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Honor - a double-edged sword: An examination of the South's "culture of honor" wounding of two races

Vernetta K. Williams
University of South Florida

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Honor – A Double Edged Sword: An Examination of the South’s “Culture of Honor”

Wounding of Two Races

by

Vernetta K. Williams

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Co-Major Professor: Hunt Hawkins, Ph.D.
Co-Major Professor: Lynn Worsham, Ph.D.
Charles Heglar, Ph.D.
Gary A. Olson, Ph.D.

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Dedication

Three individuals have played critical roles in the success of this work, and I dedicate this work to them.

First, there is the late Dr. Jack Moore, my initial dissertation director, who rejected several of my topics. While his seemingly countless rejections frustrated me immensely, they caused me to dig deep to locate a rich topic to which I was deeply committed and about which I am deeply passionate.

Secondly, I dedicate this work to Bebe Moore Campbell, who died earlier this year. Her novels have inspired me to explore the complexity of race relations in the United States.

Lastly, but definitely not least, this work is dedicated to my son, Corey A. Rolfe. Though removed from the academic arena, he has been my personal source of the study of honor among black men. He patiently endured some of the most disappointing and devastating seasons of my life and constantly reminded me to have fun and enjoy life. I pray this work encourages him to complete the things that God has been given to do.

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ABSTRACT

This work expands the understanding of the “culture of honor” that social psychologists maintain exists in the American South. Social psychologists attribute the higher incidence of violent crimes, especially murder committed by white men in the South as compared to Northern white men, to this “culture of honor.” While social psychologists have restricted their work to white men, this work explores how this distinct culture has impacted the Southern black community while uncovering deeper ways in which the culture has affected the Southern white community. Using historically-based literature and film by African Americans, the work provides a more comprehensive look at the Southern “culture of honor.”

In the “culture of honor,” notions of honor involve the entire community, with the family as the central unit of honor. Male and female family members possess significant responsibilities in regards to carrying and protecting family honor. Once familial honor is compromised or lost, a violent retaliation occurs. Legal and social institutions support the culture by assuming an apathetic attitude towards violent acts committed in defense of honor.

The four works selected for this study allow for an insightful look into the Southern

“culture of honor.” While each work presents various aspects of the “culture of honor,” they all contribute to a unique understanding of the culture. In *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, Bebe Moore Campbell illustrates the damaging affects the culture has on black and white families in the South. Ernest Gaines’s *A Gathering of Old Men* depicts how Southern black men who, for decades, have been victims of violence at the hands of white men choose to assert their own toughness. The film *Rosewood* by John Singleton represents the film industry’s contemporary depiction of strong, black male figures in the South. Finally, Michael Schultz’s made for television film *For Us, The Living* celebrates the passion behind black men like Civil Rights’ champion Medgar Evers, who refused to accept the violent “rule of retaliation” adhered to by Southern white men. From this study, the Southern “culture of honor” emerges as a much more complex institution than originally presented by social psychologists.

Chapter One

The South's Other "Peculiar Institution"

If America in general has been a land of violence, it was the South that institutionalized it and bestowed on it an aura of respectability

-John Hope Franklin

Plantation life, General Robert E. Lee, Ft. Sumter, the Southern Belle, *Gone with the Wind*, the Confederate flag, "ya'll" and the Southern drawl are a few of the common cultural icons associated with the South. Just as freedom and apple pie are symbols for the United States of America, the artifacts listed above are emblems of the American states south of the Mason-Dixon line. Some of these images, like the Confederate flag, remain controversial in today's society, provoking sentiments of pride and tradition in many Southerners while symbolizing division, racism and ignorance to other Southerners as well as those outside the South. However, a strong consensus exists among Southerners and Northerners alike that one of the most disgraceful cultural institutions to exist in the history of the South is slavery. This institution led to the formation of a scandalous organization, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), and the notoriously violent acts, such as lynchings, affiliated with the KKK. The white hoods used to designate members of this violent, white supremacist group terrorized blacks in the South for decades. As a whole, slavery and its offspring such as the KKK have blemished the South's refined and genteel reputation. Because slavery serves as the origin of much of the dishonorable aspects of the South, it became known widely as the South's "peculiar institution."

The word institution has several meanings; it can be applied to things as diverse as prisons to the union of a man and woman in holy matrimony to a religious application. The sociological definition defines institution as “a well-established and structured pattern of behavior or of relationships that is accepted as a fundamental part of a culture” (Neufeldt, 700). In short, an institution is a group, organization or society that is established. The term “peculiar institution” was the name given to slavery during the antebellum period of American history and the name has followed slavery long after its abolishment. In his work titled *The Peculiar Institution*, historian Kenneth Stampp explores various aspects of this institution. Stampp explains that slavery was referred to as the “peculiar institution” because embedded within it were a number of paradoxes and ironies. Likewise, the Southern “culture of honor” is filled with paradoxes and ironies.

Paradoxes, ironies and controversies surround both slavery and the “culture of honor.” Some historians contend that slavery was the direct cause of the Civil War. Others believe slavery created the larger issue of state rights, which prompted the war. Still others believe that economics was the driving force of the historic war dividing the North and South. Whether slavery directly or indirectly caused the Civil War, its reputation as one of the South’s most strange and unusual cultural institutions has had a lasting effect on the culture of the South. Slavery has defined Southern history, shaped Southern society and distinguished Southern values, politics, attitudes and race relations from Northern ones. While innumerable historians, sociologists, filmmakers, psychologists, authors and scholars have made slavery the subject of their work, this study explores another cultural institution that originated in early Southern history. Like slavery, this other institution has proven to be an enduring and powerful force in

Southern society; however, this institution is not as well known or widely recognized as slavery.

Most known as the “culture of honor,” this other peculiar institution of the South is also called an “honor culture.” The defining characteristic of the “culture of honor” is its reliance “on violence to settle disputes” (Nisbett and Cohen, 4). The study of the “honor culture” does not enjoy the academic legacy of slavery; nonetheless, it is not considered a recent phenomenon. Social psychologists trace the development of this peculiar institution to the herding culture of those who settled Southern colonies. The leading social psychologists to study this peculiar Southern institution are Richard E. Nisbett, Andrew Reaves and Dov Cohen, who have written several articles. However, Nisbett and Cohen expound upon and clearly delineate aspects of the “culture of honor” in their book about the psychology of violence in the South.

In their book, Nisbett and Cohen explore the history and development of the “culture of honor” in the South. These scholars believe that this culture developed in response to the economy of the South and contextualize it into an international realm. According to these scholars, “there is one type of economy, however, that tends to be associated worldwide with concerns of honor and readiness to commit violence to conserve it. That is the economy based on the herding of animals” (Nisbett and Cohen, 5). In their discussion, Nisbett and Cohen discuss herdsmen in the “mountainous, semi-desert and steppe areas of the Middle East, Africa, Eurasia and North America” (5). They compare herders with their farming counterparts, who tend to be much less violent. As an example, the scholars contrast the “great warriors” of the Navajo herders in North America to the peaceful Zuni farmers (Nisbett and Cohen, 6). Likewise, Nisbett and

Cohen point out that

The northern United States was settled by farmers – Puritans, Quakers, Dutch and Germans. These people were cooperative, like farmers everywhere, and modern in their orientation toward society. They emphasized education and quickly built a civilization that included artisans, tradespeople, businesspeople, and professional of all sorts. In contrast, the South was settled primarily by people from the fringes of Britain- the so-called Scotch-Irish. These people had always been herders because the regions where they lived-Ireland, Scotland, Wales,-were not in general suitable for more-intensive forms of agriculture (7).

These scholars identify the South as the “states of the deep South as well as the mountain states of Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia (9). While they assert that the West could be included in their work since the Scotch-Irish settled that area and took the herding economy with them, Nisbett and Cohen believe that it is “the South that retains a version of the culture of honor, and this culture is largely responsible for the greater violence in the region” (9). These scholars contend that the “culture of honor” has infiltrated Southern attitudes, which has caused it to impact Southern habits, thinking and operation.

In their discussion, Nisbett and Cohen describe the necessity of herdsmen to be aggressive and violent. Because herdsmen lived in remote areas with few numbers of people, law enforcement agencies were ineffective. Individuals had to protect themselves due to the length of time it would take for the law enforcement to reach these areas. Lacking the strength and presence of law enforcement made the herdsmen vulnerable to attack; at the same time, herdsmen determined their wealth in terms of the amount and quality of animals they possessed. The vulnerability of herders to attacks and/or raids required the herders to project an attitude of aggression; in essence, herders had to be willing to protect or at least appear willing to protect their herds from invasion simply

because possessing such a reputation provided a measure of security against potential thieves. In these communities, men needed, valued and respected hostility and violence.

According to Nisbett and Cohen, there are eight elements of the “culture of honor.” They are: 1) Men who perceive their reputations for being strong and tough as their most valued possessions; 2) The larger society who agrees that a reputation for being tough is a man’s greatest asset; 3) Men who adhere to the “rule of retaliation,” a rule dictating that men must protect their reputations against insults, affronts and any other perceived form of disrespect; consequently, men must be willing to defend their reputations with the use of force; the retaliation is generally a violent one 4) Men who “are strong and unwilling to tolerate an insult” (Nisbett and Cohen, xvi). 5) A society that classifies, recognizes and rewards this tough reputation as honorable; 6) Men who believe their honorable reputations are connected to their ability to protect what belongs to them; 7) Men who believe it is their duty and obligation to protect the women in their lives (moms, wives, sisters, daughters, etc.) and 8) An intolerance for insults to women, especially those compromising or questioning a woman’s sexual chastity. Nisbett and Cohen assert that the early economic structure of the South coupled with the loose form of government caused the “culture of honor” to become embedded within Southern society.

However, the rationale presented by these social psychologists for the origins of the “culture of honor” is questioned by other social psychologists (Chu et al) who disagree with the hypothesis that higher rates of homicide exist in rural Southern communities. According to these scholars, “although we analyze similar data and address the same conceptual issues, we find no support for the Nisbett-Reaves hypothesis” (Chu

et al, 971). These scholars studied “similar data” and assert that herding economies developed in areas outside the South. In addition, these scholars point to other factors, such as poverty, the Civil War and inequality as causes for higher rates of violence in the South.

While social psychologists were the first scholars to recognize the existence of the “culture of honor” in the American South, they are not the first to coin the term, nor is the American South the first region to be labeled a “culture of honor.” In fact, social psychologists adopted the notion and phrase “culture of honor” from cultural anthropologists. Like the social psychologists mentioned above, some cultural anthropologists do not agree with the labeling of the American South as a “culture of honor;” however, their reasons differ. Cultural anthropologists identify small, remote, Mediterranean village communities, Middle Eastern communities and Islamic cultures as “cultures of honor” and are uncomfortable with the label “culture of honor” being applied to the American South because they consider those residing in Southern communities as being too mobile. Cultural anthropologists believe the term should apply strictly to groups of people in communities that remain isolated.

In spite of the reservations of cultural anthropologists in labeling the South as a “culture of honor,” mobility occurs among residents of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern communities that adhere to the culture. In April 2006, the Associated Press reported an article from Berlin about a Turkish man who killed his sister because he was ashamed of her “Western lifestyle” (“Man Convicted,” FoxNews). Though the youngest brother was convicted for the murder (he was 18 at the time and convicted as a juvenile), the victim’s older two brothers were involved in the murder; they both were acquitted.

The young brothers were ashamed of their sister, who had moved to Berlin from Turkey; her family forced her to move back to Turkey and marry; she did but left her parent's house against their will, moved back to Berlin and divorced her husband. The woman, who had children, "was killed by three shots to her head on a Berlin street" in what the article called an "honor killing" ("Man Convicted," FoxNews). This is just one example of an "honor killing" reported by the Associated Press from residents throughout Europe and the Middle East.

Cultural anthropologists identify an individual and collective sense of identity of the family and community members who adhere to the culture as a critical aspect of the "culture of honor." In essence, a man's honor as an individual is dependent upon his ability to build and maintain an honorable reputation vis a vis his family and community. Collectively, the legal and social systems of "cultures of honor" are more lenient upon individual men who violate the law in the name of honor because the violent acts they commit are not considered offensive stances. Rather, those within the culture consider their acts of violence to be defensive; defensive violence is defined as "assaultive behavior in defense of one's reputation, family, and other sacred values. At the same time, the code rejects gratuitous violence and the general use of violence in interpersonal relationships" (Chu et al, 972). In short, only certain types of violence are accepted by law enforcement and court systems in the "culture of honor." Consequently, the codes of honor inherent in "cultures of honor" transcend established laws, proceedings and policies.

In their studies of small, Mediterranean village communities, Middle Eastern and Islamic cultures, cultural anthropologists found a distinct code related to defending honor

that permeates every aspect of the culture and community and dictates acceptable family relations, social relations, social behavior, law and governance in these communities. In these communities, honor is a familial concept because the family is the fundamental group with which individuals within the culture share honor (Rodriguez, Mosquera et al, 17). Female relatives carry the honor of a family while male relatives guard and protect honor. Female family members are expected to preserve family honor by remaining above reproach sexually. If a female family member compromises her family honor by engaging in sexually questionable behavior, male family members are responsible for restoring honor to the family. Honor, in these cultures, is likened to a commodity in the sense that it can be lost and restored. Some scholars point out that honor carries greater capital for poorer families who do not possess alternate means of establishing or maintaining stature in the community if their family honor were to be lost. Consequently, honor is a coveted possession among poorer members of society (Sev'er and Yurdakul).

