Violence and U.S. Regional Culture

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The U.S. South, and western regions of the U.S. initially settled by Southerners, are more violent than the rest of the country. Homicide rates for White Southern males are substantially higher than those for White Northern males, especially in rural areas. But only for argument-related homicides are Southern rates higher. Southerners do not endorse violence more than do Northerners when survey questions are expressed in general terms, but they are more inclined to endorse violence for protection and in response to insults. Southern subjects responded with more apparent anger to insults than did Northerners and were more likely to propose violent solutions to conflicts presented in scenarios after being insulted. The social matrix that produced this pattern may be the culture of honor characteristic of particular economic circumstances, including the herding society of the early South. Consistent with this possibility, the herding regions of the South are still the most violent.

Phenomena involving regional, ethnic, or cultural differences in patterns of behavior often prompt heated disputes among historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and economists who seek to account for such phenomena using the particular analytic tools of their disciplines. For the most part, social psychologists have chosen to stand apart from such controversies, although such differences seem to have a psychological component and to be susceptible to examination by social psychological methods. Indeed, because of the diversity of methods and theoretical approaches used by social psychologists, the field may be well positioned to act as a kind of broker for questions about differences in collective patterns of behavior. The question of regional differences in violence is one of this sort.

Throughout the history of the United States, Southerners have been regarded—by Northerners, by travelers from Europe, and by themselves—as being more violent than Northerners. The *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* devotes 39 pages to the topic of violence, beginning with the sentence "Violence has been associated with the South since the time of the American Revolution" (Gastil, 1989, p. 1473). The subsequent pages are replete with accounts of feuds, duels, lynchings, and bushwhackings—events that are held to have been relatively commonplace in the South and relatively rare in the North. Less lethal forms of violence are also reputed to have characterized the South. Autobiographies of Southerners, more than of Northerners, report severe beatings by parents (Fischer, 1989, p. 689). Pastimes that seem inconceivable on a New England village green or a Middle Atlantic town square were commonplace in the old South. For example, there

was a sport called "purring," in which two opponents grasped each other firmly by the shoulders and began kicking each other in the shins at the starting signal. The loser was the man who released his grip first (McWhiney, 1988, p. 154).

Assuming the accuracy of the historical evidence, why should there be such strong regional differences in preference for violence? Historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists have offered five different explanations.

One explanation calls on the temperature difference between North and South. There is a reliable relationship between temperature and violence; homicides (Anderson, 1989) and other violent acts, such as injuries from misthrown baseball pitches (Reifman, Larrick, & Fein, 1991), are more common in hot weather than in cooler weather.

A second explanation is poverty. The South is poorer than the rest of the country, and poverty is associated with crimes of all kinds, including crimes of violence. Hence, greater Southern rates of violence might be attributable to greater poverty (Blau & Blau, 1982).

A third explanation, and one of the oldest, attributes Southern violence to the institution of slavery. Tocqueville (1835/1969) traveled down the Ohio River and contrasted the industrious farmers on the Ohio side with the boisterous layabouts he found on the Kentucky side. He noted that the institution of slavery made it both unnecessary and demeaning for the Whites to work and that the resulting idleness allowed them to turn to exciting, dangerous pastimes.

But the Kentuckian scorns not only labor but all the undertakings that labor promotes; as he lives in an idle independence, his tastes are those of an idle man; money has lost a portion of its value in his eyes; he covets wealth much less than pleasure and excitement; and the energy which his neighbor devotes to gain turns with him to a passionate love of field sports and military exercises; he delights in violent bodily exertion, he is

familiar with the use of arms, and is accustomed from a very early age to expose his life in single combat. (p. 379)

A fourth explanation is that the violence of the Whites was the result of imitating the violence of African Americans (Cash, 1941). The violence of that group might be due to an originally violent culture or a reaction to ill treatment at the hands of Whites, but whatever its cause, Whites may have been unconsciously mimicking it (see Hackney, 1969).

Herding Economies and the Culture of Honor

A fifth explanation, and the one that I argue for, is that the South is heir to a culture, deriving ultimately from economic determinants, in which violence is a natural and integral part. New England and the Middle Atlantic states were settled by sober Puritans, Quakers, and Dutch farmer-artisans. In their advanced agricultural economy, the most effective stance was one of quiet, cooperative citizenship with each individual being capable of uniting for the common good. In contrast, the South was settled initially by swashbuckling Cavaliers of noble and landed gentry status, who took their values not from the tilling of the soil and the requirements of civic responsibility but from the knightly, medieval standards of manly honor and virtue. The major subsequent wave of immigration, and a much larger and ultimately more influential one, was from the borderlands of Scotland and Ireland (Fischer, 1989; McWhiney, 1988). These Celtic peoples had long had an economy based on herding, primarily pig herding. At the time of the Puritan migrations, they were "isolated from and hostile to their English neighbors, and they remained tribal, pastoral and warlike" (McWhiney, 1988, p. xxxiv). Upon arrival in America, during the 17th and 18th centuries, they moved inland from the northeast coast (usually from the entry port of Philadelphia) to the southern and western frontiers, especially to the hill country regions. There they continued and even intensified the hunting and herding practices at the base of their economy.

