In June 1923 New Yorkers were treated to a new musical, Helen of Troy, New York, whose story, inspired by the Arrow collar and Arrow Man, turned on crises of commerce and romance. Helen is a pretty young secretary to a Troy collar factory owner, Mr Yarrow, named to evoke the Arrow collar. Mr Yarrow, facing falling sales of a stiffly starched collar that consumers find uncomfortable, hires a photographer, portrayed as bohemian woman artist, to take publicity pictures. Her strikingly handsome model, Theodore, modelled on the elegant advertising image of the Arrow Man (Figure 1), demonstrates the inadequacy of comfortable cotton collars, by dipping one in water, dissolving its starch and revealing unmanly limpness. Helen, in love with the son of her boss’s rival, saves the day by inventing the semi-soft collar, proving her superiority to the unscrupulous efficiency expert who pursues her affections. In the musical finale, the sons of Mr Yarrow and his rival triumphantly unite to form a new firm specialising in semi-soft collars that promises riches for all. The New York Times praised the show as a ‘light-hearted burlesque of big business, where any man can be captain of industry … There wasn’t a dry collar in the house when the audience joined in the fun with shouting and laughter.’

For a 1920s theatre audience, this story recalled the real-life economic crisis and triumph of a high-profile industry, Troy, New York’s manufacturers of detachable collars, a wardrobe staple for most US men and all but working-class men in Britain and Europe since the 1840s. In the first decade of the twentieth century, many young American men began to purchase informal soft collars and attached-collar shirts, rejecting their fathers’ uncomfortable starched collars. The semi-soft cotton collar rescued collar companies’ fortunes, thanks to the product’s appeal and the power of advertising, most especially the Arrow Man. In 1907, in order
to compete with rival companies’ new soft collars and at the same time appeal to traditional tastes, Cluett, Peabody, and Co., a major Troy collar manufacturer, made advertising history. The firm introduced a new line of collars constructed of cotton rather than linen, which met older standards of formal attire while introducing new characteristics that fitted changing styles. Because, as Theodore demonstrated, traditionalists associated comfortable cotton collars with unmanliness, even spinelessness (compared to stiff collars’ masculine uprightness), the company anticipated they would have to ‘sell’ the Arrow collar to new and old markets. In order to convince retailers to sell Arrow collars and entice consumers to buy them, Cluett, Peabody hired the firm’s first advertising manager, who recruited the new advertising firm Calkins and Holden, and the noted illustrator Joseph Christian Leyendecker, to create an image representing the ideal American Man. The Arrow Man’s bold, elegant image, defined by crisp, precise lines and dramatic lighting, graced advertising copy from 1907 to 1931, in magazines, newspapers, billboards, public transport, and retail store displays. The Arrow Man helped make the firm the nation’s foremost collar manufacturer and left an indelible mark on popular culture. Americans who have forgotten Helen of Troy, New York recall a line from a Cole Porter song from the 1934 Broadway musical Anything Goes, ‘You’re the top, you’re an Arrow Collar’. The term Arrow Man became a popular expression referring to a handsome, desirable, stylish man. Tall, well
built, with broad shoulders, a strong jaw, chiselled features, and muscular hands, he was a visual representation of the New American Man and the male equivalent of the Gibson Girl who represented the New Woman.4

The Arrow Man and his collar were but players in a complex story of social and cultural transformations, spanning the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. Recent scholarship emphasises that, like women’s dress, long synonymous with change and variety, men’s fashions and physical ideals also shifted, albeit more subtly and in different ways from women’s. Many men, like women, were also enthusiastic consumers and, like new modes of femininity, the new masculine ideals of the early twentieth century’s first decades were tied to consumption.5 The tale of the Arrow collar and Arrow Man are key to this story because detachable collars, mass marketed to men in the US and internationally from the 1840s, were among the earliest mass-produced consumer items. Yet the story of the Arrow Man and his collar also reveals that changing masculine ideals and physical appearance, heightened by the new visual and consumer culture, were part and parcel of broad and fundamental shifts in the US: new occupational and social class configurations and emerging American popular culture.

In an age of compelling advertising images created for enterprising manufacturers and retailers by innovative advertising agencies and talented artists such as Maxfield Parrish, why was the Arrow Man’s influence so deep and wide-ranging? The Arrow Man was one of the most successful examples of a remarkable development, the proliferation of idealised visual images of people through the new mass media, which in turn heightened the significance of a long-range trend, Americans’ increased awareness and preoccupation with external appearance. By the 1830s the affluent middle classes in relatively anonymous, urban settings increasingly tended to measure people encountered in public by outward appearance rather than by the personal knowledge of character typical of small, tightly knit communities.6 At the turn of the twentieth century, films, photographs, posters, and advertising illustrations in the new mass-circulation magazines took advantage of innovations in reproduction of images, especially photography and colour lithography, and technology that increased availability and flexibility of electric lighting to dramatise personal images.7 Owners and managers of the department stores that sprang up in cities and suburbs hired specialists trained in design and display who used colour, lighting, glass, and props to show off new fashions in clothing and other goods on shop floors and windows facing streets. Personal appearance took on new meanings, including performance and pretence, as men and women in rural and urban areas became aware of possibilities of cultivating their own external appearance through make-up, lighting, and stylish garments, which they viewed in the new media and newly designed shops. Mass-media images like the Arrow Collar Man were central to
shifts in the significance of appearance because they were not only tools for marketing products nationally, but also models for individuals' presentation of self to others in public and private settings.8