Scholars have applied the term “honor killing” to murders that occur in “cultures of honor” once family honor has been jeopardized. An “honor killing” refers to the practice of male family members killing a female family member who has dishonored the family by some actual or perceived sexual impropriety. The murder of the female accused of the offense is the sole means by which male family members can restore honor to the family. The killing is often committed by the youngest male of the family to mitigate the punishment in case the crime gets reported to the authorities. In some “cultures of honor,” the woman who brings family dishonor is expected to kill herself (Faqir; Arin). Because of this practice, cultural anthropologists are not the only scholars to study or document “cultures of honor.” In fact, “honor killings” have received much

critical attention from feminists. One scholar traces the practice of honor killings to a pre-Islamic code where women were considered property (Sev'er and Yurdakul, 15). As members of "cultures of honor" are leaving their communities, the practices of these communities have attracted international attention.

This study shows the extent to which the notion of honor and the distinct codes of honor present in "cultures of honor" exist in the American South. Social psychologists believe that the "culture of honor" prevails predominantly in the most rural areas of the South today, which reflects the character of Mediterranean "cultures of honor." Yet the Southern "culture of honor" does not restrict violence to women. Rather than kill their female family members for sexually improper acts, Southern white men seek to project a tough reputation and are willing to harm whoever insults their personal or familial reputation.

In several aspects, the "culture of honor" that social psychologists have examined in the South is comparable to the institution of slavery. Both institutions are strongly associated with violence. Like slavery, the "culture of honor" is the institution responsible for violent acts committed by white men against black men. According to Nisbett and Cohen, higher rates of violent crimes, specifically homicide, exist among white men in Southern territories in comparison to men in Northern states. These scholars attribute the higher violent crime rate to the "culture of honor" which promotes the belief that a man's reputation for strength and toughness is one of his most valued possessions. Consequently, men in these cultures are willing and expected to defend their honorable reputations with violence. In a "culture of honor," grave importance is placed on the insult and the appropriate response to an insult. Therefore, the "rule of retaliation" exists,

which governs that a man must retaliate violently to an insult. Men are required “to appear strong and unwilling to tolerate an insult,”(Nisbett and Cohen, xvi) especially an insult directed at a female family member. Once an insult has been made, that insult must be punished.

Another way in which slavery and the “culture of honor” are similar is the communal nature of both institutions. Though it may seem that the “culture of honor” mainly affects and involves the individual man seeking to protect his tough reputation and any person who may insult that man, the culture affects the identity and function of the family unit and government operation in the South. Nisbett and Cohen assert that a critical aspect of the “culture of honor” is the prevalence of legal systems and law enforcement agencies to maintain softened attitudes toward violent crimes committed in defense of honor just as many of the lynchings and other murders committed by the KKK were overlooked and unpunished. According to these scholars, the volume of violent crimes committed in the South by white men and the lenient attitudes of Southern legal and punitive systems toward these violent crimes when they are professed or proven to be committed in the defense of honor simply do not exist in the North.

Another distinguishing characteristic of slavery and the “culture of honor” which this study examines are the initial critical and social outlooks on these institutions. Early on, the common misperception among scholars and society at large was that slavery singularly affected one race. For years, slavery was discussed, presented and memorialized in a manner that overwhelmingly focused on the ways in which the institution of slavery brutalized the African American family, psyche and culture. Once more and more critical attention was given to slavery (especially from the African

American perspective), emphasis began to be placed on how slavery negatively impacted the Southern culture at large, whites, race relations as well as the country. For example, the narratives of former slaves Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass became vital to understanding how slavery dehumanized whites as much as these works were instrumental in presenting how slavery damaged blacks. While it has taken some time for the academic spotlight to become fixed on the white race, the increasingly intellectual focus on white Americans has caused the previously non-existent area of white studies to blossom into a bona fide academic discipline. Just like much of the early work on slavery failed to address the effects of slavery on the white family, culture and psyche, social psychologists have omitted black men and the black community from their studies of the Southern “honor culture,” which has limited the understanding of how the “culture of honor” has affected Southern culture. Social psychologists have focused singularly on the ways in which this institution has produced violent white men. The rationale behind this omission is that research conducted by these scholars uncovered “little or no regional difference in black homicide rates, only in the white rates” (Wright, 62).” By electing to preempt black men from their explorations of the “culture of honor,” social psychologists have not provided as a complete picture of the culture as possible. Not only have white men and the Southern white community been affected in more ways than explored by social psychologists but the black community has been affected as well.

While the lack of a discernable difference in violent crimes committed by black men in the South as compared to black men in the North may be justification enough for social psychologists seeking reasons for the violent crime rate discrepancy between Southern and Northern white men to exclude black men from their studies of “the culture

of honor,” this study proposes that a cultural examination of the South’s “culture of honor” is deficient without examining how black men are situated within the institution. Because of the intimate ways in which the black and white communities historically have co-existed in the South, a study of any historically-based cultural institution in the South is incomplete without considering ways in which both blacks and whites interact with the institution. The nature and structure of the historical South cause institutions such as the “culture of honor” and slavery to affect the races in different ways. The extreme social and economic disparities between blacks and whites during slavery determined who was empowered, castrated, privileged and disadvantaged. However, because scholars chose to pinpoint obvious ways in which slavery altered the victims of chattel slavery, they overlooked the subtle and not so subtle ways in which slavery changed the families, values, character and lives of the victimizers. While the effect of the “culture of honor” on white men is evidenced by the heightened statistics of violent crimes committed by Southern whites, the lack of evidence in terms of varying violent crime rates among black men does not automatically dismiss the possibility that black men have been affected by the Southern “culture of honor.” The absence of similar crime and homicide statistics for Southern black men who have historically held a vastly different status in the South than white men does not mean Southern black men have been untouched by the South’s “culture of honor.” The culture most likely affected black men in a different way just as slavery affected black men in differing tangible and intangible ways than white men. Rather than summarily excluding black men from a study of the Southern “honor culture,” this work recognizes the benefits of exploring how black men and the black community interact with the “culture of honor” in the American South as well as

exploring other ways the institution has affected the white community.

Due to the varying social and economic positions that blacks and whites have had in the South, many mainstream Southern norms, lifestyles and values have been either rejected, adopted or forced upon the African American community. Sometimes these responses are easily identified. At other times, these responses are covert; therefore, they go undetected. This study investigates how the black community, especially black men, have dealt with the peculiar institution of the “culture of honor” in the South by examining selected works by African American writers and filmmakers who situate their stories in the South. Just as slave narratives illuminated aspects of the peculiar institution of slavery and its largely unrecognized effects on the white race that had not been examined before, contemporary films and novels by African Americans can provide greater insight into the effect of the “culture of honor” upon the white community as well as insight into how the black community generally and black men specifically address, embrace and reconstruct the “culture of honor” existing in the South.

Because this study focuses primarily on how black men in the South address the “culture of honor,” race is a factor in each of the honor related crimes examined in this work. In keeping with the distinct codes of the “culture of honor,” two of the works examined are based upon white men violently retaliating against black men who they believe have compromised a white woman’s sexual purity. The history of race relations in the South as well as the historical perception of white women explain why black men are victims of violence rather than white women. Just as women were once considered property in the pre-Islamic countries to which “honor killings” predate, blacks were considered the property of white men during slavery. Whereas the woman in

Mediterranean, Arab and Islamic countries is considered the transgressor when her sexual purity is questioned, the black man in the American South is automatically considered the transgressor and the chaste, white woman is considered the victim. Both victims in the culture had property status as one time in the culture; it is easier to kill a person who has a history of being considered property instead of a human. Moreover, the South has held white woman on a pedestal for much of Southern history. White women have been considered quaint, fragile, delicate, pure and innocent. Furthermore, white women have enjoyed a social status above black men; consequently, any impropriety involving a white woman and black man ends up being blamed on the black man.

The literary works and films included in this investigation of the South's "culture of honor" possess traits that render them particularly useful for a study of this peculiar institution. An important factor for determining which works to include was authorship; all of the works selected have either a black author or filmmaker; therefore, they provide an opportunity to examine the "culture of honor" from an African American perspective. Two films and two novels have been chosen for this study; they are Bebe Moore Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, Ernest Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men*, John Singleton's *Rosewood* and Michael Schultz's *For Us The Living*. Each work selected portrays the "distinct cultural code" (Chu et al, 972) of the "culture of honor." A myriad of films, novels and short stories were reviewed before selecting these four works. Many films featuring Denzel Washington and Cuba Gooding Jr, were examined (*Men of Honor*, *Courage Under Fire*, *Antwone Fisher*, *John Q*, etc.) as well as works by Toni Morrison and James Alan McPherson (*Song of Solomon*, *Elbow Room*, etc). As noted earlier, just as the slave narratives of the early American period provided a more complete picture of

the peculiar institution of slavery not given by white writers and historians, films and literature by African Americans provide a fuller understanding of the Southern “honor culture.”

Because a study of Southern culture must be situated in the South to be effective, the American South is the setting of each film and novel selected. The novels and films selected represent the Southern states of Florida, Mississippi and Louisiana. Thirdly, each of the works selected is grounded in historical reality, meaning each work is based on a historical event, figure or social situation. This is an important criterion simply because film and literature are modes of entertainment, so events, plots and characters are largely the products of creative imagination. While the filmmakers and authors may take creative license when re-enacting the events, presenting the historical figures and portraying the cultural complexities of the South, their creativity is contained within the realities of the actual society, personalities and actions being represented. Since this study examines a cultural institution in a specific region, it is important that the works selected mirror Southern social structures rather than contrived elements in a person’s creative mind. Nonetheless, it is recognized that the authors and filmmakers alter historical events and figures; these modifications can provide insight into cultural values as well.

While some of the works mentioned previously possessed a few of the criteria needed for this work, each work included in this study verifies the existence of the Southern “culture of honor” and contributes to an understanding of this peculiar institution. Directed by John Singleton, the movie *Rosewood* is based upon the 1923 destruction of the first all-black Florida town. In the film, the spark that led white men to burn down the town of Rosewood, Florida, is a white woman’s accusation that a black

man beat her. Just as *Rosewood* is based upon an historical event, Bebe Moore Campbell based her novel *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* upon the highly publicized 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a teen-aged black boy living with his mother in Chicago who, while visiting his uncle in Mississippi, was brutally beaten for allegedly addressing a white woman inappropriately. By having an open-casket funeral in Chicago and showing her son's mutilated face, Till's mother attracted national attention to the all too-frequent killing of black males at the hands of white men in the South. In *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, Campbell chronicles several decades of the lives of white and black families connected to the death of a young, Northern black boy whose parents have roots in the South; the boy is murdered for speaking to a white woman during his short stay with his maternal grandmother, who lives in Mississippi. The made-for television film *For Us, The Living – The Story of Medgar Evers* presents Medgar Evers's life from the time he committed himself to Civil Rights work in Mississippi until his assassination a few years later. The film is based on a book written by Medgar Evers's widow and was released almost 20 years after Medgar's death. The film incorporates scenes and events missing from Myrlie Evers's book but that are critical to aspects of the Southern "culture of honor."

Unlike the previous three works, Gaines's novel *A Gathering of Old Men* is not based upon a specific historical event or figure in the South. Rather, it records the volatile racial tensions that existed in rural Louisiana between blacks and whites as integration was reaching remote locales. Far into the 20th century, black men in the South were treated as subservient; they were degraded, intimidated, humiliated and abused by their white employers, neighbors and community members. Black men clearly understood that violating certain Southern codes led to beatings, lynching and other physical abuses that

often resulted in death. In contrast to Singleton's film and Campbell's novel, Gaines's novel is based upon the murder of a white man at the hands of a black man. *A Gathering of Old Men* documents the day in the life of several elderly black men who have decided they will no longer be victims of white male violence. Rather than concede to the Southern codes dictating what should happen when a black man harms a white man, the elderly black men unite to protect one another against the forthcoming retaliation. With guns in hand, the black men face off with the policing and social authorities of the Louisiana Bayou community. This novel offers a unique look into the black men's decision to defend themselves and their honor instead of passively accepting or succumbing to the expected violent retaliation.

Another important aspect of each film and novel chosen for this study is the foregrounding of African American male characters; since black men are at the center of the plot of each work, the ways in which these men individually and collectively integrate the "culture of honor" within their lives, families and psyche can be studied. A character analysis of these men's thoughts, personalities and motivations is made possible by the focus on black men. In *Rosewood*, a black male is single-handedly responsible for saving the lives of a number of the children of the small town and standing up to the white men in the town. In Gaines's novel, a group of black men present a united front, each claiming that he has killed the white man so that the authorities, formal and informal, cannot arrest or harm just one man. *For Us, The Living* is based upon the work of an integral Civil Rights leader, Medgar Evers, who served as the impetus for change in racial relations in Mississippi. Campbell's novel is slightly different from the other three, because families, rather than individuals, are highlighted. However, at the center of the plot of the novel is

a young black boy. Campbell's novel affords the opportunity to examine how black and white families as well as the larger Southern community are affected by the Southern "culture of honor." Finally, each of the works selected does not present the black or white Southern community in isolation; rather, the stories are presented within the larger Southern society and racial intermingling. This approach permits a more dynamic look at the Southern "honor culture."