Herding, even when carried out in less isolated circumstances than the American frontier, predisposes people to a violent stance toward their fellows (Lowie, 1954; Peristiany, 1965). This is so because pastoralists are extraordinarily vulnerable economically. Their livelihoods can be lost in an instant by the theft of their herds. To reduce the likelihood of this occurring, pastoralists cultivate a posture of extreme vigilance toward any act that might be perceived as threatening in any way, and respond with sufficient force to frighten the offender and the community into recognizing that they are not to be trifled with. In writing of the Mediterranean herding culture, similar in many ways to traditional Celtic cultures of Europe and the American South, Campbell (1965) described the task confronting young shepherds:

The critical moment in the development of the young shepherd's reputation is his first quarrel. Quarrels are necessarily public. They may occur in the coffee shop, the village square, or most frequently on a grazing boundary where a curse or a stone aimed at one of his straying sheep by another shepherd is an insult which inevitably requires a violent response. . . . It is the critical nature of these first important tests of his manliness that makes the self-regard (*egoismos*) of the young shepherd so extremely sensitive. It is not only the reality of an obvious insult which provokes him to action, but even the finest of allusions on which it is possible to place some unflattering construction. (p. 148)

Young White Southern men were taught to create a similar impression of themselves as being ferocious in defense of their reputations.

From an early age, small boys were taught to think much of their own honor, and to be active in its defense. Honor in this society meant a pride of manhood in masculine courage, physical strength and warrior virtue. Male children were trained to defend their honor without a moment's hesitation—lashing out against their challengers with savage violence. . . . These backcountry child ways were . . . transplanted from the borders of North Britain, where they were yet another cultural adaptation to the endemic violence of that region. . . . This system of child rearing flourished in its new American environment. (Fischer, 1989, p. 690)

The socialization of Andrew Jackson, the first U.S. president raised in a herding region (the hills of Tennessee), was very much in this culture-of-honor tradition. In advice to the young Jackson, his mother made it clear how he was to deal with insults: "Never tell a lie, nor take what is not yours, nor sue anybody for slander or assault and battery. Always settle them cases yourself" (McWhiney, 1988, p. 169). Jackson, a true representative of his culture, was involved in more than 100 violent quarrels in his lifetime, including one in which he killed a political opponent.

Southern society seems to have retained aspects of the culture of honor even in this century, resulting in very different views about violence there than are common in the rest of the country. Hodding Carter, a Mississippi journalist, reported that in the 1930s he served on a jury in a homicide case. The accused was an irritable man who lived next to a gas station. Day after day, the workers at the station made jokes at the man's expense until one morning the man emptied his shotgun into the crowd, maiming one of the jokers, wounding another, and killing an innocent customer. Carter was the only juror for conviction. As one of the 11 jurors voting for acquittal put it, "He ain't guilty. *He wouldn't of been much of a man if he hadn't shot them fellows*" (Carter, 1950, p. 50). Brearley (1934) wrote that in much of the South of his time it was impossible to obtain a conviction for murder if the perpetrator had (a) been insulted and (b) had warned the victim of his intention to kill if the insult were not retracted or compensated. Lundsgraade (1977) has maintained that the same pattern holds in modern Houston, Texas. And until the 1970s, Texas law held that there was no crime if a man killed his wife's lover caught *in flagrante delicto* (Reed, 1981).

Regional Differences in Homicide

There is abundant historical and anecdotal evidence supporting the view that the South is more violent and other

such evidence linking this violence to the herder–warrior culture of honor. What is the status of statistical evidence of the sort likely to convince a social scientist? Most research to date has focused on homicide, both because of its obvious importance and because excellent, relatively error-free data are available. It is a simple matter to determine whether homicide rates are higher in one region than another, and in fact most investigators find that they are higher in the South. Linking this difference to the nature of traditional Southern White culture has proved to be a matter of great dispute. Some investigators (e.g., Blau & Blau, 1982) have maintained that Southern homicide rates are no higher than Northern rates once one "corrects" for the facts that the South is poorer, has greater income inequality, and has more African Americans—three factors associated with higher homicide rates. However, the elimination of differences among regions through statistical adjustment obscures potentially important differences among regions. In my view, the data have been analyzed at too high a level of aggregation, examining homicides from all races and all city sizes (another variable with a heavy positive effect on homicide rates) and then trying to pull race, city size, and other effects out statistically.