The emerging advertising industry added another dimension to Americans' changed relationship with personal appearance. The image of the Arrow Collar Man was a novelty on the visual landscape, an early example of the advertising industry's strategy of marrying high quality art with innovations in distribution of goods, reproduction and dissemination of images, and business. Manufacturers had been using advertising since the eighteenth century, but before the 1880s most advertisements relied on words describing advantages of goods or services for sale with a few illustrations that were utilitarian, designed to provide information that supplemented the text. Advertising changed dramatically in the late nineteenth century as the goals of retailers and manufacturers shifted to selling mass-produced goods in national markets. Manufacturers and retailers sought not only to stimulate or create the desire for goods and foster product loyalty through brand-name recognition but also to legitimate profit-making strategies of business and transform commodities into cultural artefacts and icons appealing to the affluent middle class, the major market for consumer goods. Advertisers, challenged to produce more effective advertising, reinvented themselves. Art historian Michelle Bogart explains that new heads of firms enlisted art in their campaign in part to establish themselves as honest, responsible professionals, rather than misleading promoters of goods such as patent medicines. Earnest Elmo Calkins, organiser of the firm responsible for the Arrow collar advertisements, was a leader of the movement to harness to advertising goals the high-quality design, colour and form which was typical of illustration, posters and painting. Calkins, both businessman and appreciator of the arts, was convinced that visual images could communicate messages more effectively than the written word and that advertising art could be public art, a means to bring art to ordinary people.9 Some painters rejected business interests as irreconcilable with aesthetic ideals, but many modernists who sought to imaginatively depict forms and situations of contemporary life in bold images designed to reach large numbers of people embraced advertising's goal of reaching a popular audience, and saw an affinity between public art like mural painting and new billboard advertising. When Calkins started his firm, he hired designers experienced in industry and retailing and drew into his fold prominent talented magazine illustrators, including Leyendecker, N. C. Wyeth, and Maxfield Parrish. The Arrow Man advertisements were an early example of advertising's new look in which compelling visual images dominated written copy.10

Leyendecker was an excellent choice. He was well known to both the general public and other artists, including his close friend Norman
Rockwell, who described him as America’s ‘most famous illustrator’ and believed that but for unfortunate life circumstances Leyendecker’s artistic status would have been greater and more enduring. Leyendecker was especially admired for his depiction of masculine subjects. Connolly, Cluett, Peabody’s new advertising manager, former editor of the Chicago men’s apparel trade journal Haberdasher, was familiar with the images he created for Hart, Schaffner and Marx, Chicago’s manufacturer of popular, high-quality men’s clothing and a pioneer in using national advertising. Leyendecker was suited to meet the needs of the new advertising industry. He began his career during the last decades of the golden age of illustration, when many talented artists created images for great literature, and he moved easily into advertising art, which self-consciously combined bold, striking images of modern art movements with natural realism that the consuming public recognised as art. He learned accurate anatomical drawing from life at the Chicago Art Institute (1889), while apprenticed to an engraving house, and then (with his equally talented brother Frank) at Paris’s Académie Julien (1896–7). Leyendecker’s biographer, Michael Schau, explains that, unlike the Académie Julien that disdained new trends, the young artist appreciated the potential of emerging commercial poster art and absorbed the line and colour characteristic of art nouveau masters that adorned the streets and boulevards of fin de siècle Paris.

Arrow collar advertisements pioneered a strategy now taken for granted in the visual landscape. The Arrow Man campaign, which highlighted the social background and environment of the product’s user, was one of the earliest to employ what was later termed a ‘soft sell’, a restrained, refined message in which the products’ consumer was as important as images of the products themselves. Advertising agencies sought to create images with which viewers could identify, either because figures in advertisements were familiar (perhaps homey or neighbourhood) types, or admired models of stylish, knowing individuals in sophisticated settings. Because images of a product’s user conveyed personal characteristics with which viewers could identify in a variety of ways, objects for sale were themselves personified or animated with personal qualities. This advertising strategy sought to convert goods for sale from utilitarian objects into a means to enhance outward personal appearance in order to manage self-presentation to others.

