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# Self-Protection and the Culture of Honor: Explaining Southern Violence

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*The southern United States has long been known to be more violent than the northern United States. The authors argue that this may be due in part to an ideology justifying violence for self-protection and for maintaining "honor," or a reputation for toughness. Analysis of data from three surveys shows that southern White males do not endorse violence unconditionally but do endorse violence when it is used for self-protection, to defend one's honor, or to socialize children. These data fit well with behavioral data concerning gun ownership and the types of homicide committed in the South. Although the conditions that gave rise to southern violence are largely gone, it may be sustained through collective representations emphasizing the importance of honor and through violent self-fulfilling prophecies centering on hypersensitivity to affronts.*

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For centuries, the American South has been regarded as more violent than the North (Fischer, 1989). Ever since records have been kept, the South has led the rest of the country in homicide, and the pattern continues today. This pattern cannot be explained away using structural or economic variables. Even after controlling for such factors as poverty, population density, city size, economic inequality, and demographic characteristics, the homicide rates for White non-Hispanics remain higher for the South than for the rest of the United States (Nisbett, Polly, & Lang, in press).

Nisbett (1993) has argued that the greater southern violence has its roots in the history and economy of the region. The bulk of settlers in the South were Scotch-Irish herding peoples (Fischer, 1989). The herding basis of their economy was actually strengthened after their arrival here, because the wide-open spaces of the southern frontier were ideal for keeping animals (McWhiney, 1988). Cultural anthropologists have observed that herding cultures the world over tend to be more approv-

ing of certain forms of violence (Campbell, 1965; Edgerton, 1971; Peristiany, 1965). In an economy of herding, it is important to establish a reputation as a tough character as a deterrent to theft. Herders must be willing to use force to protect themselves and their property when law enforcement is inadequate and when one's livelihood can literally be rustled away.

This emphasis on self-protection was probably especially adaptive in the frontier South when adequate law enforcement could not be depended on. According to the historian Fischer (1989),

In the absence of any strong sense of order as unity, hierarchy, or social peace, backsettlers shared an idea of order as a system of retributive justice. The prevailing principle was *lex talionis*, the rule of retaliation. It held that a good man must seek to do right in the world, but when wrong was done to him, he must punish the wrongdoer himself by an act of retribution that restored order and justice in the world. (p. 765)

Or, as a North Carolina proverb put it more succinctly, "Every man should be sheriff on his own hearth" (Fischer, 1989, p. 765).

Effective law enforcement was certainly not characteristic of the frontier South (Ireland, 1979; McWhiney, 1988, pp. 159-162). As an observer of the South noted,

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"In many rural areas a lone law officer was often powerless or afraid to intervene—the rate of death by violence to peace officers was very high at that time—particularly in Texas. But even if caught, the murderer was unlikely to be convicted and was seldom given a heavy sentence" (H. V. Redfield, 1880, cited in Gastil, 1971, p. 418).

In systems such as this where self-protection is essential, a *culture of honor* will develop. Where enforcement of the law is inadequate, it becomes important to defend one's reputation for severity to establish that one is not to be trifled with. Allowing oneself to be pushed around, insulted, or affronted without retaliation amounts to announcing that one is an easy mark. Therefore, if one has been crossed or trifled with, retribution must follow as a preemptive strike and warning to the community. Self-defense becomes very broadly defined as preservation of one's person, one's family, one's home, or one's honor (Campbell, 1965; Pitt-Rivers, 1965).

In the absence of normal law and order, power and hierarchy are established through the social mechanisms underlying the culture of honor. Seemingly trivial offenses convey great meaning about who dominates whom in a society without adequate law enforcement. As Daly and Wilson (1988) write in their book *Homicide*:

A seemingly minor affront is not merely a "stimulus" to action, isolated in time and space. It must be understood within a larger social context of reputations, face, relative social status, and enduring relationships. Men are known by their fellows as "the sort who can be pushed around" or "the sort who won't take any shit," as people whose word means action and people who are full of hot air, as guys whose girlfriends you can chat up with impunity or guys you don't want to mess with.

In most social milieus, a man's reputation depends in part upon the maintenance of a credible threat of violence. (p. 128)

As Pitt-Rivers has noted, "Whenever the authority of law is questioned or ignored, the code of honor re-emerges to allocate the right to precedence and dictate the principles of conduct" (1968, cited in Ayers, 1984, p. 275).

An anecdote from Hodding Carter's book *Southern Legacy* (1950) vividly illustrates how honor and the rights of self-protection were tied together in his home state of Louisiana. Carter sat on the jury of a man on trial for killing one person and wounding two others. The man, "whose house adjoined a small-town filling station, had been for some time the butt of the station attendants' jokes. Despite his warnings that he had had enough of their tomfoolery, and though aware of his short temper, they nevertheless persisted in badgering him until, one morning, he stood on his front porch and fired a couple of loads of buckshot into them" (p. 48). Carter was the only juror to vote for a guilty verdict. The man was acquitted because, in the words of one juror, "Good God

Almighty, bub. . . . He ain't guilty. He wouldn't of been much of a man if he hadn't shot them fellows." As one of the jurors later explained to Carter, "Son, you're a good boy but you got a lot to learn. You can't jail a man for standing up for his rights" (pp. 48-51).

Instances like this were not the exception; retribution for an affront to honor was an accepted practice, winked at or treated lightly by legal institutions. Brearley (1934) argues that in much of the South of his day it was impossible to convict someone of murder if (a) the killer had been insulted and (b) he had warned the victim of his intent to kill if the insult was not retracted or compensated.

Honor in the reputational sense and protection of the family were closely tied together. In *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, Wyatt-Brown (1982) writes that "a crime of passion in response to a family wrong was often greeted with acquittal. If the law intervened at all, the penalty was often slight" (p. 43). Insults or attacks against female members of the family were considered especially heinous.

In the Old South, as in the ancient world, "son of a bitch" or any similar epithet was a most damaging blow to male pride. . . . To attack his wife, mother, or sister was to assault the man himself. Outsider violence against family dependents, particularly females, was a breach not to be ignored without risk of ignominy. An impotence to deal with such wrongs carried all the weight of shame that archaic society could muster. (Wyatt-Brown, 1982, p. 53)

In some places in the South, the understanding of the importance of honor and retribution was not just a part of conventional wisdom but was actually codified into law. According to Reed (1981), "Colonial Louisiana, for example, had a law stipulating that a woman and her lover, taken in adultery, were to be turned over to the aggrieved husband for punishment. He could do as he saw fit, but if he killed one, he had to kill both" (p. 11). Similar laws involving a husband catching his wife and her lover *in flagrante delicto* survived until very recently. In fact, "until the 1960s and 1970s, statutes in four states made it justifiable for the husband to kill his wife's lover" (Taylor, 1986, p. 1694). Three of these states were in the South or Southwest (Georgia, New Mexico, and Texas). The fourth was Utah.

The greater acceptance of passion killings is reflected in homicide rates today. Reed (1981), citing FBI statistics, notes that the southern homicide rate is higher than that in the rest of the country because "lovers' quarrels and family disputes are a dangerous business in the South. . . . The southerner who can avoid both arguments and adultery is as safe as any other American, and probably safer" (p. 13). Nisbett (1993) showed that it is argument-related killings that drive the southern homicide rate higher, rather than killings committed in the context of another felony such as robbery or burglary.

