. Let's be authentic, vulnerable and respectful.

When it's all said and done, what will they say about the men of our century. Will it be one of empowerment, enlightenment and trailblazers or will it be one of misogyny, homophobia and low standards? The choice is ours. Here's a manifesto I hope we men of the 21st century can follow. One that taps into our emotions and power and simultaneously values respect and responsibility.

The Manifesto

1. The 21st Century gentleman earns a lady's respect and does not demand it
2. The 21st Century gentleman does not use the word bitch to refer to lady
3. The 21st Century gentleman is not afraid to stand up for what he believes in no matter how unpopular it is
4. The 21st Century gentleman is reliable and punctual
5. The 21st Century gentleman is a good listener and listens to understand not to prove a point
6. The 21st Century gentleman is socially conscious and stands up for the oppressed
7. The 21st Century gentleman is polite and well mannered
8. The 21st Century gentleman is not intimidated by a lady's ambition or drive. He fans the drive
9. The 21st Century gentleman takes pride in his appearance
10. The 21st Century gentleman is curious about the world and other cultures and so educates himself accordingly
11. The 21st Century gentleman actively combats patriarchy
12. The 21st Century gentleman actively mentors the youth because he knows they are the next set of global leaders
13. The 21st Century gentleman promotes respect for women as opposed to misogyny. He does not holler at women or make catcalls
14. The 21st Century gentleman sets goals bigger than himself so that he can grow into the man to achieve them
15. The 21st Century gentleman is not afraid to be vulnerable
16. The 21st Century gentleman understands that at any given time, there is a potential for different solutions to a problem and so he is inclusive
17. The 21st Century gentleman is committed to leaving this world a better place than it was before he came into it
18. The 21st Century gentleman celebrates other people's successes
19. The 21st Century gentleman is comfortable in his own skin
20. The 21st Century gentleman commits to putting a smile on five people's faces everyday
21. The 21st Century gentleman commits to his mental, physical and spiritual health