In this examination, each novel and film is discussed in its own chapter. The following four critical aspects of the "culture of honor" are explored in each text and film: 1) The family unit(s) that adheres to the notion of honor, 2) the white man who values his reputation for toughness, protects his family's honor and is willing to defend an insult to his reputation with violence, 3) the white woman who carries her family's honor and is expected to maintain her sexual chastity and 4) the legal or governmental authorities that overlook acts of violence or are more lenient when these violent acts are committed in defense of honor. The fifth thing that is examined in each work is the dominant black male character; this figure is studied for his behavior, motives, attitudes and values. Where a specific trait or aspect of the "culture of honor" could not be found, an examination of what represents that element has been done. For example, traditional family structures in terms of mother, father and children do not exist in *A Gathering of Old Men*; therefore, an examination of who and what represent the family unit is done. Also, the main white female character in Gaines's novel was raised by a white woman and a black man, yet this woman still represents sexual chastity in the community because she is unmarried. In addition, Gaines's novel presents several, not just one, black dominant male, so these characters are studied as a group and as individuals.

The reason that the phrase “culture of honor” is italicized throughout this work is to distinguish the type of honor in these regions from the more prevalent understanding of honor known throughout the world. As Nisbett and Cohen note, most people relate honor with deference, high esteem, veneration and other words indicating a certain special, elevated attitude reserved for those to whom only the utmost respect is given. In their wedding vows, husbands and wives take the oath “to honor and obey.” Within the educational arena, honor societies, honor cords, the honor roll and honorary degrees are associated with those believed to be intellectually exceptional. Within courts of law, titles such as “the Honorable” and “Your Honor” are used to address those holding the highest position in the court, the judges. Perhaps the area of American culture most aligned with the “culture of honor” due to its role of defending American honor is the Armed Forces. In the military, one of the highest awards conferred is the “medal of honor.” Furthermore, the Honor Guard is the group of soldiers who carry and present the U.S flag during special ceremonies. Therefore, the term honor generally refers to people, organizations and objects that a society greatly values. Social psychologists recognize that the word honor in “culture of honor” has extremely different connotations from the widely accepted meaning for those outside the culture. Within the context of these cultures, honor takes on a negative connotation to identify feelings of hostility and anger rather than warmth and appreciation. In such an environment, the oxymoronic phrase “honor killing” was birthed. Thus, “culture of honor” is italicized throughout this work to distinguish it as a term reserved for a specific community with a nontraditional application of honor.

Honor as it is applied to “cultures of honor” is not a novel concept nor is it the

first time that honor has been affiliated with violence in the South. In his discussion of the Old South's common practice of dueling, historian Jack Williams confirms much of what social psychologists identify as several aspects of the "culture of honor" existing in the South. The dueling that was rampant in the South from 1800-1860 is indicative of the codes embedded within the "culture of honor" in the South. Honor was an explicit and implied aspect of dueling. As author Jack Williams notes, dueling was considered the "'affair of honor,' the Southern gentlemen's method of settling personal disputes and avenging insults to self, family or friends" (Williams, 4). Various causes of a duel included "presumed insults about family, friends, or physical, mental, or moral traits" (Williams, 13) among the list of political difference and business dealings. In a later chapter, Williams states, "The basic cause of the duel was a slur on a man's character, the injuring of a man's reputation" (24). The act of dueling was borrowed from Europeans; in fact, many Southerners visited France and England to study rules and conduct of dueling. Dueling was also practiced heavily in Spain.

While the practice of dueling was borrowed from Europe, Southerners modified the practice to suit their knowledge of guns. Whether conducted with guns or swords, dueling was considered a violent act. Williams notes, "This violence device could persist because the duel was an affair of class and caste, an important facet of Southern gentility and chivalric presumptions, a means by which Southern males could demonstrate their virility and prove their courage, and a mechanism for the protection of the nineteenth-century Southern man's most prized possession, his honor" (72). Even Europeans noted the difference in the Southern adoption of dueling versus the use in England – "'the worst feature in the American systems of dueling is that they do not go out, as we do in this

country [England], to satisfy honour, but with the determination to kill...”(Williams, 41). Whereas in England and other parts of Europe, one could restore honor through the act of dueling, in the South, men believed the insult was restored only through the death of the person who committed the offense. This quote illustrates that the motive was to kill not to restore honor. Throughout the work, Williams quotes various scholars and Southerners who describe the duel as a way to avenge an insult – it was a way “to prove honor, fearlessness, implacability in the face of insult” (5). The dueling ground was considered the “field of honor” (Williams, 26) and only gentlemen accepted a challenge to a duel from other gentlemen. Horsewhipping and caning was used on those of inferior status, such as slaves and white men of lower classes. Historian John Hope Franklin believed the duel was one piece of evidence of the violent nature of Southern white men, and these white men exercised violence in different forms with those of lesser social status (Williams, 6).

Distinguishing the practice of dueling as peculiar to the South, Williams notes that dueling became an “epidemic” only in the South (Williams, 6). While dueling entered the North, it never became embedded in the culture and anti-dueling laws were quickly adopted and adhered to in North. Williams believes other factors allowed dueling to flourish in the South and be oppressed in the North. Unlike Northern communities, Southern areas were undeveloped and underdeveloped and thus, more prone to violence (Williams, 73). Williams explains that the upper class men had to display courage and strong masculinity in order to keep the lower class whites and blacks oppressed. Williams confirms the economic need identified by Nisbett and Cohen needed to preserve status; this need facilitated the proliferation of dueling upon the aristocracy,

and dueling became part of the training of Southern upper class men. A culture developed where schools, trainers and course in dueling permeated the South (Williams, 42-43). Dueling allowed gentleman to develop a tough reputation since the lower classes were known to brawl, fight and use knives. Dueling was sophisticated violence since the formal rules dictating dueling complimented the supposed refined character of Southern gentleman. Opponents to dueling existed in the South and anti-dueling legislation was even passed in the South; nonetheless, the police and courts did not enforce the legislation, another sign of the existence of the “culture of honor” in the South. Though many Southern states classified dueling as a crime, Williams explains that public opinion believed otherwise, and in the South, public opinion outweighed formal policy. In fact, Williams notes that in the times when dueling in the South was prosecuted, “judges generally were reluctant to sustain laws that, they believed, might seriously infringe on the personal liberty of gentlemen” (67). Therefore, anti-dueling laws become impotent.

Williams even attests to the power of the understanding of honor among the Southern aristocracy as something beyond a simple concept or idea - “For a Southerner, personal honor, while an intangible concept, was no less real than any physical possession and among these possessions no less valuable than the most expensive and cherished” (77). Williams continues to explain the role of family, especially the central role of women, in the Southern understanding of personal honor. In his explication of the dynamic nature of the understanding of honor, Williams notes, “...there was to be praise for female chastity; there was to be an exaggerated modesty of language when women were present...Honor meant that no woman-no gentlewoman-should be embarrassed or insulted. Certainly no female member of a man’s family, whatever the degree of

consanguinity, was to be considered as having any but the loftiest qualities of character. Any imputation to the contrary was an assault, to be fiercely combated on the field of honor” (77). In short, “a gentleman ‘must be willing to risk life itself in defense of his own good name and that of a member of his family’” (Williams, 77).

Violence and honor are also linked in the areas of the humanities and arts. In musical and theatrical production, specifically opera, the act of suicide is accepted in relation to honor; one author notes this acceptance as “the Madame Butterfly Effect” (Stack, 431). Within the discipline of English, a search of honor in any literary database returns numerous articles and books. Some address the concept of honor in Medieval times. Some address honor as a theme or within literary criticism (Weber, Eugen; Golding, Sue). Others examine honor in the literature of European writers (French, German and British – Grimbert, Joan; Westphal-Wihl, Sarah). Other works connect honor to love and chivalry (Row, Anne; Yacowar, Maurice). Many address the concept of honor in Southern literature and even specify “Southern Honor” as a distinct type of honor (MacKethan, Lucinda; Wyatt-Brown, Bertam). William Faulkner is the subject of inquiry in more than one examination of honor (Folks, Jeffrey; MacLelland, Jackie). One work even examined Southern Honor in connection to sexual violence (Blair, John). While the notion of honor has a presence and history in literary works, it has not been examined in reference to race relations in the South. The present study, as best known, is the first work to examine the “culture of honor” in connection to race relations and from an African American perspective.

As mentioned earlier, a chapter is devoted to each of the four works examined in this work. The chapter on Campbell’s *Your Blues Ain’t Like Mine* explores various

aspects of the “culture of honor” but focuses on the effects of the “culture of honor” on both the white and black communities. The following chapter shifts focus to the black male. In Gaines’s *A Gathering of Old Men*, the opportunity to study a group of elderly black men who have been subjected to violence but are claiming to have killed a tough white man is afforded. This chapter examines the extent to which black men embrace, reconstruct and disregard notions of honor embedded within the South. The effect of the “culture of honor” on Southern law enforcement officials is examined also. In the following chapter, John Singleton’s *Rosewood* is studied. Because this film features one black man, it allows for a more in-depth study of the character of the black man residing in a “culture of honor.” The chapter on Michael Schultz’s *For Us, The Living – The Story of Medgar Evers* affords an examination of how the director capitalizes on aspects of the Southern “culture of honor.” The final chapter examines the works as a whole to illustrate the greater understanding they provide of the peculiar Southern “culture of honor.”

Chapter Two

The Dysfunctional Family, Southern Style

*I laid down last night,
Turning from side to side,
Yes, I was turning from side to side,
I was not sick,
I was just dissatisfied*
-Jimmy Rushing

Known mostly as a popular fiction writer, the recently deceased Bebe Moore Campbell has addressed a plethora of issues in her novels, journalistic articles, children's books and play. Two of her novels are based on historical racial events in the United States. The most recent novel, *Brothers and Sisters*, is set in California shortly after the Rodney King beating that led to the Los Angeles race riots; the novel addresses the tensions and conflicts brewing in a multi-racial Los Angeles bank shortly after the riots. The novel features several ambitious white and black male and female characters as they seek to achieve professionally while confronting their personal issues and shortcomings. Published in 1992, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* is Campbell's first novel. Like *Brothers and Sisters*, the novel explores racial tensions, but the source of the tension is different. In Campbell's first historically-based novel, the tensions are the result of the peculiar Southern institution known as the "culture of honor."

The time period is the 1950s. The setting is Hopewell, Mississippi, a small, racially segregated town. The historical context is pertinent - the South recently has been ordered

to integrate public schools. The characters are numerous; however, there is one main black family and one central white family. The Cox family is a lower class white family whose men are known around Hopewell for being viciously mean. Parents Mamie and Lester Cox have two sons. The older son, John Earl, is respected by his father as a leader and hunter; John Earl is married to Louetta Cox. The younger son, Floyd Cox, is the misfit of the family because he lacks the prowess and courage that his brother and father possess. Similarly, Floyd's beautiful wife Lily does not fit in with the other Cox women. The central main black family is the Todds, whose parents are separated by divorce and distance. Raised in Hopewell, Wydell and Delotha Todd run off to Chicago during their teenage years once Delotha becomes pregnant. After settling in Chicago, Wydell becomes an alcoholic and eventually abandons his wife and son. Left to raise young Armstrong by herself, Delotha quickly becomes overwhelmed and decides to send Armstrong to live with her mother Odessa in Hopewell, Mississippi.

Within the first 20 pages of the novel, Campbell establishes the existence of several prominent traits of the "culture of honor" through an incident between Floyd Cox and the young Armstrong Todd. Though he is not well off, Floyd owns a house and a pool hall that serves as the lone source of public recreation for black men in Hopewell. On this particular day, Floyd has agreed to allow Lily to accompany him into town as he handles some business. Lily, who is a stay at home mother with the young Floyd Junior, longs to escape to town to purchase items as well as experience new people and things. After going to the store, Floyd and Lily stop by the pool hall. Floyd instructs Lily to stay in the truck while he goes inside.

Excited about her newly purchased red lipstick and perfume and anxious for some

activity beyond home life, Lily defies Floyd's instructions and creates trouble for young Armstrong. A group of black men are in the pool hall. Youngster Armstrong Todd is speaking French to the other men because he enjoys flaunting his sophistication and superiority to the Southern black men of Hopewell. Though he does not speak French fluently, Armstrong knows a few phrases that he learned from his father who served in the military. In the middle of speaking a French phrase, Armstrong hears someone at the door, turns around to see Lily and continues to speak French. At this moment, Lily steps inside the doorway, smiling at Armstrong and lifting her arm to smell the perfume she recently applied to her wrist. Lily begins laughing, and Armstrong laughs too. Suddenly, Lily pauses, looks over her shoulder and steps back outside. Shortly thereafter, Floyd enters the pool hall to speak with his black attendant Jake. Floyd hears the strange language and asks what it is. Jake identifies it as French and adds, "Mr. Floyd, he was talking it to your wife" (Campbell, 19). Upon hearing this news, Floyd asks Jake if Lily came inside; Jake responds that she came to the doorway.