It seems to make more sense to examine the rates for Whites separately, at each city size separately, and see whether the rates are different between North and South. This is what Gregory Polly, Sylvia Lang, and I did (Nisbett, Polly, & Lang, 1993). We looked at both male offender rates and victim rates, because they have different sources of error. Offender rates could be wrong about the race of some of the perpetrators because the wrong person was arrested. Victim data would rarely be wrong about the race of the victim, but in a small fraction of cases the perpetrator is not of the same race as the victim (Hackney, 1969). We examined White, non-Hispanic offender and victim data for small cities (10,000–50,000 inhabitants), medium sized cities (50,000–200,000 inhabitants), and large cities (more than 200,000 inhabitants) for the period 1976–1983. We included in our analysis every variable found by any investigation we have read to be significantly associated with homicide rates in the United States, including an index of poverty, an index of income inequality (the "Gini" index; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1983), population density, and percentage of the population who are males between the ages of 15 and 29. Instead of just examining North versus South as a two-level dummy variable, we followed the recommendation of Gastil (1971) and used a continuous variable of degree of "Southernness" of the state in which the offense occurred. This variable reflects the fact that some non-Southern states, including several Western and southern Midwest states, were settled primarily by Southerners. In fact, in the mid-to-late 19th century, the great majority of the residents of some non-Southern states, such as Oklahoma and Arizona, had been born in the South. Gastil's scheme assigns a score to each state reflective of the proportion of the population descended from Southerners.

We may examine first the data just for cities with 90% or more residents who are White and non-Hispanic.

This means that population density, poverty, and income inequality data are derived primarily from the White population. There are no cities of more than 200,000 people having 90% or more White non-Hispanic populations, but there are sufficient numbers of smaller cities like that in our sample to make an analysis meaningful. Table 1 presents regression coefficients (from an analysis in which variables were entered simultaneously) for these cities for White male offender rates and for victim rates. It may be seen that the only variables that predict homicide rates consistently across both measures and both city sizes are poverty and Southernness. Although poverty is an important predictor of homicide, Southernness is also important and remains important even when poverty differences among regions are taken into account.

The unadjusted rates for White, non-Hispanic homicide in the major census regions are presented in Table 2. The regions of the country are ordered in terms of increasing Southernness, defined as percentage of the current population descended from Southerners. It may be seen in Table 2 that the regional differences are really quite large in absolute terms. For the smaller cities, the ratio of homicides in the South to homicides in New England, the least Southern region, is about three to one. For the medium-size cities, the ratio is more than two to one. It is important to note that the rates for Southern regions are higher than for comparable, more Northern regions even when one takes into account poverty differences between regions. For example, the small cities of the plains region of Texas having the lowest poverty rates produce much higher homicide rates than the small cities of the plains region of Nebraska having the highest poverty rates (and substantially higher than the poverty rates of the low-poverty-rate Texas cities).

Essentially the same picture as in Tables 1 and 2 can be found by examining the White homicide rates for cities of all kinds, including those with high non-White

Table 1

Standardized Regression Coefficients for White Non-Hispanic Homicide Rates for Cities That Are 90% or More White and Non-Hispanic

| | City size | | | |
| | 10,000–50,000 (n = 101) | | 50,000–200,000 (n = 60) | |
Measure	Male offender rate	Victim rate	Male offender rate	Victim rate
Gini index	−.03	.15	.26*	.14
Population density	−.05	−.08	−.11	−.14
Poverty index	.38***	.25*	.42***	.46***
% Males 15–29	−.10	−.06	−.22*	−.20*
Southernness index	.37***	.43***	.52**	.64**
r^2	.29	.33	.49	.57

* $p \le .05$. ** $p \le .01$. *** $p \le .001$.

Table 2
White Non-Hispanic Homicide Rates for Cities That Are 90% or More White and Non-Hispanic

	City size					
	10,000–50,000			50,000–200,000		
Region	Male offender rate	Victim rate	n	Male offender rate	Victim rate	n
New England	2.62	1.77	22	3.16	1.63	11
Middle Atlantic	1.90	1.02	10	3.35	2.49	7
Midwest	2.92	1.97	45	3.37	2.20	24
Pacific	4.62	2.64	8	6.10	4.26	5
Mountain	4.67	3.26	14	4.56	3.14	8
Southwest	5.13	4.69	4	4.47	2.84	2
South	8.23	4.85	9	6.63	4.49	4
Ratio of South to New England	3.14	2.74		2.10	2.74	

and Hispanic populations. Again, the ratio of White homicides for a random sample of all small cities is three times higher for the South than for New England, and twice as high for medium-size cities. For cities of more than 200,000, however, the regional difference is very slight. A regional difference for large cities emerges in regression analyses because poverty rates for Northern large cities are actually higher than for Southern large cities. Because poverty rates in large cities are heavily influenced by the rates for non-Whites, the adjustment for poverty probably gives a misleading picture for the White population. It seems more likely that regional differences are indeed smaller for the White population in large cities than in smaller cities.