That argument-related types of killings are more common in the South is consistent with the South's stronger emphasis on honor and self-protection.

If violence is necessary for adults, then we would expect this to be conveyed to children through their socialization. Socialization agents must model violence and must teach its use in relations with peers. There is historical evidence that southerners were more likely to sanction bad behavior in their children with violence and were more likely to expect violence from their children when it was used for self-protection and to answer affronts (Fischer, 1989, pp. 689-690).

If we are correct in our view that the violence of the South is the cultural residue of originally economically based concerns about honor and self-protection, then it ought to be possible to show this in attitude surveys. The main task of this article is to describe the contours of the southern ideology of violence through its embodiment in the attitudes of individuals. To do so, we will contrast southern and nonsouthern attitudes about violence and show that they differ in systematic ways. Southerners should not be unconditionally more approving of violence. Rather, contemporary southerners should be found to be more likely to endorse the use of violence for self-protection, for retribution against insults to honor, and as a tool in the socialization of children. We will also examine the possibilities that, consistent with a strong ethic of self-defense and retribution, contemporary southerners are more likely to own guns or other weapons and to express willingness to use weapons for self-protection.

These individual attitudes become quite important when we consider that people holding these attitudes interact quite frequently with others in their culture holding similar attitudes. When honor is strongly valued by many in a culture, the likelihood increases dramatically that two individuals will interact and then become embroiled in a conflict in which neither can back down. A person knows what is expected of him or her; and importantly, because individuals know the rules of their culture, they also know what is expected of their opponent. One party cannot back down without losing face, and both sides know this. Further, when they both know that the interaction can turn violent or that weapons may be involved, the avoidable may become inevitable, and violent self-fulfilling prophecies can result.

#### DATA FROM THREE SURVEYS

Two major sources of attitude data on violence are in the public domain and available for reanalysis. These are data collected by the National Opinion Research Center over the past two decades (1972-1990) and data collected by Blumenthal, Kahn, Andrews, and Head (1972) in a

classic survey of violence. We present our analyses of their data here and add our own survey data.

In the three studies that follow, we present data only on White male respondents. We excluded women from the analyses because men are responsible for the vast majority of violent acts committed in American society. We excluded people of color because we argue that the ideology of violence specified above is a legacy of the herding economy of the frontier South. This is a legacy that, for the most part, people of color were excluded from historically. When we say "southerners" or "non-southerners," we are not trying to overgeneralize our results but are using this as a shorthand way of saying "southern White males" and "nonsouthern White males." We recognize that our results may not apply to a large proportion of the southern and nonsouthern population.

Our reanalyses of the national surveys include all questions dealing with endorsements of interpersonal violence. We do not address, except tangentially, questions dealing with policy (e.g., national defense spending and capital punishment), criminal victimization, stereotyping of groups regarding propensity toward violence, definitions of what violence is, perceived causes of violence, perceived agents and victims of violence, feelings about big city riots and college disturbances, law enforcement and punishment of criminals, the extent of military service, or changes respondents would make in their lives in response to violent events in the United States.

In analyzing our own data and data from the other surveys, we used continuous-level variables, and we report *p* levels based on continuous-variable analyses that controlled for income, education, and age. However, for ease of understanding and estimation of the magnitude of differences, we present all results in the tables using raw percentages.

#### STUDY 1

We obtained data from the Blumenthal et al. survey (1972) of men "aged 16 through 64 living in the conterminous United States. . . . 1,374 respondents were interviewed with a structured interview schedule yielding an overall response rate of 80 percent" (p. 16). The primary goal of the study was to understand how American men see violence when it is used for social control and social change, but questions ranged widely over issues of violence by individuals, gangs of hoodlums, and government agents.

#### *Method*

For reasons discussed above, we selected only the White respondents for these analyses. (The survey did not ask whether respondents were Hispanic, and so we

filtered on the race variable, which divided respondents into White, Black, and "other.") We combined 79 White respondents from the border South (Kentucky, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C.) and 226 White respondents from the deep South (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia) to create our southern category. In our nonsouthern category, there were 741 White respondents from all other regions of the country. (By recent census classifications, Delaware and West Virginia would be considered southern states. However, their classification is probably irrelevant, as none of the primary sampling units used in this survey were located in these two states.)

### Results

*Violence in general.* Southerners did not generally endorse violence more than nonsoutherners. When questions asked about violence in the abstract or about violence that was not related to honor or self-protection, no South/non-South difference was generally found. It can be seen in Table 1 that, if anything, southerners appeared less favorable toward violence than nonsoutherners when given no context for the violence. On a series of semantic differential items, southerners were more likely than nonsoutherners to identify violence as bad, unnecessary, avoidable, and worthless.

When respondents were given abstract statements about violence and vengeance, there was little difference between nonsoutherners' and southerners' endorsement of violence, as seen in Table 2. There was no difference on rates of agreement with the statements that "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is a good rule for living," that "when someone does wrong, he should be paid back for it," and that "many people only learn through violence." And although southerners were more likely to agree that "violence deserves violence" and that "it is often necessary to use violence to prevent violence," they were also more likely to agree that "when a person harms you, you should turn the other cheek and forgive him." Finally, when respondents were forced to choose which is worse, "hurting people" or "damaging property," southerners were more likely than nonsoutherners to say that hurting people is worse.

*Violence for purposes of protection.* On questions that concerned matters of self-protection, however, the pattern was different. It can be seen in Table 3 that southerners were much more likely to agree that "a man has the right to kill another man in a case of self-defense," that "a man has the right to kill a person to defend his family," and that "a man has the right to kill a person to defend his house." This last question is striking. As a matter of abstract principle, southerners were more likely to see harming people as worse than damaging

**TABLE 1: Semantic Differential Items From Blumenthal et al. (1972)—Percentage of Respondents Giving an Extreme Negative Evaluation of Violence**

Here are some words that have been used to describe violence. The first words are *strong* and *weak*. Do you think violence belongs at the strong end or at the weak end or in between?

	Percentage Giving the Extreme Negative Response					
	Weak	Bad	Unnecessary	Avoidable	Worthless	Fierce
Non-South	9	59	49	21	44	53
South	17	72	67	34	64	67
<i>p</i>	.39	.07	.006	.06	.0002	.20

property; yet when a scenario of self-protection was invoked, they were more likely to endorse violence.

The principle that violence is a legitimate means of self-protection seems to be extrapolated to the principle that violence is a legitimate means of social control. As Blumenthal et al. (1972) note, "Attitudes toward the use of violence for social control are greatly influenced by the individual's values, particularly his beliefs in retributiveness and self-defense. We may infer from the data that for some Americans, consciously or unconsciously, police force is thought of as a means of providing retribution for wicked deeds" (pp. 243-244). It can be seen in Table 4 that southerners were more likely to advocate violence in dealing with (a) "hoodlums [who] have gone into a town, terrified people, and caused a lot of property damage," (b) "student disturbances on campus and elsewhere, which involve a lot of property damage," and (c) "big city riots." In dealing with hoodlums and students, southerners were less likely to say that police should "let it go," and they were more likely to say that police should either "shoot, but not to kill" or actually "shoot to kill." In dealing with big city riots, southerners were less likely to say that police should "let it go," "make arrests without using clubs or guns," or "use clubs, but not guns"; and they were more likely to say that "police should shoot to kill."