The image of the Arrow Man was a masculine ideal that Americans could admire and/or identify with, but he was hardly a bloodless abstraction. Leyendecker used his skill and distinctive style to create a man with a distinct physical presence. Classically trained in the complexities of human anatomy, the artist skilfully indicated the physical body beneath the elegant garments without describing it blatantly or literally. The physical contours of the images are shaped with crisp lines that articulate crucial points at which the body contacts and gives shape to tailored garments.
Turns in the directions of lines that shaped the body and features are not rounded but gently angled, conveying strength and presence. Moreover, the Arrow Man was not a single individual, but a type that included salient features of various examples of white male attractiveness appealing to a variety of personal tastes. For example, a 1913 Arrow advertisement (Figure 2) shows four men of different life stages in a formal setting, a box at the theatre, observed by an attendant. Like other illustrators, Leyendecker did not rely on himself as a model but used studio models, a practice he retained even when other illustrators shifted to photographs in the early twentieth century. Many models were actors, trained to perform, convey a stance and emotions, maintain a pose, gestures, and expressions for visual artists who are astute observers. The first Arrow Man was Charles Beach, an actor who became the artist’s assistant and companion, described by Rockwell as tall, powerfully built, extraordinarily handsome and well dressed, like ‘an athlete from one of the Ivy League Colleges’. The link between new film and stage stars and advertising images was not lost on consumers. As Americans came to associate glamour and sophistication with films, the Arrow Man became more than an advertising icon but took on the cachet of a matinée idol. Popular accounts report that fan mail for the Arrow Man, including marriage proposals and gifts on Christmas and Valentine’s Day, amounted to more than that which Rudolf Valentino received at the height of his career.

Appearing for twenty-three years, Arrow Man advertisements were remarkably consistent and distinctive, although they became less so as others, including Rockwell, imitated his style. Earlier images were sketchier, more linear, with less bold colour and dark/light contrasts; in later years figures were more idealised and dramatically lit (although images of this sort also appeared as early as the World War I period). In the Arrow Man’s last appearance in 1931 (Figure 3), figures are less detailed, with broad planes on faces and garments; contrasts in value and elegant props create drama and a romantic mood. The Arrow Man and his female companion are posed as if on a set, rather than in a specific domestic setting or place of entertainment. Interpretation of the significance of appearance is left to the viewer’s imagination, imparting an air of mystery. The consistency of Leyendecker’s work was double-edged, as it ensured success in advertising, but also meant less artistic development. Rockwell contends that Leyendecker lived slightly beyond his means in order to constantly produce and not linger over creations. This strategy encouraged him to rely on technique rather than depth of meaning, repeat images that had proved successful in the past and, worse, prevented him from taking jobs that paid little but could challenge him artistically and enhance his reputation. But Leyendecker was not alone. Advertising agencies began to exert more control over artists and during the Great
Figure 2: This 1913 Arrow advertisement, picturing elegant men enjoying an evening at the theatre, is one of J. C. Leyendecker’s more complex images. Note the variety of male dress and types, including a young man (far left) wearing new fashions favoured by his generation. Photograph courtesy of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, Troy, New York.
Figure 3: The last Arrow advertisement (1931) is an example of a variation on J. C. Leyendecker’s style. The Arrow Man and his companion are depicted more abstractly, with little detail, accompanied by elaborate yet stylised props suggesting an elegant, dramatic interior, perhaps the lobby of a theatre. Note that there is little feeling of a relationship between the two figures, and the Arrow Man’s female companion has less ‘life’ than the Arrow Man himself. Photograph courtesy of the Rensselaer County Historical Society, Troy, New York.
Depression, businessmen, under pressure to sell products, began to reject images that drew on modern art styles in favour of those appealing to a wider public taste.¹⁸

The Arrow Man’s compelling appearance also resonated with changes in Americans’ consciousness of external appearance that varied by gender, race, and class, prescribing different sorts of outward appearance for women and men, and people of different races. In the mid-nineteenth century, most white Americans evaluated both women and men in terms of moral character rather than personal appearance, and perceived physical attractiveness as an external manifestation of an individual’s inner, moral qualities. Many African-American reformers, aware of racial implications of linking personal appearance with morality, questioned this notion.¹⁹

But for white Americans, fashion, constantly changing with the vicissitudes of taste, was incompatible with beauty, which was timeless, immutable, and linked with women, not specific individuals but idealised physical types signifying inner personal characteristics tied to feminine ideals. Male beauty was also defined as universal, although rarely explicitly articulated, echoing the male silhouette of classical antiquity: broad, muscular shoulders, narrow waist, flat stomach, and long legs. By the end of the nineteenth century, as Americans’ awareness of personal appearance shifted, the view that beauty was a manifestation of inner goodness and morality declined. Female beauty was increasingly linked to fashion, part of the management of self-presentation in public, and to business, including the cosmetic industry and magazines providing advice. Many respectable women took to using cosmetics and beauty-enhancing accessories.²⁰ Men, too, began to separate inner moral character from appearance. Contrary to popular wisdom and scholarship identifying women as the early twentieth century’s quintessential consumers, men were prime targets of marketing strategies and enthusiastic consumers, albeit unlike women. Many men purchased stylish garments, especially collars, for their own use through mail order catalogues, men’s furnishing shops, or at department store counters especially designed to attract and sell to the male customer.²¹