The pattern of greater regional differences for smaller cities has two important implications. First, it shows that the South is not uniform with respect to homicide. It is the smaller communities of the South—and West—that have elevated homicide rates. This pattern suggests that the phenomenon is primarily rural in nature, consistent with the historical argument about the importance of type of agricultural economy in producing the cultural differences in the first place. Second, it indicates that temperature differences between regions are not the basis of regional differences in homicide, because regional temperature differences are as great for large cities as for small ones.

Regional Differences in Attitudes Toward Violence

Of course, the argument to this point is what sociologists call a merely *residual* one. Southernness may be correlated with something not yet measured that no one would want to call culture. It would be good to have some positive indication that there are regional differences in attitudes or other psychological variables between North and South that could plausibly explain the homicide differences. As many investigators have pointed out, there

just are not that many documented differences between Southerners and non-Southerners in attitudes toward violence (e.g., Reed, 1981). (It is customary, though, to find Southerners more in favor of whatever war the United States is fighting at the time of the survey, more approving of spanking as a discipline technique for children, and more opposed to gun control.)

Dov Cohen and I (in press) have recently begun a review of the major national surveys that have covered topics of violence and have conducted our own survey of White men in the most rural counties of the South and the western portion of the Midwest. The national surveys include the National Opinion Research Council (NORC; Davis & Smith, 1989) items of the past 20 years that have dealt with questions of interpersonal violence and the classic study by Blumenthal, Kahn, Andrews, and Head (1972) on American males' attitudes toward violence. I report the data for White men only from each of these surveys.

The NORC and Blumenthal et al. (1972) data sets contained numerous questions about violence in the abstract, but few produced regional differences. For example, respondents from different regions proved equally willing to endorse items such as, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is a good rule for living"; "Many people only learn through violence"; and "When someone does wrong, he should be paid back for it." Although there were a few abstract questions for which Southerners were more inclined to endorse violence (e.g., "It is often necessary to use violence to prevent violence"), there were just as many for which Southerners were less inclined to endorse violence (e.g., "When a person harms you, you should turn the other cheek and forgive him"). Even when the questions were made more concrete, specifying the settings or participants, Southerners were not necessarily more likely than Northerners to endorse violence. For example, Southerners were no more likely to agree that police may sometimes have to beat suspects or that it might be right for a man to punch another adult male.

Despite these null results, Cohen and Nisbett (in press) found three specific categories of survey items that differentiate Southerners from non-Southerners—items that relate to self-protection, to the proper response to an insult, and to the role of violence in the socialization of children.

Attitudes Toward Violence for Self-Protection

The protection items show a difference relating both to protection of property and to the protection of human life, including one's own. For example, when asked whether a man has the right to kill to defend his home, 36% of White Southern men agreed a great deal, compared with 18% of non-Southern White men. (There is a North Carolina proverb saying that "Every man is a sheriff on his own hearth.") Southern men were also more likely to agree that "a man has the right to kill a person to defend his family" (80% vs. 67%). Similarly, Southern men were more likely to say that police should shoot, or even shoot to kill, to protect against rioters, whether the

rioters are Blacks, gangs of hoodlums, or students (all examples are from Blumenthal et al., 1972.)

In our survey of rural counties, we found White Southern men to be twice as likely to report having guns for purposes of protection as rural Midwestern White men, although they were no more likely to report owning them. It seems not to be a stretch to explain both the customary Southern opposition to gun control and the customary Southern endorsement of the war of the moment in terms of the greater importance of protection. If protection of life and property by violent means is a necessity, then ownership of guns is required, and gun control imperils self-protection. Wars are usually defended (at least in this century) in terms of the need for self-protection, which might be expected to appeal to Southerners.