Interestingly, although southerners were more likely to endorse violence to protect and restore order, they were not more likely to endorse violence to bring about change. If the results above regarding violence for social control were solely the product of greater southern support for the status quo, one might have expected southerners to be less approving of violence for social change. However, this was not the case. Differences between the South and non-South were slight and non-significant for 14 of the 15 items dealing with approval of violence for social change.

Thus southerners are not more approving of violence in all forms. Rather, it seems that southerners are more likely than nonsoutherners to see violence as a tool with a special use: That is, it is a tool to protect and restore order when that order appears to be violated.

**TABLE 2: Endorsement of Abstract Statements About Violence and Vengeance, From Blumenthal et al. (1972)**

	Percentage Agreeing	p
"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is a good rule for living.		
Non-South	25	
South	26	.85
When someone does wrong, he should be paid back for it.		
Non-South	67	
South	68	.99
Many people only learn through violence.		
Non-South	52	
South	54	.56
Violence deserves violence.		
Non-South	43	
South	50	.10
It is often necessary to use violence to prevent violence.		
Non-South	64	
South	74	.006
When a person harms you, you should turn the other cheek and forgive him.		
Non-South	41	
South	54	.0006
Some people say that stealing or damaging property is as bad as hurting people.		
What do you think?		
Non-South	49	
South	41	.005

**TABLE 3: Questions About Violence Used for Self-Protection, From Blumenthal et al. (1972)**

	Percentage Agreeing	Percentage Saying They Agree a Great Deal	p
A man has a right to kill another man in a case of self-defense.			
Non-South	88	57	
South	92	70	.0001
A man has the right to kill a person to defend his family.			
Non-South	92	67	
South	97	80	.0001
A man has the right to kill a person to defend his house.			
Non-South	52	18	
South	69	36	.0001

*Responses to insult.* The data from the Blumenthal et al. (1972) survey concerned mostly violence for self-protection. However, one question addressed violence used to protect honor. Respondents were told about a police officer who punches a man and knocks him down after the man swears at him and calls him a pig. Some might view this as an improper use of the officer's authority; other people might view it as a justifiable reaction to an insult. As shown in Table 5, southerners were more likely to empathize with the police officer who punched the man and to say they would feel similarly if they were in the officer's shoes.

*Region and demographic variables.* The results control for income, education, and age differences between the South and non-South. Results of analyses that do not control for income, education, and age show no significant reversals and are, in fact, remarkably similar. The

South variable is only weakly correlated with these demographic variables ( $r$  with income =  $-.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r$  with education =  $-.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r$  with age =  $.01$ ,  $p < .69$ ). And in multiple regression equations, these demographic variables seem to predict a different pattern of responses than the region variable does. These patterns can be roughly characterized as follows: The main effect of income is in general very slight, and what weak effects there are do not seem to resemble those for southernness. The main effect of age does not seem to resemble the pattern for southernness, except that older people are more likely to give negative responses on the semantic differential items and are somewhat more likely to endorse violence for social control. The main effects of education seem to be that less educated people are more willing to empathize with the police officer on the insult item, more likely to give negative responses on the se-

**TABLE 4: Endorsement of Violence for Social Control, From Blumenthal et al. (1972)**

There have been times when gangs of hoodlums have gone into a town, terrified people, and caused a lot of property damage. How do you think the police should handle this situation?

When you think about student disturbances on campuses and elsewhere that involve a lot of property damage, how do you think police should handle the situation?

When you think about big city riots (ghetto disturbances/inner city disturbances) involving Negroes (black people/colored people) and police, how do you think the police should handle the situation?

	Percentage Saying Never or Hardly Ever		
	For Hoodlums	For Students	For Big City Riots
The police should let it go, not do anything.			
Non-South	88	85	90
South	91	90	95
<i>p</i>	.01	.02	.0001
Police should make arrests without using clubs or guns.			
Non-South	19	12	17
South	23	16	24
<i>p</i>	.15	.16	.08
Police should use clubs, but not guns.			
Non-South	19	23	18
South	16	19	22
<i>p</i>	.94	.76	.06
Police should shoot, but not kill.			
Non-South	36	54	40
South	26	39	32
<i>p</i>	.06	.002	.56
Police should shoot to kill.			
Non-South	69	83	71
South	57	71	59
<i>p</i>	.0004	.0005	.003

**TABLE 5: Empathy With a Police Officer Who Punches Someone After Being Insulted, From Blumenthal et al. (1972)**

A policeman is giving a ticket to a man for reckless driving. The driver takes the ticket, begins to swear, and calls the policeman a pig. . . . The policeman hauls off and punches the driver in the nose and knocks him down.

	Percentage Saying Not Likely at All or Not Too Likely	Percentage Saying Somewhat Likely or Very Likely	<i>p</i>
How likely is it that anyone among your friends could feel like that policeman if a similar thing happened to them?			
Non-South	24	76	
South	16	84	.07
How likely is it that you could feel like that policeman if a similar thing happened to you?			
Non-South	31	69	
South	21	79	.04

mantic differentials, more likely to endorse abstract statements about violence, and more likely to endorse violence for social control. Less educated people are *not* more likely to endorse violence on the self-protection items, except in the case of defending one's house.

Thus the pattern of southern responses seems to be distinct. South/non-South differences remain even after other demographic variables are controlled for. And in multiple regression equations, the pattern of southern responses—endorsement of violence only for protection, in response to insult, and for social control—seems

to be different from the patterns produced by other demographic variables.

**STUDY 2**

The General Social Surveys (Davis & Smith, 1990) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) are national surveys covering a variety of social and political issues, including racism, religion, and national policy. We report below all of their questions having to do with ideologies about interpersonal violence that were asked during the period 1972-1990.

### Method

The number of respondents varied from question to question, but for most there were approximately 6,000 White male respondents. Approximately 2,000 came from the South, defined as census divisions 5, 6, and 7. (Division 5 includes Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and the District of Columbia. Division 6 includes Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, and Mississippi. Division 7 includes Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Texas.) Approximately 4,000 came from all other regions of the country. The questions relevant to interpersonal violence from the survey all have to do with the appropriateness of punching someone under various circumstances.

To select out White males, we used NORC's race variable, which separated respondents into White, Black, and "other." Respondents were not asked directly whether they were Hispanic, but they were asked, "From what countries or part of the world did your ancestors come?" We ran analyses both including and excluding respondents who might be considered Hispanic on the basis of their answers to this question, and results were virtually identical on every item analyzed. Because there was a fair amount of uncodable data on the ethnicity question, however, we chose to use analyses filtered on the race variable only. Again, we present  $p$  levels based on analyses that control for income, education, and age. Because the income question was asked over a 20-year period, we standardized this variable by year.

### Results

It can be seen in Table 6 that southerners were slightly more likely to come up with situations in which they would approve of "a man punching an adult male stranger" or "a policeman striking an adult male citizen." However, when respondents are asked about what these situations might be, only items that involve answering an affront or protecting the family produce the South/non-South differences. (It should also be noted that it is only for these first two general violence items in Table 6 that it makes a difference whether we report raw or demographic variable-adjusted  $p$  levels. The weak differences from these two general items become significant only after age, income, and education are controlled for.)