Yet, despite shifts in gender ideologies, some aspects of men and women’s external appearance still invited moral judgements about the inner person, chiefly regarding sexuality. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a woman’s fashionable middle-class appearance still signalled the status of a respectable ‘lady’, and lack of respectability could have dire consequences. A working woman who appeared unrespectable was regarded as sexually available, or a prostitute, and risked respectable woman’s scorn and physical danger.²² What was important for men was that they not appear to have external characteristics typical of women. Because Americans thought of preoccupation with fashion as a woman’s realm, white middle-class men who deliberately embellished their outward appearance (beyond
the purposes of health and physical fitness) risked being thought of as unmanly, effeminate, and in extreme cases suspected of homosexuality. In light of this powerful gender ideology, the Arrow Man’s cachet is puzzling. If many white middle-class Americans suspected that men who embellished their appearance were unmanly, then why did the Arrow Man become a symbol of the well-dressed, fashionable, desirable man? And there is another question. A number of scholars, assuming that an artist’s social perspective and response to men and women influence the content of their artistic products, read the Arrow Man’s physicality and gaze as homoerotic and Leyendecker as homosexual. Martin and others observe that, in more than a few illustrations, attractive men gaze openly and even intensely at each other, suggesting an intimate, sensual relationship (Figure 2). In illustrations that depict two or more men in the company of an equally elegant woman, the Arrow Men gaze at each other rather than the woman; the woman is usually rendered with less detail (although drawn beautifully), does not regard the men, and conveys considerably less emotion. Cooper notes that in illustrations depicting the Arrow Man’s full body, the crotch reveals a just noticeable bulge suggesting the fullness of genitals. Boyce points to numerous coded references to homosexuality in both images and text. To twenty-first-century observers, the circumstances of Leyendecker’s life support this interpretation. The artist never married, and biographical details reveal no relationships with women. Leyendecker commuted to his New York City studio from his home in New Rochelle, which he shared with his sister and his brother Frank and later also Charles Beach, who became his manager and assistant. Augusta and Frank left because of family quarrels, in 1924, but Beach stayed until Joseph’s death in 1951 and inherited half the artist’s estate. Yet there is no direct evidence that Leyendecker’s relationship with Beach was homosexual, although Rockwell’s account reveals a close emotional attachment.

Another, more historical, question is more to the point. Did white middle-class men and women at the turn of the twentieth century perceive homoeroticism in Arrow Man advertisements? George Chauncey, author of *Gay New York*, says, no. Before the 1930s the gay male world was visible and diverse, but not in terms of the late twentieth-century oppositional categories of homosexuals and non-homosexuals. Men who engaged in sex with other men from time to time were not always identified as homosexual, and many homosexuals – those who identified themselves as queer – maintained their manly appearance, identifying themselves as homosexual because of their sexual orientation rather than their looks. Queers, sharing the perspective of many heterosexuals that men who obviously used artificial means to improve their looks were unmanly, took care to differentiate themselves from fairies, who lost their manly status because
of their effeminate styles of dress and posture. In short, in early twentieth-century urban America, it was possible for men who had a conventionally masculine appearance to be intensely sexually active with other men but not risk stigmatisation as ‘abnormal’. To early twentieth-century observers, the Arrow Man was most certainly conventionally masculine.

Yet homoeroticism apparent to twenty-first century viewers of Leyendecker’s images should not be dismissed out of hand. Viewed in context of the new consumer advertising, it is a window into understanding the considerable power of advertising images, and how they both tapped into and contributed to shaping ideologies of sexuality and gender. Martin suggests that Leyendecker’s Arrow Man and other male images resonated with so many people a century ago because emotional, even erotic, communications between men conveyed the sexuality inherent in consumerism’s message of self-gratification. Americans’ new preoccupation with personal appearance was more than concern with external images, but was also rooted in the potential of gratifying deep and complex emotional and physical desires. The men who shaped the new field of advertising understood that high-quality art could resonate with these inner desires, and many talented artists were stimulated by the challenge. In the first decades of the twentieth century, people were not startled by imagery with homoerotic connotations, partly because they defined homosexuality narrowly, but also because it was already assimilated into advertising messages.