Attitudes Toward Violence in Response to Insults

The second major difference we find has to do with the appropriate response to insults. A pair of NORC questions presented in Table 3 is revealing. Respondents were asked if they thought it could ever be right for an adult male to punch another male and whether it could ever be right for a man to hit a drunk who bumped into the man and his wife. Although there were no regional differences in approval of the notion that it could ever be right for a man to punch another adult male, there were differences when it was specified that the other man was a drunk who bumped into the man and his wife, a situation that many would regard as an insult. Cohen and Nisbett (in press) included the insult item in their survey of rural respondents and found similar results. Other concrete scenarios, which did not involve insults, produced no regional differences in endorsement of a man punching another man, either in the NORC data or in Cohen and Nisbett's data.

Cohen and Nisbett (in press) presented their subjects with a series of scenarios in which an insult occurs and asked them whether a violent response—either fighting or shooting the person who does the insulting—would be justified, extremely justified, or not at all justified. For example, they described a situation in which "Fred fights an acquaintance because that person looks over Fred's girlfriend and starts talking to her in a suggestive way" and another situation in which "Fred shoots another person because that person sexually assaults Fred's 16-year-old daughter." In addition, they asked those subjects who felt that the violence would be justified whether they thought that the insulted person "would not be much of a man" if he failed to respond violently.

White Southern men were more likely than White Midwestern men both to feel that the violent response to the insult is extremely justified (12% vs. 6%) and to say that a failure to respond violently would indicate that the insulted person was not much of a man (19% vs. 12%; both regional differences are significant at the .01 level). It is important to note that these results cannot be explained by differences in either educational or economic

Table 3

Percentage Endorsing 1990 NORC Questions on Violence as a Function of Region

Region	NORC national data[a]		Cohen & Nisbett rural county survey[b]
	Ever approve of a man punching adult male	Approve of hitting a drunk who bumped into a man and his wife	Approve of hitting a drunk who bumped into a man and his wife
New England	73	7	—
Middle Atlantic	68	7	—
Midwest	69	8	6
Pacific	73	8	—
Mountain	72	10	—
Southwest	70	14	—
South	73	15	16

Note. NORC = National Opinion Research Council.
[a] Davis & Smith, 1989. [b] "Self-Protection and the Culture of Honor" by D. Cohen and R. E. Nisbett, in press. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin.

status, both of which were nearly identical for the Northern and Southern samples.

Socialization for Violence

The third major area in which Southern attitudes differ from Northern ones has to do with socialization for violence. Anthropologists point out that an adult male cannot be expected to respond with violence to insults and to be prepared to defend himself and his family and property with violence when threatened unless he has a long-time familiarity with violence. Thus, his own youthful infractions may have been dealt with violently—by spankings or beatings—and he may have been encouraged to respond with violence, from an early age, to the insults of his peers (e.g., Cambell, 1965; Lowie, 1954; Peristiany, 1965).

Cohen and Nisbett (in press) have found that these patterns of socialization for violence are characteristic of modern Southern White men. They asked their subjects whether they thought spankings in general were justified and whether they thought that a spanking for a specific infraction, such as shoplifting, was justified. About 49% of their Southern subjects strongly agreed that spanking was an appropriate discipline policy, whereas only 31% of their Midwestern subjects thought so. Similarly, 67% of their Southern subjects thought spanking was appropriate for shoplifting, whereas only 45% of their Northern subjects thought so. These differences are comparable to others reported in the literature on regional differences in attitudes toward spanking.

Cohen and Nisbett (in press) also presented their subjects with two scenarios in which a young child was bullied. Respondents were asked to imagine that a 10-

year-old boy named James is confronted with "a boy a year younger who 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 bloody nose in front of a crowd of other children." They were also asked to 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." Subjects were asked what they thought most fathers would expect James to do—"take a stand and fight the other boy" or avoid fighting. For both questions, Southern respondents were more likely than Northern respondents to think that most fathers would expect fighting (39% vs. 25%).

Thus, there appears to remain today a difference between Southern and Northern White men in attitudes toward children and violence. More Southern than Northern respondents believe in spanking as a means of discipline, and more Southerners than Northerners believe that fathers would expect their bullied child to fight.

Regional Differences in Behavioral Responses to Insults

If Northern and Southern cultures differ so much in the meaning and importance they attach to insults, then it ought to be possible to show that Southerners have different reactions to insults than do Northerners—for example, that they respond to insults with more anger, that they see more aggressiveness and hostility in their environment, or that insults prime violent imagery. Norbert Schwarz, Brian Bowdle, and I decided to examine these possibilities in the laboratory (Bowdle, Nisbett, & Schwarz, 1993). This is a tricky business if one wishes to avoid damaging people's sense of well-being or making them feel quite unhappy, but we believe we have hit on a way of insulting people in the laboratory with little risk of such damage.