As indicated in Table 6, southerners were almost twice as likely as nonsoutherners to endorse a man's hitting someone if that person were in a protest march expressing opposition to the man's views or if that person were drunk and bumped into the man and his wife on the street. They were also more likely to approve of a man's punching a stranger who had hit the man's child; and they were more likely to approve of a police officer's

hitting a citizen who had said vulgar and obscene things to him, though the differences were not as strong. Their responses were not more violent on items that did not involve insult or self-protection. That is, they were not more likely to approve of hitting a person if that person "was beating up a woman," "was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case," or "was attempting to escape from custody." The lack of difference on the question concerning "beating up a woman" is quite interesting because it clearly involves the issue of protection—but not protection of one's self or one's own family. Had the woman been a spouse, relative, or friend, different results might have been obtained.

The hypothesis of self-protection would predict that southerners would approve of violence more when dealing with someone who "had broken into the man's house" or who "was attacking the policeman with his fists." However, these questions produced little South/non-South difference. The latter case may have been due to a ceiling effect. (Ninety-seven percent of nonsoutherners and southerners would have approved of a policeman's striking a citizen in this instance.)

*Region and demographic variables.* The  $p$  levels presented in the tables are based on analyses controlling for income, education, and age. Again, there are no significant reversals when these variables are not controlled for. The South variable is only weakly correlated with the other demographic variables ( $r$  for income =  $-.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r$  for education =  $-.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $r$  for age =  $-.02$ ,  $p < .02$ ). And even after these demographic variables are controlled for, the region variable exerts an influence. Further, in multiple regressions, these demographic variables tend to predict different patterns of responses than the South variable does. Income, age, and education were all associated with differential endorsement of some violence items; but the patterns of endorsements and nonendorsements for the three variables did not resemble that for the South variable, nor did the patterns for the three variables resemble one another.

### Conclusions

In general, the hypotheses received some support from the NORC data. There was very little difference on questions that gave scenarios not involving self-protection or affront. However, differences did emerge on four of the six items that involved self-protection or affront issues. Of course, there is some subjectivity in how items were classified and in the interpretation of such items. For example, the greater approval for punching a protester could be merely the result of less tolerance for protest, and the greater approval for punching a drunk who bumped into the man and his wife could be the result of less tolerance for public "immoral" behavior.

TABLE 6: Items From the General Social Surveys Involving Approval of Violence in General and Approval of Violence After an Affront

	Percentage Saying Yes	Percentage Saying No	p
Items about violence in general			
Are there any situations that you can imagine in which you would approve of a man punching an adult male stranger?			
Non-South	70	30	
South	72	28	.03
Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a policeman striking an adult male citizen?			
Non-South	83	17	
South	85	15	.009
Items involving a man punching a stranger after an affront			
Would you approve if the stranger was in a protest march showing opposition to the other man's views?			
Non-South	3	97	
South	6	94	.005
... was drunk and bumped into the man and his wife on the street?			
Non-South	8	92	
South	15	85	.0001
Other items involving a man punching a stranger			
Would you approve of a man punching a stranger who had hit the man's child after the child accidentally damaged the stranger's car?			
Non-South	59	41	
South	64	36	.002
... was beating up a woman and the man saw it?			
Non-South	86	14	
South	87	13	.64
... had broken into the man's house?			
Non-South	88	12	
South	89	11	.09
Item involving a policeman striking a citizen after an affront			
Would you approve of a policeman striking a citizen who had said vulgar and obscene things to the policeman?			
Non-South	16	84	
South	20	80	.001
Other items involving a policeman striking a citizen			
... was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case?			
Non-South	9	91	
South	9	91	.34
... was attempting to escape from custody?			
Non-South	86	14	
South	86	14	.17
... was attacking the policeman with his fists?			
Non-South	97	3	
South	97	3	.78

However, taken as a whole, the items are at least suggestive that self-protection and affront items will draw out South/non-South differences. To generate more evidence with less ambiguous stimuli and a greater range of situations, we conducted our own survey examining violence, protection, and honor issues.

### STUDY 3

We conducted our own survey to establish more firmly that the South has a version of the culture of honor. We compared rural areas because of our assumption that the culture of honor of the Old South should be best pre-

served there. Nisbett and his colleagues (Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett et al., in press; Reaves & Nisbett, 1993) have shown that South/non-South differences in homicide rates are greater in small towns and rural counties than in larger cities, and we expected attitudinal differences to mirror behavioral differences in this regard.

### Method

Southern respondents came from census divisions 5, 6, and 7 (South Atlantic, East South Central, West South Central; see above for a listing of states). Midwestern respondents came from census division 4 (Minnesota,



Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas). This region, representing the heartland Midwest, seemed more ecologically and economically similar to the South than any other non-South region. Both division 4 and the South are characterized by low population densities and agricultural rather than industrial economies.

Respondents came from counties of under 20,000 households that were not adjacent to a metropolitan area. Every household with a listed phone number in these regions was eligible to be called and to receive a letter requesting participation in our survey. Using Kish selection tables (Kish, 1965), we randomly selected one of the males 16 years or older in the household to be interviewed.

Of our 585 phone numbers (South = 325; Midwest = 260), 56 were disconnected and 127 had no males 16 years or older in the house. In 20 homes, the respondent was deaf or incapable of answering the survey in English. Three homes in the South but none in the Midwest were vacation homes. Of the 379 respondents remaining, we obtained 307 completed interviews, 148 interviews in the Midwest (82%) and 159 interviews in the South (80%).

Of our 307 respondents, 278 were non-Hispanic Whites. Of the 29 non-White or Hispanic respondents, 25 were from the South. Again, for reasons specified above, only non-Hispanic White respondents were included in the analyses that follow.

For 21 respondents, we could not obtain needed demographic information such as age, income, or years of education. These respondents were dropped from the analyses that follow. The mean age was 50 for both midwestern and southern respondents ( $p < .94$ ). The mean family income was \$43,342 in the Midwest and \$42,232 in the South ( $p < .83$ ). The mean number of years of education was 12.73 in the Midwest and 12.46 in the South ( $p < .45$ ). Thus these major demographic factors cannot explain Midwest-South differences that we find. In the analyses that follow, we control for income, education, and age to make doubly sure of this and to increase the power of our statistical tests.

The survey took approximately 40 minutes to administer and included a number of other questions about demographics and attitudes not related to approval of violence.

In the analyses that follow, we report on questions dealing with ideologies of interpersonal violence. Included were nine types of questions: (a) Respondents were told about a man named Fred who reacts violently (either by fighting or by shooting) after being affronted in several situations. Respondents were asked how justified Fred's violent response was. If respondents thought a violent response was in any way justified, we asked a follow-up question: If Fred doesn't give the violent re-

sponse, would you say that Fred was "not much of a man" or that Fred was "acting reasonably"? (b) Respondents were asked a general question about how often it is okay to answer an insult with physical violence. (c) Respondents were asked to judge the manhood of men who become involved in fighting. (d) Respondents were asked how events like an insult or a fist fight might disrupt their friendships. (e) Respondents were asked questions on punching another man taken from the General Social Survey. (f) Respondents were asked about the social distance they would keep from a killer and from a forger of bad checks. (g) Respondents were asked what most fathers would expect of a 10-year-old boy named James who is either beaten up once or repeatedly bullied. (h) Respondents were asked their feelings about spanking. (i) Respondents were asked about whether they own guns and their reasons for owning them.