After learning that his wife entered a room full of black men and one man addressed her, Floyd contemplates the action he should take. "For a moment, he stood motionless, trying to decide what to do, because if the boy had talked crazy to Lily, he had to do something" (Campbell, 19). Floyd recognizes he has to take action against the youngster for talking to Lily, and he internally agonizes about the response he should take - "Should he just holler at him? Should he go in there and beat him with a pool cue? Knock him down? Just how angry was he supposed to get?" (Campbell, 20). These quotations illustrate that rather than merely responding as a man concerned about his wife's safety, Floyd is adhering to a code that dictates the appropriate response.

According to the “culture of honor,” Floyd’s responsibility as the man of the family is to protect the family reputation against insult. Another man, especially a young black boy, speaking possible sexual innuendos to his wife is insulting. Nonetheless, the fact that Floyd is abiding by societal rules, rather than being motivated by his own convictions, causes him to hesitate. Finally, Floyd decides to confront the youngster verbally, asking whether Armstrong had said something crazy to his wife. After Armstrong answers no, Floyd bans the boy from the pool hall.

After taking this action, Floyd regrets the fact that he did not retaliate with violence - “I shoulda hit that boy....What was I thinking of? Lord, I don’t want this getting back to Daddy and them” (Campbell, 21). Because Floyd knows that his father and brother wholeheartedly subscribe to the “culture of honor,” he does not want the other Cox men to learn about the incident. This early episode in the novel demonstrates the pressure upon a man living within a “culture of honor” to react to insults, perceived or actual, with violence. In his musings, Floyd realizes that his non-violent reaction to the incident may cause him to lose respect not only with his male family members but also with the black men in the community. To avoid losing respect within his family, Floyd chooses to keep the situation to himself. However, Floyd does not realize that he has already lost respect in the pool hall. The black pool attendant believes that Floyd inappropriately responded to the incident. While he does not dare to verbalize his opinion, Jake thinks Floyd’s decision not to respond with violence attests to his weakness. Jake’s ponderings confirm Floyd’s fears that whatever tough reputation he had among the black men of Hopewell has been damaged.

Once Floyd gets back in the truck, he violently retaliates against Lily for

disregarding his instructions to remain in the truck. As he enters the truck, Floyd slaps his wife, demanding to know why she got out of the truck. Consistent with Mediterranean “cultures of honor,” the retaliation occurs against the female family member for her sexual impropriety. As noted earlier, women carry the honor of the family through their sexual chastity. Once a woman dishonors the family, the responsibility for restoring honor falls upon the male member, who must kill the offending female relative. Inconsistent with Mediterranean “cultures of honor,” Lily is not killed for her indiscretion. Had Lily resided in the Mediterranean, her act of standing in the doorway of a room filled with men would have been grounds for her murder at the hands of her husband or another male family member.

The South’s public and private perception of the white woman explains why white women are not killed by their male family members in the South. Historically, the South has elevated white women to a high level of moral stature. According to traditional Southern viewpoints, a Southern white woman is sexually modest, sophisticated, delicate and innocent. Furthermore, the Southern white woman only desires the finer things in life. Therefore, she would never debase herself to fraternize with an inferior black male. If a Southern white woman chooses to degrade herself by co-mingling with a black man, her decision is not acknowledged publicly; rather, it is handled privately, within the family. Publicly, the black man would be blamed and punished for coercing a white woman to submit to his base, animalistic instincts.

Lily realizes the precarious situation she is in once Floyd asks her, after slapping her, what the boy said to her. At this point, Lily recognizes that her response would either elicit more violence from Floyd for her or cause Floyd to harm the young boy, so “she

had to protect herself. If she said she was sorry, it would be like admitting that she'd gone into the pool hall to look at a colored boy; Floyd might hit her again. If she told him what the boy had said (What had he said? What?), Floyd might hurt him" (Campbell, 20).

Desiring to protect both herself and young Armstrong, Lily responds that she did not understand what the boy said. Once he gets this answer, Floyd instructs Lily not to "let on about what happened. You know how Daddy and them are" (Campbell, 25). To prevent himself from having to respond violently to Armstrong, Floyd keeps the incident hidden from his family. Unfortunately, Floyd's desire for his father and brother to remain ignorant of what happened at the pool hall goes unfulfilled.

To humble the cocky, young Armstrong, the black pool hall attendant informs the other Cox men of the incident since he believes that Floyd did not handle it properly and wants to teach Armstrong a Southern lesson. Understanding the codes of the "culture of honor," Jake mentally conveys his belief that Floyd should have knocked Armstrong down - "Floyd Cox is scared! Just plain scared! Like some of these sorry mens gon' do something to him" (Campbell, 21). Jake visits the Cox residence to drop off the money that Floyd left at the pool hall; during his brief stay, Jake nonchalantly comments to Lester that Floyd handled the incident at the pool hall well. This remark immediately raises questions, and Lester confronts Floyd, who assures his father that he handled the situation. Lester probes, "Handled it, did you? Like we woulda done? Like you was one of us?" (Campbell, 30). Because of the importance of the Cox family reputation to Lester, he wants to know that an insult to a female family member was handled in a way that restored honor to the Cox family and punished the offender. Once the other two Cox men are aware of the incident, a violent retaliation according to the codes of the "culture of

honor” is initiated.

The three Cox men pile into a truck on a mission to restore honor to their family by hurting the man who insulted Lily Cox. Once the Cox men arrive at Armstrong’s grandmother’s house, Armstrong, who is on the porch, runs away from the house. The Cox men chase him, catch him, beat him and kick him. Armstrong keeps asking what he has done. Finally, Floyd responds, “You was talking crazy to my wife. That’s what” (Campbell, 38). Armstrong’s transgression was his insult to a white man’s wife, and the men of the Cox family retaliate with violence. Once the Cox men have brutally beaten Armstrong, Lester insists that Floyd pull the trigger to kill Armstrong since the insult was to his wife. Lester yells, “You gon’ fight your own battles, or is your brother gon’ hafta do it all? She’s your wife. Yourn” (Campbell, 38). Floyd complies and kills Armstrong to prove that he has a tough reputation that he is willing to defend. The final thing that Lester says as the three men drive home is, “Well, you might can’t fix everything that needs fixing, but damned if you can’t make some things right” (Campbell, 40). To Lester and John Earl, it was clearly insulting for a black man to talk “crazy” to a white man’s wife; they wanted to ensure that the dishonor was corrected. Floyd’s violent retaliation ushers him into the graces of his father, who had always thought he was not strong or tough enough. For the first time in his life, Floyd feels loved and accepted by his father and brother, who are well known in Hopewell for their violent, tough reputations.

The community reaction to the murder attests to the presence of another critical element of the “culture of honor” - the overlooking of violent acts by governing authorities when these acts are committed in the name of honor. No one in Hopewell expects the Cox men to be punished, even though Armstrong was alive when his

grandmother came home and identified his murderers before dying. Armstrong's murder quickly becomes the talk of the town. Every black person in town learns that Armstrong Todd was killed by the Coxes because he spoke French to Lily Cox. When John Earl informs Floyd that everyone is talking about the murder, Floyd's immediate response is fear. However, his brother calms him by reiterating the code which gives a man a right to protect his wife and defend his family's reputation. John Earl tells Floyd, "Ain't a man around here wouldn't have done the same thing. There's just some things a man ain't supposed to stand for" (Campbell, 53). John Earl's comment attests to the pervasive Southern belief that a man defends his family honor with violence. Once Louetta informs Lily that that the Cox men have killed Armstrong, Lily wants to know whether their husbands will be arrested; Louetta responds, "It's gonna be like it ain't never happened" (Campbell, 54).

Even the black community recognizes that the Cox men will go unpunished. As Delotha is choosing the coffin in which to bury her son, she remarks to her mother Odessa, "It's my fault. They won't punish them Coxes. It'll be like nothing ever happened" (Campbell, 55). As a formality, the sheriff visits Floyd's home to question him regarding Armstrong's death. Floyd assures the sheriff they he did not kill Armstrong; he asserts that he simply gave the boy a good "talking to" for talking "dirty" to his wife (Campbell, 72). When Floyd says, "A man's got a right to protect his wife" (Campbell, 71), the sheriff agrees. Later in the conversation, Floyd proclaims his rights and responsibilities as a man operating within the Southern "culture of honor" - "What kind of man would I be if I let any ignorant nigger that wants to talk to her just any ole kind of way? A man's got a right to protect his property, his children, and his wife. Ain't

that right?" (Campbell, 72-73). Again, the sheriff agrees with Floyd and leaves, without disputing Floyd's claim to innocence or questioning him any further. The sheriff summarizes his investigation by saying, "So you are saying that you didn't kill that boy" (Campbell, 73). From the Cox women to the black community to the policing authorities, no one in Hopewell expects the Cox men to be punished for their violent murder of a young boy. In fact, several similar violent incidents occur immediately after Armstrong's death. In a nearby town, a boy gets burned for allegedly attacking a white girl – another example of the "rule of retaliation" practiced within the "culture of honor."

While everyone in Hopewell understands the codes embedded within the "culture of honor" existing in the South, their way of life gets scrutinized when Northerners learn of Armstrong's death. Delotha arrives to Hopewell to take her son's body to Chicago to bury him. Northern reporters arrive in town with Northern mannerisms contrary to the Southern lifestyle, codes and race relations. The Northern reporters tote cameras, ask questions, address blacks as equals deserving of respect and promise to bring justice to the men who murdered young Armstrong. When these Northern reporters arrive on Odessa's porch, she refuses to talk with them though she is intrigued by their talk of justice. Odessa rationalizes that these men do not live in Hopewell; therefore, they will return North once they get their story, and she will be left to deal with the repercussions of accusing white men; an action that would bring further violent retaliations.

The presence of the Northern press bothers the wealthy Hopewell citizens who believe that bad press will not only negatively affect their economy and way of life but also invite further disruption to their lives by those outside the Delta. In order to "keep Mississippi business in Mississippi" (Campbell, 90), the wealthy decision makers, known

as the Honorable Men of Hopewell, decide that an arrest needs to be made. The decision to arrest the Cox men is a business decision for the Honorable Men, not a decision based on their agreement with blacks and the Northern press that an injustice has been committed. Even the sheriff and deputy who arrive to arrest the Cox men are “resigned” (Campbell, 93) to what they must do, feeling uncomfortable and apologetically arresting the men. Sheriff Barnes tells Floyd that he would not be there if it was up to him, but the out of town reporters have stirred the community. Floyd remains speechless as the young deputy informs Floyd that he is being arrested for killing Armstrong. Floyd thinks, “Up until that moment he’d never associated the word ‘murder’ with what he’d done to the colored boy...He’d righted a wrong, that’s what he’d done” (Campbell, 94). Again, Floyd, the Cox men, the police and the larger white community of Hopewell believe that the murder of Armstrong was needed to restore family honor rather than a crime deserving punishment.

While some official actions are taken against the Cox men, they are all done to remove the unwelcome Northern spotlight from Hopewell rather than to punish men for committing murder. The motive behind the arrest of the Cox men and subsequent trial of Floyd Cox is to preserve the peculiar institutions of the South, including the “culture of honor.” Consequently, John Earl and Lester serve only a few days in jail, and Floyd’s trial for murder is a farce. Several black and white residents of Hopewell testify at Floyd’s trial, which is well-attended and highly publicized. Darnell, one of the black men in the pool hall during the incident, provides a first hand account of the interaction between Armstrong and Lily. Darnell testifies that Lily stood in the doorway of the pool hall as Armstrong spoke French. Floyd’s attorney, Waldo Anderson, asks Darnell, ““Why

do you think a white lady would enter a business establishment with nothing but nigras inside?” (Campbell, 115). This question captures the Southern belief that white women would have no interest in black men. Darnell’s response that Lily thought Armstrong was funny produced an uproar among whites in the courtroom. The white members of Hopewell are appalled that Darnell implies that “one of their prettiest women had been fascinated enough by a black boy to want to stand around and listen to him speak a language she didn’t understand” (Campbell, 115). Even the Judge turned red as a result of his “outrage” at Darnell’s response. No white citizen believes the testimony; on the contrary, the white community thinks it absurd to intimate that Lily was curious about black men. Cognizant of the danger he has put himself in through his testimony, Darnell goes from the courtroom to the bus station to leave town.

Several white Hopewell community members serve as false witnesses for Floyd and the incident. The preacher testifies to Floyd’s upstanding Christian character though Floyd and his family have not attended church in months. A neighbor testifies that Floyd has the typical Hopewell attitude towards blacks; he “liked them in their place” (Campbell, 118). John Earl also testifies on Floyd’s behalf. Lily becomes disappointed that John Earl said Floyd only talked to the boy instead of explaining that he killed Armstrong for her. She thought, “Why wasn’t it enough to say that her husband had killed because he loved and wanted to protect her? She wanted everyone to know that” (Campbell, 119). Though Lily testifies for Floyd and against Armstrong, she feels uneasy since she knows that others know she is lying. In less than half an hour, the jury returns a not-guilty verdict. Floyd becomes a free man, posing for reporters and taking pictures with his family outside the courtroom.

