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Daily OPINION

BAD MEN AREN'T "BOYS." THEY'RE MEN.

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I opened TikTok to a video calling out an abusive boyfriend, a neglectful father or even a male rapist. The comments, thankfully, are full of support and discussion, from men and women alike. But for some reason, many of the comments from men do not actually criticize the man in question — instead, they read something along the lines of "Those aren't men, they're boys."

What?

I understand the sentiment. Nobody wants to be associated with someone capable of doing horrible, reprehensible things — especially on a basis as fundamental as gender. But the idea a man loses his manhood the moment he does something vile is directly counterproductive. Bad men are still men, and pretending otherwise absolves men of responsibility for confronting the toxic masculinity and misogynistic attitudes that enable their behavior.

When we label misogynistic or abusive men as "boys," it reduces their behavior as a byproduct of individual immaturity rather than a consistent byproduct of a system that enables that behavior in the first place. Domestic violence, sexual assault and rape are not just the acts of a few immature, evil men; they are behaviors normalized and enabled through societal culture.

Ironically, this is the same culture that perpetuates the phrase "boys will be boys." When young men make inappropriate comments, disrespect and harass women, or engage in any other behavior that should be called out, it is instead brushed off: "they'll grow out of it!" But when these behaviors escalate into something more serious, we try to insist that the perpetrators were suddenly never men to begin with.

Apparently, men are only men when they behave themselves.

The more dangerous consequence of this rhetoric, though, is that it creates the illusion that abusive men are somehow obviously different from the rest of us. That they are greasy-haired, creepy, immediately obvious cartoon villains who live in their mother's basement — you couldn't confuse them with a "normal" man.

No.

Think about the sentiment that seemingly every woman knows someone who has been sexually assaulted, yet somehow so few men seem to know a rapist. The reason for this is that most men imagine rapists as faceless strangers lurking in dark alleyways — not their friends, neighbors and family. Their depravity is immediately recognizable, someone who could never be confused with the men they love and respect.

But sexual assault is not just the image of a stranger attacking someone else in an alley. It can be a boyfriend pressuring his girlfriend into sex, someone taking advantage of their friend's intoxication or an unassuming acquaintance pushing boundaries. In actuality, over 80% of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim.

These men can be charming, successful, generous and otherwise beloved by the people around them. Their capacity to do good does not erase their capacity to do harm. And when we convince ourselves that only monsters commit monstrous acts, we become less willing to recognize those acts in people we love.

As Maya Angelou once urged: "Let me not separate myself from the human being or pretend to separate myself."

Suddenly, allegations are met with shock and dismissal. He's such a good father; But he's always been respectful to me; I've known him for years; He would never do something like that. But many of you, unwitting or not, unfortunately do know a man who has done something like that. Knowing someone is not the same as knowing what they are capable of.

I think for many men, the insistence that abusive and misogynistic men are not "real men" stems from the desire to distance themselves from that behavior. If the perpetrators are categorically excluded from masculinity, then they, the respectable men, never have to question or confront the culture they participate in or the behavior they excuse. You never have to check yourself, or question if your friend's behavior is a red flag — no, not us. We aren't the "bad ones."

Masculinity cannot be defined exclusively by its best representatives while its worst are conveniently disowned. Bad men are still men. Until we acknowledge that, we will continue distancing ourselves from the problem rather than confronting it.



A protester holds up a sign. More than 80% of sexual assaults are committed by someone known to the victim, according to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PHOTOPHIEND

PATRICK'S POLITICS: THE HISTORICAL FOLLY OF "MIGHT MAKES RIGHT"

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All Secretary of State Marco Rubio had to do was make a normal historical comparison.

Last Friday, Rubio was speaking to the Federalist Society's National Lawyers Convention — a solidly conservative event (in the sense that the attendees prefer to take hard-won rights away through legal channels rather than brute force). He could have harkened back to a quote from Lincoln or Washington, both solidly American heroes. Instead, he chose a much stranger and far more revealing comparison.

Discussing the International Criminal Court, Rubio remarked, "If they're foolish enough to try to enforce their paper decrees on Americans, our answer will probably be the same as the Roman general, Pompey, when he said to those who were trying to invoke their cities' charters against his legions. He said, 'Stop quoting laws to men with swords.'" The comparison demonstrates a fundamental tenet of this administration; might is all that matters, and the law is subordinate to violence.

Pompey was indeed a famous (or infamous) general, and he gained prominence in the Late Roman Republic. He was a man forged in the convulsions of a rapidly disintegrating political system. And he was horrifically ruthless.



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio speaks at a podium. He discussed the International Criminal Court and quoted Roman general, Pompey statement, "Stop quoting laws to men with swords."

PHOTO COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

In an age of extreme violence and the breakdown of law, Pompey was no different and often surpassed his contemporaries with his cruelty. As an adolescent, He was known as the "Butcher Boy" (adulescentulus carnifex) of Rome for eliminating opponents of Sulla's regime (himself a leader inclined to ruthlessness). Does that sound like a figure an official in a democratic government should be quoting?

Apparently, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth thought so. He affirmed Rubio's words in a post on X, saying, "Stop quoting laws to MEN WITH SWORDS."

In fairness to Hegseth and Rubio, Pompey's quote actually tracks well with their vision of American power on the international stage. They view international law as weak, flimsy and unimportant. This is amplified by their calculus that the U.S. military and political apparatus is what calls the shots for the rest of the world.

The Trump administration's contempt for the ICC fits into this broader context of the "might makes right" outlook. Over the past two years, the U.S. has put sanctions on the ICC, curbing its ability to function. The ICC's mission is to prosecute individuals for crimes against humanity, especially when those individuals have not been held accountable by the law otherwise. It has 125 member states, but the U.S. is pointedly not one of them, and American leaders often argue that the ICC has no jurisdiction over the country's activities. The sanctions, however, have added a new dimension to the rift between the U.S. and the ICC.

It's not hard to see why the U.S. might dislike an international body that seeks to impose justice for terrible actions. In just the 21st century, America has been accused of perpetrating war crimes in several countries, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and most recently Iran. Given how much power the U.S. holds, it's much easier to ignore international law and get away with it. This thinking also extends to U.S. allies, including Israel, which itself has been accused of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. It is, tellingly, also not a party to the ICC and doesn't recognize its jurisdiction.

The "might makes right" approach seems to be working for the U.S. — for now. But taking a look at history, especially in Pompey's case, provides a warning for the viability of this philosophy.

For years, Pompey was at the top of the Roman Republic, and therefore its vast sphere of influence. He had the power to determine the course of events. He considered himself so esteemed that he had the term "Magnus" attached to his name, christening himself Pompey the Great (in the spirit of Alexander the Great, who Pompey tried very hard to emulate). There was no ICC at that time, of course, but Pompey would have ignored it anyway. The customs of ancient warfare meant that whoever was in charge could do what they wished to the conquered.

But the principles of "might makes right" eventually became his undoing. He was surpassed by someone with even greater power and influence — a guy named Julius Caesar, who you may have heard of. Caesar defeated Pompey and his forces at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 BC, after which Pompey tried to seek asylum in Egypt and was promptly murdered as soon as he got there.

The lesson to take from this 2000-year-old example is that power is fleeting. Basing justifications of your actions on the fact that you have a more powerful army is flimsy logic indeed, and it's not how a democracy should think. The law is supposed to transcend power, not be in its thrall.

Might doesn't make right, and swords shouldn't outweigh the pen.



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