It was fitting for the Arrow Man to symbolise shifts in men’s perceptions of their external appearance. Cluett, Peabody, and Co. utilised innovative advertising strategies to ensure demand for a new version of a product that had been central to men’s management of personal appearance for almost a century. Legend has it that the detachable collar was invented in 1827 by Hannah Lord Montague, wife of a Troy, New York, businessman, to solve a common household problem: an entire shirt had to be laundered when only its collar was soiled. Entrepreneurs who set up Troy’s first collar factories in the 1840s found ready markets because of a series of interrelated changes in social class and gender ideologies. The wearing of clean white linen had long been a mark of high status for men and women. In the eighteenth century and first decades of the nineteenth, elite men on both sides of the Atlantic wore shirts with stiff fronts and attached collars, often with a cravat, while working-class men typically wore collarless shirts under sturdy work-clothes, adding a muffler for warmth. (British working men continued to wear collarless shirts with mufflers well into the twentieth century.) In the early nineteenth century, laundering, one of the most arduous household tasks, became even more troublesome as standards of cleanliness rose because prosperous people began to associate cleanly garments with cleanly bodies. At the same time, increasingly, newly affluent men sought to demonstrate
cleanliness and taste through public display of dress, especially clean white linen. These new entrepreneurs, commanders of growing commercial and industrial enterprises, sought to identify with old elites, associated with European gentility. They transformed elite gentility into a new ethos, middle-class respectability, which combined consumption, cleanliness, and genteel manners with self-discipline and economic productivity. By signalling cleanliness and taste, detachable collars marked strict boundaries fundamental to Victorian social life: social position, gender, age, and situations delineated by space and time: morning, afternoon, evening, outdoors and indoors, public and private, household, schools and places of entertainment.

Linen was the fabric of choice for respectable gentlemen and imitators, but some collars were highly starched cotton and others, paper, celluloid, or rubber. Figure 2 shows four examples of hundreds of collar styles, varying in height, width of opening between points, stiffness, and finishing, and characteristics of points, decoration (pleats or tucks), and fastenings. Throughout the nineteenth century, standing collars of various heights were most popular for formal wear (a low version is worn by the gentleman pictured third from the left). Informal turnover collars, constructed like twentieth-century shirt collars such as the one with long points worn by the young man on the far left, were most common in the first half of the nineteenth century. Turned-outward collars appeared in the second half. Some had turned-down tips or side edges, later termed ‘wing collars’, similar to that worn by the military man on the far right. Collar manufacturers gave collar styles names like Hurworth, Chatley, and Warville that evoked British gentlemen, associated with civilisation and epitomised by British refinement, gentility, and political authority.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, white, middle-class men’s respectability also rested on ideals of manliness, conveyed in part by physical demeanour. There was not one but several interrelated and overlapping manly ideals, but the one most closely associated with economic achievement was the entrepreneur who was independent from wages – whether gentleman property-holder or owner of shop or factory. The ideal white middle-class man conveyed strength and authority through personal characteristics, self-discipline, restraint, and autonomy in private life, business, and politics, and physical appearance. Yet the ideal middle-class man was not muscular and brawny – for this signified manual workers, labourers, independent farmers, and master craftsmen – but slender, refined and graceful, with erect posture, restrained gestures, and controlled demeanour. He avoided the slouching posture associated with labourers, farmers, and small tradesmen, and the downward gaze typical of servants.

Detachable collars contributed to manly demeanour because of their special relationship to the body. Collars, like hats, drew attention to the
head and face, often perceived as representing an individual’s ‘natural’
state and a major focus in social relations, especially formal interaction.
Faces took on new meaning in this period, as people became familiar with
photographs of prominent people and film stars, and possibilities of
managing appearance through make-up and lighting. Like other forms of
self-presentation, face management was gendered. For women, make-up
became ‘dress’ for the face, a second skin through which a woman repre-
sented her inner self by manipulating outward appearance.37 For men,
collars were face-enhancing because they could detract from, flatter, or
neutralise the look of features, skin quality, and expression. Because
collars firmly encircled the neck, they constrained the position of the head,
neck, and shoulders and encouraged the wearer to sit, stand, and walk in
a particular manner. At the peak of the popularity of high-standing collars
in the 1890s, collars of high-ranking men (including many employers)
prevented a downward gaze, differentiating them from clerks, whose low
collars allowed movements required for writing.38 To look downward,
high-status men had to literally look down their noses.

Collars were about personal appearance on multiple levels, including
visibility as well as guise and pretence. In the nineteenth century, collars
were outer extensions of undergarments that created the appearance
of bodily cleanliness by suggesting, but not revealing, what was hidden
from view. Men’s outer garments – waistcoat (usually high-buttoned), and
jacket (often knee-length) – covered upper bodies; most collarless shirts
were undergarments not meant for public display. No respectable middle-
class man appeared in shirtsleeves in public, but wore a jacket, waistcoat,
and cravat during his entire working day. Parts of the body not hidden by
outer garments were adorned with detachable, starkly white starched
linen: a ‘bosom’ concealed the shirtfront, and stiffly starched white collars
and cuffs covered neck and wrists. The clean whiteness of these visible
portions of inner garments was all the more striking because it contrasted
with dark colours, typically black, of middle-class men’s formal outer
garments.39 The neck, strategic because it accumulated perspiration and
airborne dirt, bordered the less than cleanly private body that even most
affluent men did not bathe daily. Detachable collars were strategic because
they simultaneously displayed outer personal qualities and represented
the private body and inner garments. A soiled collar told tales of unclean-
liness elsewhere.40