Though the trial is over, the effects of the codes within the “culture of honor” impact several black and white families for years to come. As already mentioned, one of the damaging effects of the Southern “culture of honor” is the apathetic attitude of the white community towards Armstrong’s brutal murder. The Cox men, policing authorities and larger white community do not perceive Armstrong’s murder as a crime. Rather than believing Armstrong to be a victim, those who subscribe to the Southern “culture of honor” consider Armstrong an aggressor deserving of death. When he gets arrested, Floyd admits that he did not consider his act of shooting Armstrong at point blank range to be murder. In Floyd’s eyes, Armstrong had insulted his wife and family, so Floyd was obligated to correct the wrong through violence. Since the white community of Hopewell has overlooked lynchings, murders and beatings of black men at the hands of white men for decades, it accepts Armstrong’s murder as a part of the mode of operation of the South. Only the presence of the Northern community causes Armstrong’s murder to be treated as a crime worthy of inquiry, arrest and trial.

Another effect of the Southern “culture of honor” concerns the roles and expectations of men and women within the culture, which are carried into Southern marriages. Through the Cox family, the widespread damage of the culture on the institution of marriage is portrayed. Rather than accommodating individual personalities, the “culture of honor” confines men and women to strict guidelines. From the outset of the novel, Campbell portrays the restrictions that Lily Cox feels in her marriage bed. Lily must strategically plan how to prompt her husband to make love to avoid violating codes that dictate that women are to be sexually modest. Because Lily knows that men, including her husband, believe that whores initiated sex and “wanting it had to be his

idea” (Campbell, 10), she must ensure that Floyd is the sexual initiator. Even after engaging in sexual activity, Lily must monitor and constrain her responses though she does not understand why – she couldn’t cry out during sex, even though she did not see the harm in it (Campbell, 11). Lily constantly finds herself conforming to a code that dictates appropriate behavior and responses for her as a woman within the Southern “culture of honor.”

Because of the wide spectrum of acts that could be considered sexually inappropriate in a Southern “culture of honor,” Floyd becomes suspicious of his wife after she stands in the doorway of the pool hall. Floyd’s suspicion of Lily develops into a phobia of her infidelity. Floyd’s phobia distances him from his wife because he no longer trusts her. After their daughter Doreen is born, Floyd questions who the child resembles even though others agree she looks just like Floyd’s deceased older sister. As he studies his newborn daughter, Floyd thinks, “If she [Lily] would go into a room full of nigger men, what else would she do?” (Campbell, 189). At one point, Floyd’s phobia becomes so strong that he does not look at Lily because every time he does, he wonders what men she has been sleeping with while he is away working (Campbell, 256). Since the Southern “culture of honor” restricts a woman’s behavior, Lily’s one act of standing in a doorway destroys the confidence her husband has in her as an upright woman.

Another effect of the Southern “culture of honor” results from Floyd’s hypersensitivity to insults. Floyd believes that Lily repeatedly degrades his abilities as a husband, so he beats her throughout the novel. Part of Floyd’s hypersensitivity to insult stems from feelings of inadequacy cultivated by his family’s strict adherence to the Southern institution. Because Southern white men are expected to display physical

aggression as proof that they possess a tough reputation, Floyd Cox feels shunned by his father, brother and mother for not displaying toughness. Whereas his older brother John Earl receives compliments and accolades from his parents, Floyd feels as if his parents are ashamed of him. Furthermore, John Earl is considered the brave, tall and strong son (Campbell, 74). To overcompensate for his shortcomings as a tough leader, Floyd dominates Lily. Floyd feels helpless to defend his reputation against his parents who compare him to John Earl, yet Floyd retaliates violently against Lily whenever he thinks she compares him to John Earl.

Unable to command respect from his family, Floyd demands fear and respect from Lily by beating her. Almost every episode of domestic violence occurs when Floyd perceives that Lily suggests that Floyd does not adequately provide for his family as John Earl does. The first instance of abuse after the pool hall incident occurs after Floyd and Lily have just left John Earl's house. Floyd observes the longing in Lily's eyes as she views the modern convenience in his brother's house; though Lily does not complain or say anything, Floyd equates the longing he sees in her eyes with being spat upon in his face. When Floyd smacks Lily, he demands, "Ain't what I give you good enough?" (Campbell, 52). Similarly, the remaining incidents occur when Floyd believes that Lily acts, speaks and thinks as if what he provides is not good enough. During one episode, Lily needs milk for the baby and asks if she should ask milk of her sister-in-law. What Lily considers an act of supplying for her infant child, Floyd receives as a personal insult. Therefore, Lily gets beat.

Besides restricting women to certain behaviors, the "culture of honor" disillusioned women to the extent of the love their men have for them. The Cox women believe they

are the motives behind their husbands' violent actions. For most of the novel, Lily is proud that her husband is willing to kill to protect her. In fact, Lily's sister-in-law Louetta is the person to inform her that Floyd killed Armstrong for speaking to her. Seeing the shock on Lily's face, Louetta explains, "Yes, honey, we got men who'll defend us...That's what a man is supposed to do for his wife" (Campbell, 54). Lily thinks about the innocent Armstrong for a moment but quickly turns her attention to her husband - "She looked through the kitchen window at her husband, and he seemed taller and stronger, a man who would take care of her and protect her. Lily thought: *I got a man who'll kill for me*" (Campbell, 55). After the murder, Floyd repeatedly tells Lily that he will protect her and killed Armstrong for her (Campbell, 46). One of the first things Floyd tells Lily when she visits him in jail is "Lily, Lily....I done it for you. For your protection" (Campbell, 100). Lily wholeheartedly believes her husband.

Lily discovers Floyd's true motive for killing Armstrong during an argument between Floyd and his father Lester. The family is gathered at the parent's home, and John Earl announces that he is moving his family to another state to improve life for his family. The entire Cox family suffered hardship after Armstrong's murder and Floyd's trial due to the negative press. After John Earl makes his announcement, Lester comments that the family is scattering. Floyd interprets Lester's comment and the strange looks from the family as the family way of holding him responsible for the unexpected negative aftermath of the murder. Floyd says to his father, "That's right, blame me...I told you I handled that boy. I told you. But no, it wasn't good enough for you. You said I had to teach that boy a lesson. So that's what we set out to do. The three of us...Now you're blaming me. I done what you wanted me to do" (Campbell, 141). With these

words, Lily learns that Floyd was motivated to kill Armstrong by something and someone other than her. Lily hides her feelings of pain, betrayal and deception from the family; nonetheless, this news causes Lily to lose trust and confidence in her husband, which further harms the marriage.

Every opportunity she gets, Lily corrects anyone who asserts that Floyd killed Armstrong for her. At a point late in the novel, Floyd Junior is arguing with his father and asks Floyd if he is going to kill Floyd Junior like he did the black guy for Lily. Lily quickly whispers, “He didn’t kill no nigger for me” (Campbell, 258). By the end of the novel, Doreen has forced her mother to move in with her so that she will no longer be abused by Floyd. Floyd attempts to woo Lily back to him, admitting he has made mistakes yet asserting that he did everything for Lily. Lily adamantly responds, “You ain’t done nothing for me. Everything was for you. To make you feel good. Even that boy” (Campbell, 326). Lily recognizes that she had nothing to do with Floyd’s decision to kill Armstrong. When Louetta admits to Lily her own incorrect interpretations of the Cox men and their actions - “I was wrong, Lily. Loving us had nothing to do with it,” Lily does not respond with surprise - “Louetta, I been figured that out!” (Campbell, 292).

Just as it takes the Cox women years to realize that they were not the true cause of their husband’s violent behavior, they are slow in rejecting the abusive behaviors of their husbands. For years, Lily’s and Louetta’s tolerance of the tough, violent nature of their husbands causes them to accept physical abuse. The women not only accept the violence but rationalize it. To soothe Lily after informing her that Floyd and John Earl killed Armstrong, Louetta explains that it was good for the men to hurt black men since it preserves the women from being the objects of violence. Louetta says, “I don’t care what

color they are: men build up steam. And they gotta let it out somewhere. Colored men. White men. They both crazy” (Campbell, 54). Likewise, Lily defends Floyd’s constant drunken outbursts to Doreen; in fact, she tells her daughter “Us women just have to put up with it as best we can and learn to stay out of their way” (Campbell, 285). All of the Cox men are heavy drinkers who display violence in the home. Only after years and decades of abuse do Louetta and Lily begin to reject the violent behavior of their husbands.

The tough reputation of men who subscribe to the Southern “culture of honor” translates into a mean disposition. Consequently, the adjective “mean” is one of the words consistently used to describe the Cox men. Late in the novel, Louetta appears at Mamie’s house and shatters the wonderful images the family has held about John Earl. According to Louetta, John Earl’s life consists of drinking and beating her. Louetta shares that John Earl was not the successful man his family believed him to be; rather, she has provided for the family because of her husband’s drunkenness, but she was too ashamed to tell anyone. When describing John Earl to Lily, Louetta says, “there was a meanness in him. I didn’t see it so much here, but when we got to Birmingham, it come out. He pulled a gun on me and the kids” (Campbell, 237). Years later, Louetta calls Lily to inform her that John Earl has died. Surprised to learn that Lily has separated from Floyd, Louetta comments, “Don’t it feel good, getting away from them mean ole men?” (Campbell, 292). When she attempts to convince her mother to leave Floyd, Doreen questions her mother about the quality of life that she has lived with Floyd – “Hasn’t he made your life a living hell already? All that meanness he got inside of him, all that ugliness he can’t control” (Campbell, 286). Though the novel opens with a description

from the black community of the Cox men as mean, the wives and children of the Cox men are as adamant in classifying the men as mean by the end of the novel.

The effects of being raised in a household committed to the Southern “culture of honor” are illustrated in the lives of Floyd Junior and Doreen. Both children witness the physical abuse by their father and develop hateful attitude towards their parents. Initially, Floyd Junior targets his anger towards Lily because he believes she is the reason his father is missing from his life. Rather than hearing about his father’s murder of Armstrong from family, Floyd Junior learns about it from classmates. Therefore, Floyd Junior blames his mother for his father being in jail; he grows up angry, bitter and resentful that he must do the work that his father is supposed to do. Visibly upset, Floyd Junior tells Lily that he knows that his father “killed a nigger for you” (Campbell, 200). The younger child, Doreen, witnesses her father beat Lily; therefore, she does not believe that Floyd killed Armstrong for Lily. In an argument with her father where she protects her mother from Floyd, Doreen asks, “What you think you’re gonna do? Kill me like you killed that nigger you was supposed to be protecting Mama from? The only person she ever needed protection from is you” (Campbell, 268). Floyd Junior and Doreen are not the only victims of the “culture of honor.” The two daughters of John Earl and Louetta both run off; one runs off and eventually has a daughter; the other daughter moves to Texas and becomes a stripper. The decision of the two Cox sons to act upon the “rule of retaliation” destroys their families morally and financially.

By the end of the novel, the Cox family almost has completely disintegrated. When Lester Cox dies, John Earl and his family do not attend the funeral because they do not have the money. Louetta Cox gains massive amounts of weight and becomes

depressed. She copes with her broken life by numbing herself with valium. John Earl dies of cancer all alone in a hospital in Alabama. Mamie never faces the truth about John Earl. As Louetta describes John Earl's behavior to Lily, Mamie leaves the porch exclaiming, "I ain't got to set her, listening to you berate my son" (Campbell, 236). Floyd spends stints of his life in jail, serving years at a time for various acts of petty theft. Mamie Cox becomes bitter towards Floyd for causing the family disruption. In fact, she blames Floyd for disgracing the family by his acts of stealing. Left alone to provide for two children, Lily becomes an emotional wreck. She fights bouts of depression and is committed to a mental hospital at one point. Never having finished her education once she married Floyd, Lily is ill equipped to manage a household. Consequently, the already old home becomes even more decrepit with each passing year. Lily turns to the community and governmental assistance to provide for her and her household; Lily never achieves self-sufficiency. Eventually, Lily moves in with her mother-in law; by the end of the novel, she has moved in with her daughter. By the time Floyd is released from jail for the final time, he has lost all hopes of salvaging his marriage and relationship with his children or mom. Filled with anger, Floyd Junior becomes a drug addict and steals from his family to support his habit. Without success, the Cox family attempts to help Floyd Junior overcome the addiction on several occasions. The only Cox members with the opportunity of surviving the detrimental effects of the "culture of honor" are Doreen and her daughter, who reject the roles and codes of the peculiar institution.

One of the most far-reaching effects of the Southern "culture of honor" is its crippling effect on race relations in the community of Hopewell. Hostility, animosity and mistrust are fostered between blacks and whites because of the numerous violent acts

committed upon black men for their alleged, yet unproven, misbehavior towards white women. Disgusted with the South, Armstrong's mother chooses to take her son's body to Chicago, where she can have a proper burial and where she believes her son's murder truly will be mourned. For years, Delotha is plagued with hatred and contempt for all whites. As a result of losing a son, Delotha becomes overprotective of her other children to the point that she does not trust their father to protect them properly. In addition, Delotha longs for Armstrong; therefore, she constantly compares her other son to him and often mistakenly calls her younger son Armstrong. These actions prevent Delotha from enjoying a carefree, healthy relationship with her husband and children. The black men of Hopewell stop patronizing Floyd's pool hall in fear of their lives; they would prefer not to socialize or interact with whites than risk losing their lives. The black community is shattered by Armstrong's death. They gain hope and confidence when the Cox men are arrested and Floyd is put on trial; nonetheless, they are disappointed once justice does not occur. Like their predecessors, many of the young blacks of Hopewell choose to flee to the North, where they are not controlled by Southern institutions such as the "culture of honor." Lily's friendship with a local black woman, Ida Long, becomes strained as a result of the murder and trial. After Ida witnesses Lily perjure herself on the witness stand, she begins to mistrust Lily and the friendship disintegrates. Ida recognizes that Lily is more committed to the codes of the South than to truth and justice.