### Results

*Response to affronts.* We gave respondents a series of vignettes involving insults or an affront to honor. For three of the items, we told respondents about a man named Fred and asked how justified Fred would be in fighting an acquaintance who had affronted him in some way. On two more items, we told respondents about more serious affronts and asked them how justified Fred would be in *shooting* the person who had offended him. It can be seen in Table 7 that, for three of five questions, southern respondents could see more justification for Fred's making the violent response.

On the follow-up questions, more southerners again gave answers consistent with the strong ethic of honor and self-protection. On all questions, they were more likely than midwesterners to say Fred would be "not much of a man" if he did not respond violently. Differences were about 2 to 1 on the fighting questions (combined  $p < .11$ ) and slightly more than that on the shooting questions (combined  $p < .003$ ).

We had hypothesized that more midwesterners than southerners would see violence in response to an insult as never being right. Responses to the first question in Table 8 show that the data did not confirm this hypothesis. However, the expected difference appeared when midwesterners and southerners were asked to judge an insulted man who responds violently. The man who responds violently could be judged to be acting honorably or to be immature. Midwesterners were one and a half times as likely as southerners to judge negatively someone who responds violently to an insult. Again, the reason was not that midwesterners were generally more disapproving of violence than southerners. When questions were asked about fighting but no mention was

**TABLE 7: Affront Questions From Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties (1992)**

Sometimes conflicts are resolved through fighting, and other times, they are resolved nonviolently. Imagine that a man named "Fred" finds himself in the following situations. In these situations, please tell me whether Fred starting a fight would be extremely justified, somewhat justified, or not at all justified.

1. Fred fights an acquaintance because that person looks over Fred's girlfriend and starts talking to her in a suggestive way.
2. Fred fights an acquaintance because that person insults Fred's wife, implying that she has loose morals.
3. Fred fights an acquaintance because that person tells others behind Fred's back that Fred is a liar and a cheat.

On occasion, violent conflict involves shooting another person. Imagine that a man named "Fred" finds himself in the following situations. In these situations, tell me whether Fred shooting would be extremely justified, somewhat justified, or not at all justified.

4. Fred shoots another because that person steals Fred's wife.
5. Fred shoots another because that person sexually assaults Fred's 16-year-old daughter.

	<i>Percentage Saying Violent Response is Extremely Justified</i>	<i>Percentage Saying Fred Would Be "Not Much of a Man" if He Didn't Respond With Violence</i>
<b>Fred 1</b>		
Midwest	3	3.8
South	10	8.3
<i>p</i>	.008	.14
<b>Fred 2</b>		
Midwest	18	11.4
South	26	18.3
<i>p</i>	.11	.15
<b>Fred 3</b>		
Midwest	12	4.4
South	12	7.6
<i>p</i>	.94	.34
<b>Fred 4</b>		
Midwest	3	0.7
South	3	4.3
<i>p</i>	.88	.10
<b>Fred 5</b>		
Midwest	26	10.1
South	47	22.6
<i>p</i>	.0004	.009
<b>Index of all Fred questions</b>		
Midwest	12	6.1
South	20	12.2
<i>p</i>	.008	.01

NOTE: *p* levels are derived from a logit regression for individual "not much of a man" questions because they are dichotomous dependent variables.

made of insult or affront, midwesterners and southerners gave the same assessments, as shown in Table 8. Midwesterners and southerners had identical views of the manhood of someone who "has never been in a fist fight" or someone "who can take a punch."

Two more items captured the importance of honor in the South. We asked respondents how long their friendship would be disrupted if a friend of theirs (a) got into

a fist fight with them over a game of some kind or (b) called them a liar and a coward during an argument over a bet. Table 9 shows that midwesterners saw those two events as equally disruptive to the friendships. Southerners, however, saw the insult as more disruptive and would remember the impugning of their honor longer than they would the fist fight.

Table 10 presents data for the NORC items on approval of punching a stranger. Our results were comparable to NORC's in direction and magnitude with the exception that we found no differences for the item in which someone says vulgar and obscene things to a police officer. The question involving a man who is affronted as a drunk bumps into him and his wife gave a clear Midwest-South difference of almost 3 to 1. We also replicated NORC's small differences for punching a man who is in a protest march; however, our sample size was too small to make the difference significant. The remaining three items were not honor or self-protection related, and so we did not expect the South to be significantly more violent on these questions. As predicted, it was not.

Finally, one series of questions was intended to show that southerners stigmatize violence less by showing that they would keep less social distance from a man who killed someone in a quarrel. However, the South and Midwest showed no differences on these items.

*Socialization for violence.* The three studies presented above suggest that southerners are more likely to view violence as a legitimate response to insult, as an appropriate means of self-protection, and as a justifiable tool for restoring social order. We would expect these lessons about the uses of violence to be taught to children in the process of socialization.

We asked our respondents what they thought most fathers would expect their 10-year-old sons to do in two situations. In the first situation, a 10-year-old named James was beaten up by a boy in front of a crowd of other children. In the second situation, he was repeatedly bullied by another boy who stole his lunch money. It can be seen in Table 11 that, in both cases, southerners were more likely to say that James would be expected to "take a stand and fight the other boy."

On the second item, 40% of southerners would expect James to fight the other boy, and 25% would expect James to try to talk his differences out. In the Midwest, 26% would expect James to fight the other boy, and 32% would expect James to talk his differences out. In the choice between talking and fighting, violence was the preferred self-protection strategy in the South, and talking was the preferred self-protection strategy in the Midwest.

Violence was also more actively used in the sanctioning of children. Spanking was seen as a more legitimate

TABLE 8: Manhood, Insult, and Fighting Questions From the Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties

Some people feel it can be right to use physical force to respond to someone who has insulted them deeply. Do you think this is right most of the time, sometimes, rarely, or never?

	Percentage Saying			
	<i>Most of the Time</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
Midwest	4	31	39	26
South	7	36	28	29
$p < .59$				

Different people also have different definitions of what it means to be a man. I want you to now think about what being a man means to you. I will tell you about several different men in the following statements. I want you to tell me how much each one fits your personal idea of being a man. I will ask whether the person fits your idea well, whether he fits your idea poorly, or whether what I have said doesn't matter in your definition of manhood.

	Percentage Saying		
	<i>Fits Well</i>	<i>Fits Poorly</i>	<i>Doesn't Matter</i>
<b>Fighting related to insult</b>			
A man who fights if deeply insulted by an acquaintance			
Midwest	13	52	35
South	15	37	48
$p < .06$			
<b>Fighting not related to insult</b>			
A man who has never been in a fist fight			
Midwest	25	9	66
South	25	11	65
$p < .69$			
A man who can "take a punch"			
Midwest	19	8	74
South	20	7	74
$p < .84$			

tool by southerners. We asked, "If your child did something really terrible, like shoplifted from the local grocery store, would you spank the child?" As seen in Table 12, the majority of southerners (67%) would spank their child, whereas slightly fewer than half of the midwesterners (45%) would. Southerners were also more likely to advocate spanking when asked a more general question taken from NORC concerning whether spanking is sometimes necessary to discipline a child. In both our sample and the NORC General Social Survey sample, about twice as many nonsoutherners as southerners disagreed that a "good, hard spanking" was sometimes necessary.