Nineteenth-century middle-class white men’s attire contrasted with
working-class men’s daily occupational dress. Manual workers and shop-
keepers wore overalls, loose work-jackets, and work shirts with soft,
attached, turned-down collars; these were dyed indigo to conceal stains,
and loosely fitted to allow upper body movements necessary for physical
labour without straining seams. Yet functional work clothes also had social
meanings. Through occupational dress, working men displayed respectability and manhood rooted in pride in skill and success in a trade, muscularity, and physical prowess. Astute observers could distinguish manual workers and shopkeepers from gentlemen because in their own milieu working men’s movements, gestures, and posture were appropriate to their occupations and garments.41

American middle-class manliness differed from the British model because it incorporated the contradictory double-edged ideology that simultaneously recognised the limitations of wage-earning yet celebrated opportunities for mobility. On the one hand, US class divisions were deep. Prosperous Americans pitied white-collar employees, albeit middle-class, because they were dependent on wages. Many working-class men resented humble men who imitated employers; the term white collar originated in the 1880s as ‘white-collar stiffs’, skilled workers’ term for clerks who put on airs because they were privileged to dress like employers.42 Yet Americans believed that US social distinctions should be fluid. Manly ideals were not entirely closed to enterprising white working-class men because apprentices in skilled crafts could become master craftsmen and entrepreneurs. New entrepreneurs represented modified manliness based not on inherited property or acquired skill but success in business, industry, or profession.43

Many manual workers considered themselves respectable in the middle-class sense, and emulated fashionable dress and demeanour in public, especially on Sundays. Detachable collars played a special role in working-class men’s imitation of middle-class demeanour because collars were less expensive than other accoutrements of middle-class status – jackets, trousers, waistcoat, coat, and fine linen that required careful laundering to maintain a clean white appearance.44 Until commercial laundries and indoor plumbing became common in the early twentieth century in urban areas, only the most prosperous families could afford servants necessary for daily washing, starching, and ironing white linen.45 Detachable collars, originally signalling privilege, also required laundering, but a skilled worker who could afford a suit, coat, and shoes could purchase several collars and appear on Sundays as cleanly and respectable as a more privileged neighbour or employer.46 In the US, unlike Europe, work clothes did not permanently define humble men’s status.

The Arrow Man sold collars partly because he appeared at a moment of significant changes in the relationship between manliness and social class configurations. The demise of businesses during the severe depressions of the late nineteenth century, combined with increased consolidation and vertical and horizontal integration, convinced many middle-class families that older sources of male authority were less available to their sons. Corporate growth, the beginnings of separation of
management from ownership, and scientific management produced more salaried positions. Many more young native-born white men whose fathers had looked forward to steering their economic course as entrepreneurs became white-collar workers earning a salary or wages. Increasingly, a salaried employee did not carry the stigma of a failed man. Some middle-class families still pitied white-collar workers, many of whom were still lowly office clerks, including female secretaries whose presence degraded male status and earnings. But many salaried employees enjoyed new sources of authority in management and professional occupations; these did not require taking risks as entrepreneurs and sole responsibility for a firm but called for the ability to influence and work closely with others and, increasingly, for education. As middle-class families perceived that male authority no longer rested on independence from wages, and saw fewer distinctions between well-paid salaried employees and independent entrepreneurs, they abandoned the ideal of the autonomous, restrained, self-reliant, self-made man. Native-born middle-class men’s manliness was also challenged by women’s increased presence in public life; suffragists’ stepped-up demands for political representation; immigrant men’s increased control of local politics; and militant unions’ efforts to control industry. The consumer culture’s message of spending money and time to fulfill desires undermined older manly ideals of self-control, thrift, and restraint of emotions and sexuality.

The new model for white middle-class men was less class-specific than before and more firmly rooted in American culture rather than European patterns of gentility. Many men, worried that men’s refinement and women reformers’ challenges weakened men and the middle class, rejected European gentility as effeminate and ‘overcivilised’. The visual appearance of class distinctions between men of different backgrounds declined as white middle-class men began to perceive manly authority not only through a confident demeanour that implied internal strength but also through the outward appearance of physical prowess. Many took up spectator sports like boxing, formerly viewed as crude and unrefined when they were associated with working-class men, but increasingly considered respectable and part of American consumer culture. Yet class distinctions did not vanish. White middle-class men continued to differentiate themselves from their working-class neighbours. The new man, educated and erudite, favoured a cultured, middle-class version of physical strength – physical activities already enjoyed by the affluent, like golf, tennis, bicycling, motoring, hiking, and camping – rather than the brawniness of those who did manual labour. A new term, masculinity, conveyed the new more homogeneous image of American men. Historian Gail Bederman notes that nineteenth-century manliness referred to specific attributes.
of the manly man, while masculine was defined as inherent in all men, usually in contrast to feminine.\textsuperscript{50}