Just as black attitudes towards whites in Hopewell decay, white attitudes towards blacks do not improve. Floyd, believing that the blacks stop attending the pool hall to retaliate against him for killing Armstrong, becomes resentful of blacks. Not only Floyd, but Lily, the policing bodies, the court systems, and other whites in the community

become outraged once an arrest is made and a trial is scheduled. Upset that their mode of life has been disrupted, the whites of Hopewell blame blacks who have moved North and become too uppity and demanding as a result of leaving the South. Insulted by the outside agitation and the boldness of local blacks to testify against whites, the whites become more committed to defending their Southern institutions. Consequently, several brutal murders occur in areas surrounding Hopewell to signal to the local blacks that things have not and will not change. Because Campbell's novel spans 40 years, progress in race relations occurs by the end of the novel.

Unfortunately, Campbell's early plot is not fiction. Armstrong Todd is based upon the historical Emmett Till of Chicago, who spent his last summer alive with his mother's relatives in Money, Mississippi. While with a group of friends one day, Till stopped at Bryant's Grocery and Meat and Market to get candy; the store was owned by a white man and his wife; black sharecroppers were the primary patrons of the store. Some of the youngsters who waited outside reported that they heard Till whistle at Carolyn Bryant while he was in the store. Approximately four days later, Till was kidnapped from his uncle's house in the middle of the night by Mr. Bryant and his brother, who beat and shot Till and dumped his body into the Tallahatchie River. The two men were indicted on kidnapping and murder charges. During the trial, Till's uncle identified Bryant and his brother as the men who kidnapped his nephew. Yet, both men were acquitted by an all-white jury who deliberated a little more than an hour. Till's mother had an open casket funeral service for her son in Chicago. A national newsmagazine as well as a Chicago newspaper published the picture of Till's bruised face in their publications, which created public outcry against the murder and drew unwanted attention to the South. In

addition, several international newspapers reported the killing. Till's murder impacted the world and nation and eventually led to great strides in Civil Rights. The Till murder is not only recorded in American history, Southern history and Civil Rights history, but a film has been made about the murder and singer Bob Dylan included lyrics about Till's death in one of his songs.

Campbell's work, like much of the slave narratives of the antebellum period, illustrates the damaging effects of a Southern institution on generations of Southern families. Not only are the characters and personalities of the elder Coxes dehumanized by the Southern "culture of honor," but the lives of Lily and Floyd Cox as well as John Earl and Louetta Cox are ruined, which in turn harms the emotional and psychological health of their children and grandchildren. The Todd family lost a son, family and community members became indignant with whites and the South and the black community of Hopewell became paralyzed with fear. Relations between blacks and whites in the South quickly deteriorated. While families such as the Todds left the South forever in order to escape the peculiar "culture of honor," many more blacks did not have the option of moving and were left to survive within this violent Southern institution.

Chapter Three

Victims of Honor, Victors of Honor

*If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead...*
-Claude McKay

A Gathering of Old Men by Ernest Gaines provides a unique look into how black men interface with the Southern “culture of honor” because it focuses on a community of black men. While plenty of contemporary African American novels present a lone black male or a community of women, few have a plot centered upon a group of black men. As with most of Gaines’s novels, *A Gathering of Old Men* is situated in Louisiana. The Louisiana parish where the novel takes place is comprised mainly of a plantation owned by the wealthy, white Marshall family. Candy Marshall, who inherited the land at a young age after her parents died in a car accident, oversees the property. Surrounding the Marshall plantation are the blacks whose ancestors were slaves and sharecroppers of the land. These slaves and sharecroppers were housed in a place known as the quarters. These quarters lined the Marshall plantation but disintegrated over time.

Just as in Campbell’s novel, Gaines’s novel is situated during a transitional time for Southern racial relations. Set in the late 1970s, the novel’s actions occur as segregation practices and divisive racial relationships are being replaced by cooperation

between and equality among whites and blacks. In contrast to Campbell's novel, the plot of Gaines's novel is based upon the murder of a white man at the hands of a black man. Furthermore, unlike Campbell's novel, *A Gathering of Old Men* is narrated by those within the parish. Each chapter of the novel is told from a different community member. While most of the narrators are black males, a few of the chapters are relayed from a white male or female in the community. With this mode of storytelling, the reader obtains firsthand the motives, thoughts and actions from of the various black men thereby maximizing the insight permitted into how black men and the black community negotiate aspects of the Southern "culture of honor."

Though racial equality is occurring in other parts of Louisiana, progress in racial relations is slow for the small, rural Louisiana parish that serves as the setting for *A Gathering of Old Men*. The tension between the black and white communities of the Southern parish is established at the outset of the novel. A white man has been murdered by a black man, so everyone in the parish is bracing for the violent retaliation of the dead white man's family. In response to the murder, a group of elderly black men, at the request of Candy Marshall, have gathered at the murder scene. Prompted by Candy, each of these elderly men brandishes the weapon used to kill the white man, and each black man claims to be the murderer. As noted previously, the violent retaliation in "the culture of honor" in the South is different from the violent retaliation in Mediterranean "cultures of honor." While women are the victims of violence in Mediterranean "cultures of honor," in the South, men are often the victims of deadly violence for insulting or offending another man. Whereas women in the South experience a level of violence for their insulting, sexually improper behavior, men in the South lose their lives when they

insult a tough man. Moreover, the retaliation against women typically is handled in private spaces while men are publicly punished to deter other men from committing an insult. In the Mediterranean, a violent retaliation only occurs when a female family member has jeopardized family honor through sexual misconduct. In the South, an insult is independent of a female family member; consequently, Southern white men understand that they must be willing to retaliate with violence to an insult or affront, whether it involves a female family member or not. Anyone, through word or behavior, can insult a white man with a tough reputation, which would provoke that man to respond with violence.

Early in Gaines's novel, two critical aspects of the "culture of honor" emerge – a white, Southern man known for having a tough, violent reputation and the "rule of retaliation," which dictates that an insult must be handled with violence. While Fix Boutan does not appear or speak until the second half the novel, his reputation not only emerges in the opening chapter, but it permeates the novel. Almost every character comments on Fix and his reputation for reacting violently. The first mention of Fix Boutan is made in the first chapter by Janey, the maid for Candy Marshall's aunt and uncle (Miss Bea and Jack). Janey's face expresses fear at Snookum's news that there was a shooting involving Fix's son and a black man. She tells young Snookum, "Mean Fix coming here with his drove. You too young to know Fix, but I know Fix" (Gaines, 9). Janey continues to exhibit anxiety regarding the retaliation she knows is forthcoming, "I looked toward the highway, toward the river, 'cause I expected to hear Fix and his drove coming in them trucks with them guns any minute now" (Gaines, 11).

The next character to note Fix's reputation is Merle, a woman who helped raise

Candy. When Candy informs Merle that many of the elderly black men have gathered at the murder scene to take credit for shooting Beau Boutan, Merle exclaims, “Don’t they know who that is?” (Gaines, 12). Merle would not expect any man to openly confess that he murdered a relative of Fix Boutan. Candy steadfastly asserts that she, not any of the black men, killed Beau and enlists Merle’s immediate help. Candy explains that her lawyer will handle the sheriff in court, but she needs Merle’s assistance now. Merle retorts, “And who’s going to handle Fix? Before you even get to court?”(Gaines, 16). Merle’s comment suggests that she does not have confidence that the murderer can survive Fix long enough to make it to court.

Fear and violence are two words associated with the name Fix Boutan throughout the novel. When the funeral director arrives on the scene to collect Beau’s body, he urges Sheriff Mapes to do his job quickly because of Fix and “his friends on the lane” (Gaines, 76). Even Fix’s youngest son, Gil, alludes to the negative reputation of his family when talking to his college friend, “You don’t know my folks, Sully. So little you know about me” (Gaines, 115). Unbeknownst to Gil, Sully has heard about Fix Boutan and mentally replies, “I know a hell of a lot about you. I didn’t know this side of you, but I know a hell of a lot about you, and about old Fix, too. I’ve heard how he and his boys used to ride in the old days” (Gaines, 115). From the local parish to the university town miles away, the tough, violent reputation of Fix Boutan is well known. Once he arrives home from college after hearing news of his brother’s murder, Gil tells his father that all his life he has heard what his family has done; even as a college football player, Gill explains that he must listen to opponents discuss the Boutan family (Gaines, 137). Naturally, the talk in the local parish bar the night of the murder centers on Fix’s reputation for violent

retaliation. The bar owner, Tea Jack, remarks to his customers, “Boy, boy, boy, we haven’t had a good stringing in these parts in quite a while... We’ll have one now, if you know Fix” (Gaines, 157). Another customer comments that anyone could bet on old Fix riding before the day was out. Fix’s reputation has been built on his habit of “riding,” or arriving with a group of family and friends to murder someone who has insulted him or his family.

The characters understand that the rule of retaliation dictates that Beau’s death be avenged by someone else’s death. As Candy attempts to explain to Merle that it is now the black men’s turn to stand against whites, Merle responds, “And be killed? Is that what you want? Blood all over this place?” (Gaines, 18). Even Jameson, the black preacher, comments on the Boutan family reputation and tells Candy that he expects blood to be all over the land (Gaines, 51). Lou, Candy’s boyfriend, articulates his understanding of the rule of retaliation when he tells Candy that he knows she did not kill Beau. While Lou recognizes Candy’s strategy and knows that she would be successful in being acquitted of the murder, he also recognizes that “somebody had to pay for Beau’s lying there” (Gaines, 63). Lou insinuates that Candy can protect the blacks from Southern legal authorities by claiming to have committed the murder, but she cannot protect them from the white, Southern men who adhere to the codes of the “culture of honor.” The black preacher Jameson asks Sheriff Mapes whether he is going to do something or simply wait for Fix and his crowd to come because, if Fix arrives, he tells the Sheriff “the only luck you might have is they don’t kill everybody” (Campbell, 105). Even the men in the bar, who represent the larger parish community, discuss the family insult and need for retaliation. Though an immediate violent retaliation does not occur, certain community

members are certain that one will occur. One customer notes, “Look at the blood on that grass. That’s Fix’s boy’s blood. You think Fix ain’t go’n show up – his own blood on that grass?” (Campbell, 169). Everyone in the Southern parish is expecting retaliation because that is what their culture dictates. Another customer in the bar confirms that this peculiar culture does not solely exist in Louisiana; as he listens to the incidents of the day, he comments that in Mississippi, they had people who knew how to take care of issues like these (Campbell, 155).

Once Gaines introduces Fix in the flesh, other aspects of the “culture of honor” become evident. For Fix, the one with the infamous, tough reputation in this Southern parish, the need to retaliate is based solely on notions of protecting and preserving family honor. While the elderly, black men are gathered at the murder site with shotguns in hand ready to defend themselves against retaliation, Fix has his own gathering at his house; family and friends are gathered on Fix’s porch, in his living and in his bedroom. Though non-family members are involved, Fix is adamant that only the family speak and only the family’s opinion matters in the situation (Campbell, 136).

Fix’s fixation with family is based upon the “culture of honor’s” principle that honor is a family responsibility. Men in the family are charged with restoring family honor once an insult has occurred. For Fix, the men of the Boutan family must retaliate violently against the culprit of Beau’s murder; the news of the armed, elderly black men awaiting the retaliation intensifies the expected family response. Among those gathered in Fix’s bedroom are Beau’s wife, son and friend Luke Will. While Luke Will has been anxiously awaiting the violent retaliation, Fix Boutan refuses to retaliate until all of his sons have arrived home. The young football star, Gil Boutan, has a monumental football

game the following day and is the last son to arrive home. Not only is Gil a star player for his college football team, but he is half of the dynamic black and white duo known as “salt” and “pepper.” Unlike his father and many whites in his hometown parish, Gil befriends blacks and considers them as equals.

Gil makes it known that he does not want to participate in any violent retaliation, which creates a backlash from those gathered in the bedroom of Fix Boutan’s home. When Luke Will asserts that Gil’s reason for not wanting to retaliate is based upon his desire to keep a good name with blacks and get involved with black women, Fix responds, “Is that right, Gi-bear? Your brother’s honor to play football side by side with niggers-is that so?” (Gaines, 142). Fix makes it clear to Gil that Beau’s honor has been stripped and must be restored. When Gil explains that the days of taking the law into one’s own hands are over, Fix only sees the murder in terms of honor, so he inquires, “What day is gone, Gi-bear? The day when family responsibility is put away for a football game?” (Gaines, 143). Fix believes it is the responsibility of the male members of the family to restore honor to the slain male family member by violently retaliating against the murderer. When Gil commits to doing everything he can to help Beau’s son Tea Beau, Fix understands yet asserts that immediate action should be taken for the insulted family member, “We all will. But now her husband, his papa, your brother, lay dead on a cold slab in Bayonne, and we do nothing but sit here and talk?” (Gaines, 144).