Male out-of-state undergraduate students at the University of Michigan were screened for their permanent addresses and randomly called and asked to participate (for $5) in a study in which they would be performing a variety of cognitive tasks under time pressure. We oversampled Southern students so as to invite an equal number (40 of each) of Southerners (students from the South and Southwestern census regions) and Northerners (from any non-Southern or non-Southwestern state except Michigan) to the lab. Subjects filled out a brief questionnaire on arrival and were asked to take it to a table at the end of a long, narrow hall. On the way to the table, they had to crowd past a male undergraduate confederate working at an open file cabinet. The confederate was required to close the file cabinet and press himself against it to allow the subject room to pass. When the subject returned a few seconds later, the confederate, who had just reopened the file drawer, slammed it shut, pushed his shoulder against the shoulder of the subject, and said, loudly enough to be clearly heard by the subject, "Asshole." The confederate then quickly entered a room with a locked door at the end of the hall. (The locked door

was a needed precaution. One angry subject actually pursued the confederate and rattled the door knob.) Two confederates were posted at opposite ends of the narrow hall to observe the subject's reaction and record their impressions of the anger, amusement, and other emotions expressed by the subject. (The confederate near the locked door was prepared to intervene to announce that the provocation was part of the experiment if this had been necessary, but it never was.)

Upon their return to the laboratory, subjects were presented with two apperception tasks allowing for assessment of their level of hostility. They were asked to complete words from a series of letters including a blank, for example, _ight, gu_, _ill. Each letter series could be completed to form words with hostile connotations (e.g., fight, gun, kill) or nonhostile ones (e.g., light, gum, hill). Immediately following that task, subjects were asked to rate a series of photographs of male faces for the degree to which they expressed several emotions, including anger. Finally, subjects were asked to provide completions for three different written scenarios. Although two of the scenarios were intended to be neutral, the third involved a clear insult to the protagonist. In this scenario, which takes place at a party, a man's fiancee tells him that an acquaintance, who knows them to be engaged, has made two clear passes at her during the course of the evening. Following the collection of some background data, subjects were gently debriefed, including an apology by the experimenter for the deception and an explanation of the reasons for it and a reconciliation session with the confederate. (Only 1 of the 65 subjects and pretest subjects exposed to the manipulation to date has verbally expressed any unhappiness with the treatment afforded him. Two others were silent and unresponsive during the debriefing. The great majority of subjects responded to the debriefing with interest and amusement.)

The various assessment procedures in the experiment allow us to compare the emotional response of Southerners and Northerners to an insult. We can determine whether such a provocation differentially causes Southerners versus Northerners to see hostility in pictures of faces, to complete word fragments in a manner reflective of violence, or to provide aggressive completions to the scenarios.

The results concerning the subjects' immediate emotional response to the insult were quite clear. We subtracted the observers' ratings of subjects' amusement from their ratings of subjects' anger. The reaction patterns were remarkably different for the two groups of subjects. For 65% of the Northern subjects, but only 15% of Southern subjects, the amusement ratings were higher than the anger ratings.

It seems equally clear, however, that the insult did not cause Southern subjects to spend the rest of their time in the experiment in a state of hostility or paranoia. Their word fragment completions did not yield more hostile words than those of either noninsulted Southerners or Northerners, whether insulted or not. Nor did the insulted Southerners see more anger (or fear, or any of the

other emotions rated) in the male faces they saw. Nor did they offer more violent completions to the two neutral scenarios. However, in reacting to the third scenario, involving affront and sexual challenge, the insulted Southerners were far more likely to respond with violent imagery. Seventy-five percent of insulted Southerners completed the affront scenario with events in which the protagonist physically injured, or threatened to injure, his antagonist, whereas this was true for only 25% of Southerners who were not insulted—a highly significant difference. Northerners were unaffected by the manipulation, being equally likely to conclude the scenarios with violence whether insulted or not.

In summary, the results indicate that Southerners are more sensitive to a given provocation, one interpretable as an insult, than are Northerners—in two respects. First, the provocation makes them angrier. It seems not to be something they can brush off as easily as Northerners can. Secondly, it seems to prime violent responses to subsequently encountered insult stimuli. The implications of these results seem clear. Southerners, by virtue of the emotional meaning that the insult has for them, are more likely to display anger in certain situations in which escalation is dangerous and are more susceptible to considering violent responses in those situations. (See Huesmann, 1988, for a treatment of the role of script accessibility in aggressive behavior.)