The Arrow Collar Man, a visual representation of the new man, captured these nuances.\textsuperscript{51} Like the Arrow collar, he was not a radical departure; he was more physically imposing and muscular than the nineteenth-century ideal, but still classically handsome, evoking sculptures of ancient Greece, and refined, confident, and authoritative. In the informal, intimate setting depicted in Figure 1, the Arrow Man had a relaxed, easeful posture that in another context might signify subordination. Yet the room, a library, is a cultured middle-class setting, and one man reads a newspaper, a sign of concern with serious masculine matters. His shirts and collars and elegant trousers drape a tall, long-limbed body with broad chest and shoulders and muscular hands. His Arrow collar frames and draws attention to well-defined yet refined features: chiselled nose, deep-set eyes, bow lips, and a large jaw with cleft chin. His gaze is direct and reserved, not forbidding, but frank and often sensuous. Still a reserved gentleman, he is silent, cool, confident, and ‘where necessary, tough’. Men like him, the white-collar man, replaced the older notion of advancement through independence with success in interpersonal relationships that involved performance, presentation of themselves to others through manners and appearance.\textsuperscript{52}

The Arrow Man represented another new development – the mass production and systematic marketing of high-quality fashions to men of diverse backgrounds. In the mid to late nineteenth century, when the manly ideal was modelled on the English or continental gentleman, elite dress set the most visible trends, and custom tailors were undisputed arbiters of high fashion. At the turn of the twentieth century, manufacturers of ready-made garments competed with custom tailors by copying elite styles and Paris haute couture. But a more fundamental change was in the making. Manufacturers created their own designs that reflected popular American tastes. Custom tailors’ reign waned and the centre of men’s fashion trends shifted away from a small, privileged group to more diffuse sources. Retailers also actively influenced style and quality and with manufacturers used mass-circulation magazines and transportation networks to promote and distribute quality fashions nationally. Paradoxically, the ready-made clothing industry simultaneously provided an enormous variation of styles for men of differing tastes and needs and resulted in a more homogeneous look, with less clearly defined distinctions in the appearance of men of different classes and backgrounds. The new styles, part of emerging popular culture, like the Arrow Man himself, had an American flavour characterised by informality and reflecting visual images of popular personalities in the new mass media.\textsuperscript{53}

After World War I, changes in men’s fashions escalated. Trousers were softer and jackets had unpadded shoulders. High-buttoned waistcoats
(but not vests) that pinched in the waist and covered most of the upper body vanished, leaving shirtfronts visible. Detachable shirtfronts became outmoded and neckwear took new forms. Cravats narrowed, evolving into bow ties or neckties (worn by the Arrow Men in Figure 2) that highlighted shirtfronts. Neckties (Figure 1) created a visible connection between shirtfront, neck, and face, and the neck no longer appeared isolated from the lower body. Because shirtfronts were now visible, no longer hidden by waistcoats, collars were less distinct from shirts and thus were a segment of a total image. Collars, cut low and shaped to fit the neck, were smaller, softer, and unstarched. Shirts became more significant outer garments, a means to display taste, status, and affluence, and were often made from soft fabrics such as linen or silk, featuring pale colours and patterns or pleats (Figure 1). After peaking in 1920, Cluett, Peabody’s collar sales dropped off, plummeting during the Great Depression. As the firm began to rely on shirt sales for its profits, advertisements featured shirts as well as collars and the Arrow Man became the Arrow Shirt and Collar Man. Yet many men still wore detachable collars, and attached shirt collars were often white, their presence highlighted through colour contrast.54

Along with the blurring of the appearance of class distinctions came other social reconfigurations that changed the visual landscape. The nineteenth century’s close-fitted fashions moved with the body, apparent only in a few places, and covered substantial inner layers that protected the body. The new more comfortable fashions constructed the body differently, encouraging more physical movement and relaxed postures; softly draped fabrics revealed hints of physicality within.55 Many working-class men wore the new fashions, as did young affluent white men who engaged in active sports more than their fathers, taking on some aspects of manual workers’ physical movements. Differences in the visual appearance of the generations sharpened, as some young men offended traditional sensibilities by ignoring older men’s habit of donning distinct garments for daytime and evening, formal and informal situations, work and recreation. Along with more apparent physicality came shifts in the relationship between the private body and outward appearance. Detachable and attached shirt collars receded as signs of cleanliness and respectability partly because a cleanly body was less important as a sign of social standing: commercial laundries were more widely available and less expensive, many more people lived in homes with indoor plumbing and hot water, and more affluent households now boasted machines that washed clothing. Respectability, too, declined in importance, supplanted for many by the outward appearance of affluence, evidenced by possessions.56