For some southerners, therefore, the use of violence against children is like the use of violence in general, in that it is a legitimate tool when used to achieve control. Other authors, such as Blumenthal, Chadiha, Cole, and Jayaratne (1975), have noted the connection among southerners between approval of violence for controlling children and approval of violence for social control generally. For questions on child-rearing practices, Blumenthal et al. (1975) found that White "respondents who spent their childhood in the South were more likely to think physical punishment appropriate than those who had no southern experience" (p. 172). They also

found that, for Whites with childhood experience in the South, there was a "high association" between scores on the Physical Punishment Index and the Violence for Social Control Index ( $\gamma = .62, n = 41, p < .001$ ). This association was weaker for Whites with no experience in the South ( $\gamma = .20, n = 82$ ) (p. 173).

*Region and demographic variables.* The  $p$  levels presented in the tables are based on analyses controlling for income, education, and age. Again, there are no significant reversals when one does not control for these variables, and again the  $p$  levels look remarkably similar in the controlled and uncontrolled analyses.

The effects of the demographic variables can be roughly characterized as follows. In multiple regression equations, income had very little effect on any of the variables presented. Age had few significant effects, and to the extent that these effects existed, they were inconsistent with regard to whether older people were more or less approving of violence. Low education and South did not have similar effects, except on the spanking in response to shoplifting item and the Fred "justification" items. On several critical questions, the effect of low education was weak and nonsignificant or reversed from

**TABLE 9: Questions About Honor and Personal Relations From the Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties**

Suppose that you and a friend of yours got into a fist fight over a game of some kind. Do you think you would (1) be angry at him for at least a month, (2) be angry at him for two or three weeks, (3) be angry at him for a few days, or (4) be angry at him for a few hours?	
Suppose that you and a friend were arguing about a bet you made over a game of some kind. Suppose he called you a liar and a coward. Do you think you would (1) be angry at him for at least a month, (2) be angry at him for two or three weeks, (3) be angry at him for a few days, or (4) be angry at him for a few hours?	
Percentage who would be angry for at least a month after the fist fight	
Midwest	10
South	8
<i>p</i> < .68	
Percentage who would be angry for at least a month after the insult	
Midwest	12
South	25
<i>p</i> < .07	
Percentage who would be angry longer following the fist fight than following the insult	
Midwest	15
South	9
Percentage who would be angry longer following the insult than following the fist fight	
Midwest	27
South	32
<i>p</i> for interaction of region (Midwest vs. South) and event (fight vs. insult) < .01.	

that of the South. In sum, the South variable seemed to produce a pattern quite distinct from those produced by age, education, and income.

**SURVEY DATA ON GUNS AND GUN CONTROL**

Because of their stronger ethic of self-protection and retribution, we would expect southerners to be more likely to possess tools used for this purpose—namely, guns. National surveys invariably show that southerners are indeed more likely to own guns. But they also show that the differences go beyond mere gun ownership. Not only are southerners more likely to own guns, they are more likely to see their guns as instruments of protection (as opposed to purely for sport), more likely to carry their guns with them, more likely to feel safe if they have a gun around the house, and more ready to use their guns if their homes are broken into.

As seen in Table 13, data from NORC (and many other national surveys) show that southerners are more likely to own guns. This cannot be explained away by saying that southerners are merely more likely to prefer hunting as a pastime. Because NORC collected data on gun ownership and on hunting, we were able to look at the overlap. Southern White males were more likely to

**TABLE 10: General Social Survey Questions Asked in the Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties**

Now I will tell you about a few situations in which a man punches an adult male stranger. In each situation, tell me Yes if you approve of the man punching the stranger and No if you do not approve of the man punching the stranger.			
	<i>Percentage Saying</i>		
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>p</i>
<b>Items involving a man punching a stranger after an affront</b>			
Would you approve if the stranger was in a protest march showing opposition to the other man's views?			
Midwest	3	97	
South	5	95	.37
... was drunk and bumped into the man and his wife on the street?			
Midwest	6	94	
South	16	84	.01
<b>Other item not involving an affront</b>			
Would you approve if the stranger was beating up a woman and the man saw it?			
Midwest	79	21	
South	86	14	.12
<b>Item for a policeman striking a citizen after an affront</b>			
Would you approve of a policeman striking a citizen who had said vulgar and obscene things to the policeman?			
Midwest	13	87	
South	14	86	.74
<b>Other items for a policeman striking a citizen</b>			
... was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case?			
Midwest	10	90	
South	4	96	.06
... was attempting to escape from custody?			
Midwest	75	25	
South	81	19	.28

hunt. But they were also more likely to personally own guns without being hunters.

Gun ownership rates were relatively high in our own survey of rural areas and did not differ by region. Our survey showed no difference in pistol, rifle, shotgun, or overall gun ownership. However, there was a great difference when respondents were asked whether their gun was used for sport or for protection. Only 21% of midwestern gun owners, but 49% of southern gun owners, said the gun was used at least partly for protection.

Other surveys also illustrate that southerners are more likely to keep a gun around for self-defense purposes. In 1981, Gallup (1981) asked respondents about 12 "things people do because of their concern over crime." In response to this concern, southerners were more likely to say that they carried a weapon and that they had bought a gun, as seen in Table 15. (Southerners

**TABLE 11: Socialization for Violence From the Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties**

Now let me ask you about a couple other situations. In these situations, I am going to tell you about a 10-year-old boy named James. Imagine that a boy one year younger than James picks a fight with him. James tries to talk the other boy out of fighting, but it doesn't work. The boy gives James a black eye and a bloody nose in front of a crowd of other children.

After hearing about the fight from James, what do you think most fathers would expect James to do?

Would they (1) expect James to take a stand and fight the other boy, (2) expect James to avoid the other boy but fight if provoked, or (3) expect James to avoid the other boy and avoid fighting?

	Percentage Saying	
	Take a Stand and Fight	Avoid
Midwest	24	76
South	38	62

*p* < .006

Now imagine James in a different situation. Imagine that every day another boy pushes James down and steals his lunch money. One time, James tries to talk to the other boy to get him to quit. But the other boy still continues to bully and steal from him every day. What do you think most fathers would expect James to do?

Would they (1) expect James to take a stand and fight the other boy, (2) expect James to avoid the other boy but fight if provoked, (3) expect James to avoid the other boy and avoid fighting, or (4) expect James to try to talk to the other boy again to get him to quit?

	Percentage Saying		
	Take a Stand and Fight	Avoid	Talk
Midwest	26	42	32
South	40	35	25

*p* < .02

were not, however, more likely to carry Mace or another repellent.) The reason southerners took more violent preventive measures was *not* that they were more concerned about crime generally. Gallup asked respondents about nine nonviolent alternatives such as carrying a whistle, keeping lights on at night, and locking doors at night. Collapsing over the nine alternatives, we find that southerners were no more likely than nonsoutherners to take nonviolent preventive measures to protect themselves.