Arguments and Regional Differences in Homicide

Much of the evidence presented above suggests that it might only be certain types of homicide, and not homicide in general, that should be more common in the South. Situations in which an affront occurs should be disproportionately likely to trigger violent responses. There is little reason to expect the rates of other kinds of homicide, such as those occurring in the context of robbery or burglary, to be elevated. To examine this possibility, I compared the rates for homicide committed in the context of another felony with the rates for homicide that seemed likely to be argument-related (e.g., lovers' triangles, barroom quarrels, and acquaintance homicide). The data were obtained from Fox and Pierce's (1987) supplementary homicide reports for 1976–1983. The two types of homicide are not exhaustive of all homicides because some were ambiguous as to whether they were argument-related or felony-related (e.g., "drug-related" homicides).

It may be seen in Table 4 that White male homicide rates in small cities are much higher in the South and Southwest than in other areas for argument-related cases but not for felony-related cases. In larger cities, the homicide rates again are higher in the South and Southwest for argument-related cases, but they are actually smaller for felony-related cases (ps for the interaction between homicide type and region are highly significant for the raw frequencies for both city sizes). Similar conclusions have been reached by other investigators, who have found that only homicides involving people personally known

Table 4
White Male Homicide Rates for Felony-Related and Argument-Related Murders as a Function of Region and City Size

	City size	
Homicide type	Less than 200,000	200,000 or more
Felony-related murders		
South & Southwest	1.16	2.25
Other regions	.88	3.22
Argument-related murders		
South & Southwest	4.77	7.66
Other regions	2.13	6.51

Note. Data are adapted from Uniform Crime Reports United States: Supplementary Homicide Reports 1976–1983 by J. A. Fox and G. L. Pierce, 1987, Boston: Northeastern University, Center for Applied Research.

to the perpetrator are elevated in the South (Reed, 1981; Simpson, 1985; Smith & Parker, 1980).

Homicide and Herding Versus Farming Subregions of the South

The data presented to this point are more consistent with the hypothesis that Southern violence has its origin in a culture of honor than with the other hypotheses that have been suggested over the years (although it must be admitted that no argument from contemporary data to a long-term historical process can be as tight as one would like). The attitudinal differences relating to self-protection, insults, and socialization of children; the behavioral differences in response to insults; and the elevation of argument-related rather than felony-related homicides make sense in terms of a culture of honor deriving from a herding economy. This pattern of findings could not be predicted readily on the basis of temperature, poverty, the institution of slavery, or observation of violence by African Americans. Another unique implication of the culture-of-honor hypothesis is that those regions of the South today that still have a herding economy might be particularly prone to violence. One would expect this to be true not because herding today involves a significant risk of rustling and a realistic need for self-defense but because the agricultural uses of the land today would obviously be similar to those in the past, and those uses influenced past culture and hence present culture.

In an attempt to link homicide rates to agricultural practices, Andrew Reaves and I (1993) have examined the homicide rates of different physiographic regions of the South. We studied the most rural counties of the South—all those having no town with a population of more than 2,500—looking at homicide rates (White, non-Hispanic male offender rates), per capita income of the White population, population density, mean July temperature, percent of the population that is African American, and percentage of the population that was slave in 1860. We have categorized the counties of the South into

two kinds on the basis of their likely use for farming or herding. In general, the moist plains areas of the South allow for farming and cash crops whereas the hills (average slope of land 8% or more) and the dry plains (precipitation rate of 24 inches or less) are more appropriate for herding.

In addition to the Southern counties, we examined White, non-Hispanic male homicide rates for all comparably rural counties in New England, the Middle Atlantic states, and the states of the nonindustrial, western Midwest (North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas). The homicide rates are far higher for the southern counties (8.77 per 100,000) than for the northern (2.13 per 100,000). This is a ratio of slightly more than four to one.

It may be seen in Table 5, which presents data for the Southern counties, that the counties of the moist plains in fact have a higher percentage of their farmland developed for crop purposes than the hills and dry plains, and a lower percentage of their farmland is undeveloped pasture. As would be expected by the herding–culture-of-honor hypothesis, White male homicide rates are substantially higher in the hills and dry plains regions (12.27 per 100,000) than in the farming regions (4.98 per 100,000). It may also be seen that, although differences in poverty rate remain a conceivable explanation of the homicide differences (because White per capita income is higher in the moist plains than in the other counties), three other factors—temperature, history of slavery, and high proportion of African Americans—can effectively be excluded as explanations. Differences for each of these latter variables are in the wrong direction to explain the results. Mean temperatures are slightly higher in the farming areas than the herding areas, and the slavery and African-American population indices are dramatically higher in the farming areas. (Slavery of course was more common in the wet plains regions of the South because it was there that intensive cultivation of cash crops, notably cotton, made slavery economically viable, and the percentage of African Americans in these regions has remained high.)

Regional Differences in Violence: Past, Present, and Future

The evidence suggests several conclusions, with more clarity than one expects for historical and cultural questions.