Despite detachable collars’ decline after World War I, the Arrow Man maintained his cachet throughout the 1920s, and his collar took on new and potent meanings.57 Americans’ lives had changed dramatically. Mass
media, radio and illustrated magazines, the telephone, and railroads linked far-flung regions in North America. Middle-class consumers enjoyed innovations like indoor plumbing, appliances, and ready-made products that eased many of life’s tasks and added pleasures promised by visual media, advertising and films. The line, ‘You’re the top, you’re an Arrow Collar’, equating Arrow collars with the most admired, the apex, evokes American sense of being the best, superior in material prosperity to Europe, which was still recovering from World War I. The name Arrow itself resonated with 1920s popular culture and American identity. The Arrow brand, which included diverse styles of collars as well as shirts, was not invented by the advertising agency, but had resulted from an 1889 merger that brought a new, aggressive salesman, Frederick Peabody, who carried with him the Arrow trademark. Arrow was a fortuitous name because it conveyed American-ness – distinct from European cultured gentility – the still relatively untamed and uncivilised American West, and the authority, directness, and confidence of the New Man. In these decades, American-ness was envisioned as masculine, typified by Teddy Roosevelt’s mythic rugged individuality, informality mixed with confidence and authority, and identification with untamed nature. Theodore, the photographer’s model in Helen of Troy, New York, links rugged masculinity with the elegant, urbane Arrow Man. In the 1920s some writers captured in literary terms the significance of American popular culture by linking the Arrow Man and his collar with the American Man, consumerism, and the management of personal appearance. The contrast between the culturally refined European and materially successful American was evoked by an avant-garde journal that reported in 1921 on a poor French immigrant poet who converted to American-ness by changing his external appearance. He took a job, but retreated to his Village basement apartment and grew a beard to protest against the clean-shaven faces and white collars surrounding him. Soon, however, he understood, shaved his whiskers, ‘bought an Arrow collar’, and ‘became like an American’. F. Scott Fitzgerald’s 1929 story ‘The Last of the Belles’ linked American manhood with Leyendecker’s images by describing an ideal man as having a ‘Leyendecker forelock’. e. e. cummings folded into the text of his 1922 poem ‘Poem, Or Beauty Hurts Mr. Vinal’ fragments of the song ‘Of Thee I Sing’ and images and phrases from advertising art, including Arrow collars, now integral to the visual landscape and American popular culture.

Yet the Arrow Man and his collar did not represent unmitigated newness. Although his appearance changed little from 1907 to 1931, the transformed meaning of the garment he advertised retained references to its history. Men’s collars, long associated with elites, were detached from shirts in the 1820s and came to symbolise American middle-class respectability by the mid nineteenth century. As their use declined in the early
twentieth century, detachable collars gave their name to a new occupation with a specifically American connotation, the admiration of others and gratification of desire through consumerism. Nor was the Arrow Man’s appeal confined to the middle class. The Arrow Man represented the stylish clothing and sophisticated surroundings available to affluent white urbanites as well as a relatively new type, the white-collar man, a salaried employee who measures manliness in terms of ‘ascent through the bureaucracy’. The Arrow Man, an elite representation of this new group, resonated across class and ethnic lines because he was an idealised image for those who took the opportunity ideology seriously. They hoped to ascend through bureaucracy to higher, rarefied levels or, like the young men in Helen of Troy, New York, to become captains of industry in big business. Over three decades, along with Americans’ daily lives, shirt collars had been transformed in appearance, meaning, and function, carrying messages of gendered self-management of appearance and public performance into the early twentieth century. The transformation of multiple dimensions of the visual landscape, personal appearance and the body, advertising, and the new media, resulted in subtle and not so subtle reconfigurations of social class, gender ideologies, space and time, and generation. The Arrow Man, a potent visual image, and the Arrow collar, a material object familiar in multiple dimensions of daily existence, carried non-verbal messages that linked the imagined past with the representations of the present.

Notes
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2. For claims that a man who wore a cotton collar was a spineless ‘slouch’, see Carole Turbin, ‘Collars and Consumers: Changing Images of American Manliness and Business’, in Beauty and Business, ed. Phillip Scranton (Routledge, 2001), pp. 98–100. James Morske notes that cotton, although less costly and easier to care for than linen, was viewed as a ‘debasement’ of a high-status product. (Morske, ‘And It All Began with One Woman’, and Ken Johnson, ‘Personal Investments: C. Leyendecker and the Arrow Collar Man’, in The Arrow Man: Collar City Chic, a brochure for an exhibition at Russell Sage College Gallery, Troy, New York, 1 September–10 October 1987, especially p. 8.)
3. www.coleporter.org


16. Most writers on the Arrow Man cite his extraordinary fan mail, but none claim to have seen it (Martin, *J. C. Leyendecker*, p. 453). Michael Murphy (Arrow’s Eros?: Homosexual Content in J. C. Leyendecker’s Gillette Advertising Images’, *Journal of American Culture*, 18 (1995), pp. 75–82) cites a note in the Cluett, Peabody archives describing fan mail and comparing it to that of Valentino.

17. Thanks to Michele Bogart who pointed this out to me. Rockwell includes illustrations (Rockwell, *My Adventures*, pp. 162–5) that demonstrate Leyendecker’s influence.


44. Kidwell and Christman, Suiting, p. 121.
47. For a humorous picture of white-collar woes, see ‘White Collary’, New Republic, 1 April 1925, pp. 154–5.