In 1976, the National Election Study (NES) asked a similar question (Center for Political Studies, 1979). In this survey, southern White males were twice as likely as nonsouthern White males to say they "kept a gun for purposes of protection" (South = 40%, non-South = 23%). Again, it was not that southerners were more concerned about crime generally. NES also asked about four nonviolent preventive measures: keeping a dog for purposes of protection, putting new locks on windows or doors, putting an alarm system in the car, home, or apartment, and staying away from certain areas in a town

**TABLE 12: Questions About Spanking From the Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties and From the General Social Surveys**

If your child did something really terrible, like shoplifted from the local grocery store, would you spank the child?

	Percentage Saying	
	Yes	No
Rural county survey		
Midwest	45	55
South	67	33

*p* < .001

Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree that it is sometimes necessary to discipline a child with a good hard spanking?

	Percentage Saying			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Rural county survey				
Midwest	31	46	16	8
South	49	39	9	3

*p* < .001

	Percentage Saying			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
General Social Surveys				
Non-South	25	56	15	5
South	36	53	10	2

*p* < .0001

or city. If anything, southerners were less likely to take nonviolent preventive measures than nonsoutherners (Table 15).

Finally, polls conducted in 1984 and 1986 by Media General/Associated Press also showed that guns were more available and ready for use in the South (cited in Flanagan & Jamieson, 1988; Flanagan & McGarrell, 1986). As can be seen in Table 15, southerners were much more likely to keep a gun at home or to carry a gun or other weapon to protect themselves. As the 1986 poll showed, southerners were also more likely to use the gun if someone broke into their home. Consistent with all these results emphasizing a gun as an essential tool for self-protection, southerners were more likely to feel safe if they had a gun around. The 1986 poll asked whether having a gun in the home made it a safer place, made it a more dangerous place, or made no difference. In all other regions of the country, more people thought that having a gun increases rather than decreases the danger. In the South, the pattern was reversed; more people thought that a gun decreased the danger. As seen in Table 15, the South was the only region where the modal answer was that a gun made the home safer. Perhaps because southerners view their guns as so essential to self-protection, they are more reluctant to have their guns controlled by the government. This is shown in numerous Gallup polls and in NORC and NES data presented in Table 16.

**TABLE 13: Gun Ownership and Hunting Data From the General Social Surveys**

Do you happen to have in your home any guns or revolvers?				
	Percentage Saying Yes		p	
Non-South	50		.0001	
South	67			
Is it a pistol, shotgun, rifle, or what?				
	Percentage of All Respondents			
	Pistol	Shotgun	Rifle	
Non-South	23	33	34	
South	38	47	42	
<i>p</i>	.0001	.0001	.0001	
	Percentage Who			
	Do Not Personally Own Gun and Do Not Hunt	Do Not Personally Own Gun and Do Hunt	Do Personally Own Gun and Do Hunt	Do Personally Own Gun and Do Not Hunt
Non-South	50	6	23	21
South	35	7	32	26
<i>p</i> < .0001				

*Region and Demographic Variables*

Again, the *p* levels from our survey, NORC, and NES are from analyses that control for income, education, and age. And again, *p* levels from the uncontrolled analyses look similar. (We could not control for these other demographic variables in the Gallup and Media General polls because we did not have the raw data.) Among the three surveys, high income was a significant predictor of owning a gun in the NORC survey, but it had little effect on other items. The largest effect of age seemed to be that, in the NORC survey, older people were more likely to own pistols. However, education had much stronger effects. More education seemed to be associated with stronger support for gun control in the NORC and NES surveys, less gun ownership in the NORC surveys, and less gun ownership for reasons of protection in the NES survey. High education seemed to have opposite effects to the region variable, except in Study 3. In Study 3, South was a strong predictor of viewing the gun as an instrument of protection, and education had no effect on this item.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The South has long been known to have a higher homicide rate than other regions of the country. Even after structural and demographic factors are controlled for, this difference has remained (Nisbett, 1993; Reaves &

**TABLE 14: Gun Ownership and Reasons for Gun Ownership in Survey of Rural Southern and Midwestern Counties**

Do you happen to have in your home any guns or revolvers?				
	Percentage Saying Yes			
Midwest	77			
South	77			
<i>p</i> < .92				
Is it a pistol, shotgun, rifle, or what?				
	Percentage of Those Who Have Guns			
	Pistol	Shotgun	Rifle	Other Gun
Midwest	52	87	69	6
South	61	87	76	4
<i>p</i>	.30	.97	.34	.62
Is the gun used for sport or for protection?				
	Sport	Protection	Both	Other
Midwest	71	7	14	9
South	43	15	34	8
	Percentage of All Gun Owners Who Own a Gun at Least Partly for Protection			
Midwest	21			
South	49			
<i>p</i> < .0001				

Nisbett, 1993). However, this alone is not enough evidence to assert that the difference in homicide rates has a cultural basis. We have tried to provide such evidence by showing that the South and non-South have different ideologies about violence.<sup>1</sup>

We have argued that southern ideology does not make all violence acceptable. Rather, southern beliefs about violence derive from the South's historical development as a herding economy and as a frontier without adequate law enforcement. These conditions tend to produce an ideology that is relatively accepting of violence when used for self-protection, defense of one's honor, and socialization of children.

Our analyses of survey data support this explanation. The Blumenthal et al. (1972) data showed that southerners are not more in favor of violence in general. However, they were more likely to endorse violence when it was used for self-protection and for social control. The NORC data showed that southerners were more likely to give answers favoring violence only when asked about scenarios involving an affront or protecting the family. Data from our own survey showed that southerners approved more of violence in defending their honor and in socializing children. We also showed that southerners' attitudes about guns and their meaning were consistent with their strong self-protection ethic, and we hypothesized that this may account for their greater resistance to gun control.

**TABLE 15: Questions About Violent and Nonviolent Preventive Measures Against Crime From the Gallup Poll, National Election Studies, and Media General/Associated Press Polls**

**Gallup Poll, 1981:**

	Percentage Taking Measure			
	Carry Weapon	Bought Gun	Carry Mace or Other Repellent	Other Nonviolent Preventive Measures
South	16	24	7	27
East	10	8	8	27
Midwest	6	13	7	27
West	13	18	6	32

**National Election Studies, 1976:**

	Percentage Taking Measure
Kept a gun for purposes of protection	
Non-South	23
South	40
<i>p</i> < .0001	
Average collapsed over four nonviolent preventive measures	
Non-South	24
South	21
<i>p</i> < .08	

**Media General/Associated Press Poll, 1984:**

What have you personally done, if anything, to protect yourself from crime? Do you keep a gun at home?

	Percentage Taking Measure
South	55
Northeast	28
North Central	45
West	38
Have you started carrying a gun or other weapon?	
South	15
Northeast	6
North Central	7
West	12

**Media General/Associated Press Poll, 1986:**

Do you think people should have the right to shoot someone who breaks into their home, even if they don't know whether the person is armed?

	Percentage Saying Yes
South	75
Northeast	57
North Central	66
West	69

In general, do you think having a gun in a home makes the home a safer place, a more dangerous place, or makes no difference at all?

	Safer	More Dangerous	No Difference
South	37	28	28
Northeast	18	42	32
North Central	26	33	34
West	26	43	23

**TABLE 16: Gun Control Questions From the National Election Study and the General Social Surveys**

**General Social Survey, 1972-1990:**

Would you favor or oppose a law that would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun?