1. There is a marked difference in White homicide rates between regions of the United States, such that homicide is more common in the South and in regions of the country initially settled by Southerners.

2. There is solid negative evidence against a temperature interpretation of the difference in homicide rates. Regional differences are larger for smaller towns and more rural areas than for large cities, although regional differences in temperature are obviously just as great in the small-population towns and counties. In addition, the warmest areas of the South have the lowest homicide rates.

3. There is also good evidence against two of the traditional cultural interpretations of Southern violence.

Table 5
White Male Homicide Offender Rate and Demographic and Land Use Variables as a Function of Land Type in the South

Variable	Moist plains	Hills and dry plains
Percent of farmland developed	26.1	17.5
Percent farmland undeveloped pasture	38.7	53.9
White male homicide rate	4.98	12.27
White per capita income (dollars)	4,649	4,095
Population density (persons/square mile)	25.2	24.6
July temperature	80.7	78.2
Percent slave in 1860	44.8	10.4
Percent black in 1980	32.4	2.1

Note. All differences are significant at the .0001 level except for population density, which does not differ across groups.

Appealing to a history of slavery to explain current regional differences in violence seems doomed because the regions of the South that had the highest concentrations of slaves in the past are those with the lowest homicide rates today. Similarly, imitation of African-American violence seems an implausible explanation, because the counties with small African-American populations have the highest White homicide rates.

4. Although differences in poverty are associated with higher homicide rates, regional differences in homicide are by no means completely explained by poverty, because Southernness remains a predictor of homicide even when poverty differences between regions are taken into account; and because in microregions of North and South that are highly comparable from the standpoint of ecology, population density, economy, and other variables, the richest Southern towns have higher homicide rates than even the poorest Northern towns.

5. There is positive evidence of cultural differences between North and South in attitudes toward violence and in responses to insults. These differences are not explainable as a consequence of Southern poverty. The behavioral data were obtained from college students, and the attitudinal differences were found for rural samples that did not differ in income.

6. The most theoretically interesting but inherently hardest to establish proposition is that the South has a culture of honor with historical roots that underlies its preferences for violence. Southerners do not endorse violence in the abstract more than do Northerners, nor do they endorse violence in all specific forms of circumstances. Rather, they are more likely to endorse violence as an appropriate response to insults, as a means of self-protection, and as a socialization tool in training children. This is the characteristic cultural pattern of herding societies the world over. Consistent with the culture-of-honor interpretation, it is argument-related and not felony-related homicide that is more common in the South.

Finally, it should be noted that what is referred to as Southern violence, in the historical and anthropological

literature, as well as in this article for purposes of brevity, is actually a much more complicated regional phenomenon. It is the rural counties and smaller towns of the South and West, especially those with a herding economy, that have elevated homicide rates.

This localized pattern of violence may indicate something about the future and the likelihood that regional differences will persist. Already, the biggest urban regions of the South and West show only a trace of the elevation in White homicide rates found in other population units. This may be due in part to the manifest irrelevance of the culture of honor to the conditions of urban life, and it may be due in part to the admixture of Northern culture to these centers in the form of immigration from other regions of the country. A purely material interpretation of the Southern attitude toward violence indicates that it will not persist. It is already long since an anachronism. Few people today live in any realistic danger of having their entire livelihood taken irrevocably away from them by outlaws, not even current American pastoralists.

On the other hand, the material interpretation of the culture of honor may not be a complete explanation for its existence. Certain cultural stances may take on a life of their own because they are embedded in a matrix of behavioral patterns that sustains them. If individuals believe that they must own and even carry weapons for protection, and if they respond to insults with sufficient anger to occasionally cause them to use those weapons, this will tend to affect the entire local community. Its members may respond with heightened consciousness of the need for protection, more vigilance concerning threats, and a consequent greater likelihood of violence.

There is another sense in which the culture of honor might turn out to be self-sustaining or even capable of expanding into mainstream culture. The culture is a variant of warrior culture the world over, and its independent invention countless times (Gilmore, 1990), combined with the regularities in its themes having to do with glorification of masculine attributes, suggests that it may be a particularly alluring stance that may be capable of becoming functionally autonomous. Many observers (e.g., Naipaul, 1989; Shattuck, 1989) have noted that contemporary Southern backcountry culture, including music, dress, and social stance, is spreading beyond its original geographical confines and becoming a part of the fabric of rural, and even urban, working-class America. Perhaps for the young males who adopt it, this culture provides a romantic veneer to everyday existence. If so, it is distinctly possible that the violence characteristic of this culture is also spreading beyond its confines. An understanding of the culture and its darker side would thus remain important for the foreseeable future.

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