Luke Will repeatedly interrupts the conversation to make calls to action, yet Fix insists that it is a family issue; therefore, he will not avenge his son’s murder without the support of all of his sons. Gil and another brother refuse to accompany their father to kill Beau’s murderer while the third surviving son says he will do whatever his father wants.

Though Luke Will reiterates that he was a good friend of Beau's and will ride with Fix to avenge his friend's death, Fix responds, "I'm interested only in my family. If the majority feels their brother is not worth it, then the family has spoken. I'm only interested in my family" (Gaines, 145).

Fix's words illustrate that he wholeheartedly subscribes to concepts embedded within the "culture of honor." Fix feels strongly about his family, the insult suffered by his son and the need for the surviving men of the family to restore honor to the dead son and family by retaliating with violence. Fix expresses disappointment in two of his son's reasons for refusing to ride, believing them to be abandoning the family. Gil attempts to help his father understand his perspective that he is not neglecting family responsibility; rather, he is rejecting being a vigilante and seeking justice through violence. Gil believes that riding will actually hurt the family instead of help it. Fix retorts, "They say my ideas are all past. They say to love family, to defend family honor, is all past. What is left? All my life, that is all I found worthwhile living for. My family. My family." (Gaines, 146). Fix speaks for himself during only one chapter of the novel, yet through his words, the reader learns that Fix is committed to the family-oriented nature of the "culture of honor;" his dedication to family has created his reputation for violence in the parish. At one point in the 20-page chapter, Fix says, "This is family. A member of the family has been insulted, and family, the family must seek justice" (Gaines, 147). To Fix, it is clear that Beau's murder is an insult not only to his dead son but also to the family. Fix's notions of familial honor and adherence to tenets of the "culture of honor" are so potent that he does not retaliate because he lacks the support of all of the male members of the family. Even though he has other men willing to retaliate with violence, Fix is denied the

opportunity to retaliate because two of his sons do not subscribe to the concepts of the Southern “culture of honor.” Fix accepts their decision and remains home.

As in Campbell’s novel, the presence of racial codes is pervasive in Gaines’s novel. Though the novel is set in the late 1970s, the notion of blacks as inferior and subservient to whites prevails. The Southern parish is operated much like an old plantation with blacks largely dependent upon whites. Even the well-intentioned Candy Marshall, who professes greater affinity to the black community than the white community, is controlling and condescending to blacks. The racial code of the South dictates that black men and women defer to whites; furthermore, black men are not expected to be tough and protective of their families and reputations.

Due to the racial codes governing black behavior in this Southern parish, the death of a white man at the hands of a black man is shocking to the entire community. According to the Southern racial codes, black men are to be docile, not violent; they are definitely not expected to act violently towards a white man. Violation of these codes is considered insulting and deserving of a violent retaliation. In an early chapter of the novel, one of the elderly black men, Chimley, reflects, “I had never knowed in all my life where a black man killed a white man in this parish. I had knowed about fights, about threats, but not killings. And now I was thinking about what happened after these fights, these threats, how the white folks rode” (Gaines, 29). As explained earlier in relation to Fix’s actions, “rode” is the act of a group of white men retaliating with violence, usually death, against the offending black. The unexpected has occurred because a black man has killed a white man; this situation is further complicated by the fact that the murdered white man is a Boutan.

At Fix's house later in the novel, a conversation regarding whether Fix and his family will ride confirms that the white community is insulted by the death. Deputy Russ interrupts the men gathered at the Fix home to explain that he does not want any trouble. Luke Will responds, "When niggers start shooting down white men in broad daylight, the trouble was started then....Somebody got to do it 'fore it gets out of hand. Next thing you know, they'll be raping the women" (Gaines, 149). Luke Will not only notes that blacks solicited trouble by hurting a white man, but he also plays upon the seminal role that women have in the "culture of honor." As protectors of their reputations and families, especially their women, white men cannot permit a woman's sexual chastity to be threatened. Deputy Russ recognizes Luke Will's attempt to appeal to this aspect of the "culture of honor" in order to incite the white men to immediate retaliation; the deputy responds, "That's how it is. If they can't get you one way, they'll bring in the women every time" (Gaines, 149). The deputy's remark illustrates how women can serve as leverage to provoke men to action within the "culture of honor" since the men are charged with protecting women.

Since the unprecedented death of a white man at the hands of a black man has occurred, the black and white communities expect rapid retaliation from Fix and his crowd. To prevent the retaliation, Candy quickly responds to the situation by claiming that she killed the white man; of course, everyone knows that she is covering up for the real murderer, who is black. When the coroner arrives to collect Beau's body, he is appalled to find the group of black men defiantly standing on the porch with the Sheriff in the yard instead of Sheriff Mapes having control of the situation or a suspect in custody. After waiting for an explanation of the bizarre scene that Mapes does not

provide, the coroner demands, “What the hell is going on around here, Mapes? You’re talking to yourself while a bunch of niggers stand around here with shotguns and a white man lays dead in the grass! I demand to know what the hell is going on around here” (Gaines, 76). However, Mapes has no answers. From Miss Merle to Lou to the deputy to Gil, every character who encounters the scene of black men standing on the porch and in the yard with shotguns is amazed. One character even describes the scene as something out of the Twilight Zone.

Another incident in the novel illustrates no discrimination exists between races when it comes to a white man protecting his reputation against an insult within the “culture of honor.” The bartender Tee Jack says, “That’s a lie” in response to hearing Luke Will report that Fix will not ride. Luke Will gets ready to retaliate, asking Tee Jack what he said. Recognizing that his comment was taken as an insult by Luke Will, Tee Jack repeatedly says that he did not mean what he said. Though Tee Jack did not directly call Luke Will a liar, he indirectly insulted Luke with his comments. Noticing that Luke Will is offended, Tee Jack prepares to use his bat under the counter to defend himself against Luke Will and his friends. As a peace offering, Tee Jack gives Luke Will and his friends free drinks; a few pages later, Tee Jack emphasizes to the young men that only the first bottle is on him, musing to himself, “I didn’t think I had insulted him two bottles’ worth when I called him a liar” (Gaines, 164). Tee Jack quickly mitigates the impending violent retaliation by his peace offering of free drinks.

Though the racial code of the South intensifies the “culture of honor,” white men with tough reputations are prepared to retaliate to insults to their honor, no matter the race, class, education level or other status of the perpetrator of the offense. In fact, Luke

Will and his crowd threaten to attack another white patron of the bar, who is a teacher at a nearby university. The patron repeatedly talks about peace and admonishes the men not to take the law in their own hands. Insulted by the man's condemnation of the "rule of retaliation," Luke Will tells the man that he can get the man escorted out of the bar. Tea Jack knows that Luke Will's remark reflects his desire to hurt the man, so Tea Jack urges Luke Will not to follow through with his intentions since the patron is "a white man" (Gaines, 165). Nonetheless, Luke Will remains willing to physically hurt the man; the patron perceives the warning and leaves the bar to avoid further confrontation.

Ironically, the central white woman in the novel is the antithesis of the ideal woman of the Southern "culture of honor." Rather than being feminine, sexually chaste, submissive to white men and loyal to her family and community, Candy has masculine traits, dominates men, defends a black man and identifies more with blacks than with whites. Rather than physically representing the Southern belle, Candy looks unwomanly. For one, Candy has short hair. In the first chapter, Snookum notes that her hair was short, "almost like a man's hair" (Gaines, 5). Merle, who helped raise Candy, laments the young woman's appearance, saying that her clothes were wrong and her hair was too short for a woman interested in getting a man; then Merle remarks that Candy was not interested in getting a man (Gaines, 15). In his description of Candy, Clattoo says that she never dresses, only pants and shirts (Gaines, 50)!

Just as Candy's appearance does not mirror the typical Southern woman, her behavior also does not match what is expected of Southern white women. The typical Southern woman's focus is on getting married and supporting her family; however, Candy has other goals. Southern white women are expected to support, depend upon and

submit to their men, just as the Cox women did in Campbell's novel. Candy is an independent and domineering woman who tells her boyfriend what to do. When someone tells Lou that Candy needs him, he questions the statement, saying that for the three years he had known Candy, he had not known her to need anybody (Gaines, 58). Twice in the novel, Lou feels others judge him because he cannot control Candy or get her to do what he requests of her. In fact, Sheriff Mapes does not think Lou is a man because he cannot control Candy (Gaines, 74). Miss Merle begins to lament Lou's inability to control his woman but cuts short her remark, "And you're supposed to be a man? What kind of husband will you make if you let her kick-" (Gaines, 128). Essentially, Candy functions as the man is expected to operate in a relationship in the South. Candy makes the decisions and leads the relationship.

Finally, rather than being loyal to the surrounding white community, Candy is loyal to the black community. She repeatedly calls the blacks "my people." In fact, Candy is more committed to Mathu, an elderly black man, than she is to her boyfriend Lou. Candy considers Mathu a father to her and is willing to protect him at all costs. In fact, Candy does become Mathu's protector. Believing that he murdered Beau since the shooting happened in his yard, Candy claims to be the murderer so that Mathu is not sent to the electric chair. Rather than being the one requiring protection from white men or any man, Candy serves in the role of protector in the novel and insulates black men from the violent threat of white men in the novel.

The legal and punitive authorities have a precarious role in the novel. Early in the novel, an account is provided of the former sheriff protecting a black man from a white man's retaliation although the codes of the "culture of honor" would have dictated that

the police overlook the white man's violence. Chimley recalls a public fight between Mathu and Fix. A group of black and white men was loitering outside of the Marshall store eating cookies and drinking soda; Fix had finished drinking his Coke and told Mathu to take the bottle back into the store. Mathu replied that he was no one's servant. Fix told Mathu that he had the option of taking the bottle inside or fighting. Mathu informed the sheriff, who was among the men standing outside the store, that he would protect himself if Fix started anything; however, the sheriff did not acknowledge Mathu's comment. Fix told Mathu to take the bottle inside a second time; Mathu did not, which Fix considered insulting since black men are supposed to obey white men. Fix hit Mathu and a fight ensued that lasted for approximately an hour. At the conclusion of the fight, Mathu was standing and Fix was on the ground. The sheriff hit both men to the ground and "prevented the white folks from lynching Mathu" (Gaines, 30). Though Mathu was obviously provoked and defending himself in this fight, his act of hitting a white man should have cost him his life. In this situation, the sheriff recognized Mathu's right to retaliate against an insult and thus, protect his honor.

This incident embodies the theoretical concept within the "culture of honor" that retaliating against an insult is a defensive, not an offensive or aggressive, act; a man is rightly justified for defending his reputation against an insult. Chimley noted that this was not Mathu's first or last fight "with them white people" (Gaines, 30). Though he is the exception, Mathu represents that black man who does not heed racial codes that prevent blacks from defending themselves against whites. Mathu's repeated actions to defend himself garner respect not only from other black men on the Louisiana parish but also from the parish authorities who understand the Southern "culture of honor." As a result,

Mathu develops a reputation in the Southern parish and became respected by blacks and whites alike.

Though the sheriff (Guildry) that protected Mathu from a lynching when he fought Fix is not the same sheriff (Mapes) that responds to Beau's death, Sheriff Mapes also recognizes the right of the black men to defend themselves and their honor. As the novel progresses, the authorities become less powerful. Upon his early arrival at the murder scene, Sheriff Mapes attempts to gain control of the scene through violence. Since all of the elderly men claimed to have killed Beau, Sheriff Mapes tries to intimidate the men into identifying the true killer by slapping around a few of the men. However, this technique does not yield any results. After unsuccessfully attempting to force the elderly black men into submission, Sheriff Mapes tries to talk the men into surrendering. Finally, the Sheriff resigns to serving as a mediator to negotiate and mitigate the retaliation. Sheriff Mapes sends a deputy to Fix's house to ensure that no one leaves the house and stations a deputy at the entrance of the plantation to approve anyone who enters. Rather than facilitating the violent retaliation, Sheriff Mapes seeks to prevent it, which is an unusual stance for a policing authority operating within a Southern "culture of honor." After hearing the stories that explain why the elderly men are claiming to have killed Beau, Sheriff Mapes recognizes that he is in the midst of a complex scenario because he is dealing with men who have been insulted for years and finally have decided to take a stand. While Sheriff Mapes is present throughout the novel, he does not function as an authoritative figure. In the "culture of honor," law enforcement officials are active protecting and defending men with tough reputations. However, several characters note Sheriff Mapes' lack of action and authority, from the coroner who arrives to collect

Beau's body to Gil Boutan to the elderly black men themselves, who are not moved by his violence and force him to wait on them.