	Percentage Opposing
Non-South	32
South	43
<i>p</i> < .0001	

**National Election Study, 1976:**

Some people favor stricter handgun control, whereas others feel that each person should be able to own a gun free from government control. How about you, do you favor or oppose stricter handgun control?

	Percentage Opposing
Non-South	54
South	67
<i>p</i> < .0001	

*Qualifications of the Results*

Admittedly, there is some subjectivity in how we have classified some of the attitude items. A few of the items that we have seen as honor related may not be seen that way by others. There may be individual and cultural differences in how persons and cultures define what is an affront and what is not. We think this is an important point, and we are currently pursuing this possibility in other research. Admittedly, also, some of the differences we report are small, and a few questions do not show the predicted differences at all. However, taken as a whole, the results of the three surveys are fairly consistent in supporting the hypotheses about the South and approval of violence used for protection, retribution, and socialization.

This pattern of South/non-South differences remains even after education, income, and age are controlled for. Further, the region variable shows a pattern of responses quite different from these other three demographic variables.

There are, of course, many other demographic variables that could be examined in trying to explore variables important to southern culture. Religious denomination is one possibility. The non-South does not have one particular denomination with which it is strongly associated. But there is one denomination that is strongly associated with the South—namely, the Southern Baptist denomination. In each of the three main surveys above, Southern Baptists make up about 30%-40% of the southern White population.

The Southern Baptist religion is often regarded as an important carrier of southern culture. As Leonard (1989) writes, "White southern culture provided a core

of values, myths, and symbols that enhanced denominational stability" among a "fiercely independent constituency" of Southern Baptists (p. 1330). "The denomination itself reinforced them. By sanctioning the southern white way of life—economics, politics, morality, race—Southern Baptists helped preserve regional unity among whites after the Civil War" (p. 1330).

We examined the data to see whether there were significant differences between Southern Baptists and southern non-Baptists and found inconclusive results. For about half the critical items from Studies 1 and 2, Southern Baptists showed a significantly "more southern" response than southern non-Baptists, but this pattern was completely absent from Study 3. This was true whether or not income, education, and age were controlled for. Although the Southern Baptist religion may be an important carrier of many aspects of Southern culture, it does not seem to be critically important as a carrier of culture regarding self-protection and the importance of honor. The honor and self-protection ethic seems not to be limited in the South to one particular denomination.

#### *Persistence of Attitudes and Behaviors*

We have argued that the higher southern homicide rate derives from the history of the area as a low-population-density herding region without adequate law enforcement. Now that the South is no longer a frontier and lawlessness is much less of a threat, should one predict that the homicide gap between South and non-South will close? Eventually—probably—yes. But ideologies and patterns of behavior that have been embedded in a culture for centuries will not necessarily die overnight. We believe this will be particularly true because of the way notions of honor are likely to be transmitted in the culture: through shared norms and values, through behavioral scripts that tell you when you should respond with violence and when you should prepare to defend yourself against another's violence, and through ideas that run to the core of one's identity of what it means to be a "man" or to be "not much of a man."

Because these ideas about honor are collectively held and sustained in social interaction, they may endure even after the conditions that gave rise to them are gone (see Turner & Oakes, 1986). A contemporary southerner who displays cowardice may not be in danger of losing his life or livelihood (indeed, he may be safer than his more "honorable" counterparts), but he may face some danger of losing the respect of his peers or perhaps his self-respect.

Participating in the culture of honor requires paying a price; and in this case, the price is being willing to back up your words with action. In a culture where few people are also playing the honor game, this will rarely be called

for. Others will be willing to back down before the conflict escalates too dangerously. The price for being the "toughest" person will hardly ever have to be paid by engaging in acts that are physically dangerous. (Indeed, in such environments, where few are participating in toughness or "face" contests, the price of playing the honor game may be social. One may be ostracized as a bully or a hothead for being ready to fly off the handle so easily.)

However, in a culture where many are participating in the culture of honor, action may often be called for, and the price paid will sometimes be physical. Where guns are readily available, this action can turn deadly. It is possible that the culture can become self-sustaining as southerners arm themselves for protection and remain vigilant against affronts. Ideologies about appropriate occasions for violence, the ready availability of guns, and the occasional death and consequent renewed sense of danger may reinforce one another in a vicious cycle.

To spell out the cycle: In a culture where honor is so important, arguments can lead to affronts that demand retribution. The availability of guns increases the chance that the retribution will be deadly. In addition, the knowledge that the other person may be armed and may begin acting violently may lead to more preemptive first strikes. Once conflicts escalate, a person may be more apt to take a first strike as a matter of self-protection before he himself gets shot. If both sides in a conflict are armed and both sides know that neither one can back down without loss of honor, it becomes a race to the first blow. As Daly and Wilson (1988) note, "Violence may breed violence . . . simply by raising the perceived risks of non-violence. A rational man in a violent milieu will be quicker on the trigger than the same man in a more pacific setting" (p. 286).

Passion killings that began as arguments, lovers' quarrels, family disputes, and the like are what elevate southern homicide rates today (Nisbett, 1993; Reed, 1981). And it is easy to see why these events are so dangerous in the southern culture of honor. In such a milieu, there are high costs for backing down from a challenge, and once a challenge is issued, it quickly escalates to its deadly denouement. The presence of guns and the knowledge that they are readily available to both parties in the conflict would be likely to speed up this process. The preemptive first strike may be construed by some as an act of self-defense ("I shot him before he could shoot me").

A telling passage from McWhiney (1988) shows how issues of honor, protection, the ready availability of guns, and the social approval of violence can be tied together.

As one observer in the South noted, enemies would meet, exchange insults, and one would shoot the other down, professing that he had acted in self-defense because he believed the victim was armed. When such a



story was told in court, "in a community where it is not a strange thing for men to carry about their persons deadly weapons, [each member of the jury] feels that he would have done the same thing under similar circumstances so that in condemning him they would but condemn themselves." Consequently, they free the slayer, "and a hundred others, our sons and half grown lads amongst them, resolve in their hearts, that since every man may go armed and everyone is therefore justifiable in slaying his enemy, they will do likewise." (p. 163; quotations from J. A. Lyon, in *Columbus* [Mississippi] *Eagle*, June 1, 1855)

We believe that a modified version of this picture may continue to characterize the etiology of violence in the present-day rural South, particularly in the light of polls indicating that one in seven southerners may carry a gun or other weapon for protection.

In sum, we have provided some evidence that the ideologies of the South and of the non-South are different regarding the appropriateness of violence. We have shown that southern culture does not endorse violence in all forms but rather that it endorses violence when it is linked to issues of protection and honor. These attitudinal data fit well with the behavioral data on the types of homicides in which the South surpasses the non-South—namely, argument-related killings. We have provided empirical evidence for the components of a process by which behaviors and attitudes about violence for self-protection and honor can sustain themselves. The links among the historical development of the frontier South, the present-day ideology about violence in the region, and the data on homicide provide a good case for a cultural explanation of the difference between the South and the non-South in homicide rates.

#### NOTE

1. Obviously, much of what we have said about the South can also be said about the West and even portions of the lower Midwest, as parts of these areas were used for herding, parts were frontier, and parts were settled largely by southerners (Gastil, 1971). As a preliminary step, we chose to make a simple South/non-South distinction. However, future research will inevitably make the issue more complicated as it considers historical, economic, and cultural differences and similarities both within and between regions.

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