Towards the end of the novel, the Sheriff finally has one elderly man who confesses to the murder. Sheriff Mapes begins to escort the murderer out the house and to his car only to be greeted by Luke Will and his crowd, who have decided to retaliate without the Boutan men. The Sheriff attempts to push the murderer back into the house, but the murderer, disregarding the suggestion and protection of the policing authority, breaks free to face Luke Will. The result is a shoot-out because the rest of the elderly men run out of the house and spread themselves along the plantation. At the onset of the shoot-out, Sheriff Mapes becomes nonfunctional because Luke Will shoots him to prevent him from interfering with the retaliation. Sheriff Mapes ends up wounded on the ground in the middle of the yard throughout the shoot-out. Once again, Sheriff Mapes becomes useless in enforcing justice or upholding the Southern "culture of honor." He must remain in the middle of the yard, unable to take the confessed murderer into custody and unable to stop the vigilantism of Luke Will and his crew. Recognizing that he has been stripped of all authority, literally and symbolically, Sheriff Mapes does not attempt to move or seek shelter from the gunshots. At one point, Luke Will and his crowd appeal to Sheriff Mapes to assist them, yet Sheriff Mapes reminds them that they shot him, and he is no longer in control.

In fact, one of the most humorous scenes in the novel occurs during the final pages when Candy Marshall's boyfriend narrates the trial. The elderly black men and the young men left of Luke Will's crew are put on trial for the shoot-out. During the trial, Sheriff Mapes refuses to answer the district attorney's question regarding where he was

doing the shoot-out. After being forced by the judge to answer, Sheriff Mapes responds in a low voice. The district attorney forces Sheriff Mapes to speak loud enough for everyone to hear, so Sheriff Mapes embarrassingly testifies, “The whole fight, I was sitting on my ass in the middle of the walk. Luke Will shot me, and I was sitting on my ass in the middle of the walk” (Gaines, 213). At this response, the people of the courtroom begin laughing. After the trial, the judge puts the elderly men on probation for the next five years or their deaths, whichever arrived first – “he [the judge] said that meant he was taking away their privilege of carrying any kind of firing arm, rifle, shotgun, or pistol, or being within ten feet of anyone else with such weapons (That was like telling a Louisianan never to say Mardi Gras or Huey Long). He said if he heard once that any of the defendants picked up a gun, or was within ten feet of anyone with a such weapon, he would send that person to prison for the rest of his natural-born life” (Gaines, 213-214). With these comments, Lou Dimes notes that the judge’s orders are unrealistic and will be disregarded.

The courageous black men depicted during the final chapters of the novel are quite the contrast to the elderly, black men described in the opening chapters of the novel. At the beginning of the novel, the black men are portrayed as a cowardly and fearful lot ready to change their shameful reputations. When a young boy runs to Mat and Chimley to relay Candy’s request for all the black men of the parish to meet at Mathu’s place with the same model shotguns and empty shells, he comments as he runs off, “Ya’ll can go and do like she say or ya’ll can go home, lock y’all doors, and crawl under the bed like y’used to” (Gaines, 26). These elderly men, who are expected to elicit veneration from the youth by the fact of their age, lack the respect of the younger generation. As Miss

Merle drives through the quarters to Mathu's house, she notes "I didn't see any of the people as I drove by the houses. Just like little bedbugs, I told myself. Just like frightened little bed bug" (Gaines, 15). However, the men feel compelled to respond to this opportunity. As the men ponder their course of action, Mat says, "I have to go Chimley. This my last chance" (Gaines, 32). Mat's eyes communicated, "We wait till now? Now, when we're old men, we get to be brave?" (32). The men are ready to take action.

Though Mat and the other men choose to stand up, they experience some resistance from the community for standing against white men. Mat's wife calls him an old fool when she learns what her husband is doing. Enraged that his wife does not understand the need to take action, Mat responds, "Anytime we say we go'n stand up for something, they say we crazy. You right, we all gone crazy" (Gaines, 36). Though the men decide to exert toughness for the first time in their lives, this act does not gain them full respect from the white community. Candy and Sheriff Mapes agree that the black men will not use their shotguns. This belief reinforces the notion that these black men are impotent. Clatoo also notes that Sheriff Mapes never took the men seriously; rather, he entertained the elderly black men to keep them away from Fix – "He never took us serious, not for once. Fix was on his mind, not us" (Gaines, 180). Despite the toughness the elderly men have displayed by gathering with shotguns, they are not considered a threat or capable of committing violence.

Nonetheless, all the elderly men of the parish respond to the call for action given by Candy. For one, the men feel compelled to support the only black man in the community with a tough reputation. Secondly, they want to seize the opportunity to display toughness before they die. When Mat's wife confronts him about what is going

on, he responds “This men business,” (Gaines, 36) indicating that he and the other men have stepped into manhood. Miss Merle, who initially did not see anyone on the quarters is shocked at what she sees once she arrives at Mathu’s house; she finds “they were all there” and “three of them with shotguns” (Gaines, 15). Referencing the men and the shotguns, Miss Merle notes, “I had never seen anything like this in all my life before, and I wasn’t too sure I was seeing it now” (Gaines, 15). These men shock the community by taking a stand.

Once the men arrive at the scene, nothing is able to deter them from standing. The black preacher Jameson pleads with the men to go home and turns to Clatoo for support. Yet Clatoo, who was responsible for picking up most of the men, responds, “I come here to stand, not to talk” (Gaines, 55). Cherry explains that the men are proud as they ride to the Marshall plantation in Clatoo’s truck; these were men prepared to face death. While the men gather at the graveyard to walk to the murder scene together, Dirty Red expresses that their relatives buried at the graveyard might be proud of them after this day (Gaines, 47). Spurned by the opportunity to redeem themselves, the elderly black men believe even their ancestors will celebrate the stand they have chosen to take. Mathu indirectly acknowledges his respect for these men as men. When Sheriff Mapes attempts to get Mathu to convince the other men to go home, Mathu responds, “A man got to do what he think is right, Sheriff. That’s what part him from a boy” (Gaines, 85). Mathu recognizes that these are men who must make their own decisions and no longer be dictated by a code that cripples them from defending themselves against white men.

From the outset of the novel, Mathu is distinguished as the exceptional black man on the parish for his boldness, strength and toughness. Because of his reputation for not

backing down from a white man, the other black men want to support Mathu, the suspected killer, and feel honored to do so. Chimley says, “Mathu was the only one we knowed ever stood up” (Gaines, 31). The men feel indebted to Mathu because he represents who they should be – men willing to stand up for themselves, their reputations and their families. Mathu even has the respect of whites on the parish. In speaking of Mathu, Sheriff Mapes confesses, “I admire the nigger. He’s a better man than most I’ve met, black or white” (Gaines, 74). While Sheriff Mapes does not believe any of the other black men who profess to have killed Beau, he believes Mathu for a particular reason, “I know you did it. You’re the only one around here man enough” (Gaines, 85). Sheriff Mapes addresses Mathu as a man on several occasions, which is an unusual description of a black man in the South. Customarily, black men were considered boys by Southern white men and were frequently called boys. Even the other black men recognize the respect that the Sheriff possesses for Mathu. When describing Sheriff Mapes, Rufe notes, “Mapes was a lot of things. He was big, mean, brutal. But Mapes respected a man. Mathu was a man, and Mapes respected Mathu. But he didn’t think much of the rest of us, and he didn’t respect us...But he knowed that Mathu had never backed down from anybody, either. Maybe that’s why he liked him. To him Mathu was a real man. The rest of us wasn’t” (Gaines, 84). Evidently, the black men understand how they were perceived by whites in relation to Mathu as well as by Mathu himself. Clatoo explains that Mathu bragged about not having any white blood and looked down on the rest of them; the more white blood a black had, the more Mathu despised the man (Gaines, 51). Regardless of Mathu’s attitude toward the black men of the parish, they hold Mathu in high esteem because of his actions. Like everyone else, Clatoo, the leader of the elderly black men,

speaks highly of Mathu – “Ya’ll know I respect this man like I don’t respect too many men. And ya’ll know why. He always stood up. Stood up to Fix, stood up to anybody who tried to do him wrong. Even to the Marshalls out there at the front, he stood his ground” (Gaines, 179). Mathu serves as the standard to which the other elderly black men strive because of his repeated stances.

The men’s continued unity brings them to a point in the novel where they begin to be respected and taken seriously. On several occasions, the men gather as one. First, the men gather in Clatoo’s truck to ride to the Marshall plantation. Then, the men gather at the graveyard before walking to the Marshall plantation. Next, the men gather in line to be hit by Sheriff Mapes when he first arrives on the scene to coerce a confession. For majority of the novel, the men are gathered on the porch of Mathu’s house, known as the “garry.” Each instance of gathering builds solidarity among the men. When in the truck, the men sit silently pondering the action they have taken and the likely consequences for their actions. The men must gather in stages when riding because the truck cannot hold everyone. At the graveyard, the men have a larger gathering and are able to share stories of violence committed against their relatives resting in the graveyard. It is only when the men arrive at Mathu’s house, that the gathering is complete.

Besides the literal acts of gathering, the elderly black men gather symbolically. Each man claims to be Beau’s murderer; before one man can finish explaining why he killed Beau, another man begins confessing and explaining his motive for killing the man. Each time a man speaks, the group realizes its control of the situation. Sheriff Mapes interrupts Johnny Paul’s monologue to inform him that he does not have time to hear what Johnny can and cannot see; Johnny Paul responds, “You ain’t got nothing but

time, Sheriff” (Gaines, 88). Johnny Paul continues his story, and Sheriff Mapes tells him to make it quick; Johnny Paul responds, “You still don’t see. I don’t have to make nothing quick. I can take all the time in the world I want, and it ain’t nothing you can do but take me to jail. You can’t slap me hard enough to hurt me no more, Sheriff” (Gaines, 89). The elderly black men have finally gained a voice and audience with white authorities; this voice would usually be silenced with violence. However, the black men have committed themselves to enduring the violence in order to be heard.

Another act of unity occurs when the men load their guns without anyone knowing. Because the men were instructed to shoot before they arrived at the murder scene, no one expects the guns to be loaded. However, the men contrived a plot to load their guns at the murder scene. Rooster explains that no one knew that the men put bullets in their guns as each man went to the back of Mathu’s house to use the bathroom. This act was kept hidden from everyone who was not holding a shotgun, including Beulah, the black preacher, and Mathu (Gaines, 169). This is significant because Candy and Sheriff Mapes already agreed that the elderly black men would not use their shotguns. However, they did not realize that the men were serious about committing violence in order to defend themselves. After the Sheriff informs the men that Fix will not show up, the men decide to enter Mathu’s house to talk amongst themselves. Some men want to leave while others are determined to stand “to the end” (Gaines, 179). Mat does not want to leave because he feels that they will “never gather like this ever again” (Gaines, 180). Many of the men have been empowered by their act of standing, so they want to maximize the opportunity they have. Knowing they are the ones deciding, they want to remain in control of the situation.

The motivation for these men's determination to stand with Mathu is the opportunity to avenge the insults they and their families have endured. Rooster, a character who experiences tremendous growth during the course of the novel, admits how scared he was initially when asked to get a shotgun and meet at Mathu's house. Once at Mathu's house, the thought of leaving without retaliating is inconceivable for Rooster - "I was thinking now about all the hurt I had suffered, the insults my wife had suffered right in front of my face...and this was the day we was go'n get even. . .Go back home and do what? I hadn't even fired a shot...No, that wasn't enough. Not after what I had put up with all these years. I wanted me a fight, even if I had to get killed" (Gaines, 181). This is the day of retaliation for these men, none of whom is younger than 65. One by one, the men recount the transgression that motivated them to kill Beau. Billy says his motive was the beating of his boy by white men, which caused the young man to go insane. Earlier in the novel, Miss Merle provides Clatoo's reason. She explains, "It was not Fix, it was that crazy brother of his, Forest Boutan, who had tried to rape one of Clatoo's sisters. She had defended herself by chopping him half dozen times with a cane knife. She didn't kill him, but he was well marked for the rest of his days. And she was sent to the pen for the rest of hers, where after so many years she died insane" (Gaines, 25). Clatoo chooses not to relay his reason while the men are telling their stories; however, the reader already knows Clatoo's motive.

Another elderly man, Tucker, tells the story of how his brother, the last sharecropper to compete successfully with the tractors, was punished for his success - "And I didn't do nothing but stand there and watch them beat my brother down to the ground" (Gaines, 97). Because of his shame and guilt, Tucker pauses several times while

telling the story of his brother - "He stopped again. He looked at all of us. But none of us looked back at him. We had all done the same thing sometime or another; we had all seen our brother, sister, mama, daddy insulted once and didn't do a thing about it" (Gaines, 97). Tucker believes that he was just as much a part of his brother's killing as the white people who used the cane to beat him since he did not defend his brother. Rufe comments, "He wanted us to pass judgment over him for what he had done. Us judge him? How could any of us judge him? Who hadn't done the same thing, sometime or another?" (Gaines, 98). Consistent with the complicit role of government authorities within the "culture of honor," the law did not punish the men who Tucker watched beat his brother. According to the law, the sharecropper had cut in on the tractor and started the fight. Because of fear, Tucker did not speak up for his brother and what he witnessed.

Rufe explains that all the elderly men had a similar experience of not protecting or defending their families. Gable tells the story of his son being executed in the electric chair "on the word of poor white trash. They knowed what kind of gal she was. Knowed she had messed round with every man, black or white, on that river. But they put him in that chair 'cause she said he raped her" (Gaines, 101). Gable's story provides the classic "culture of honor" retaliation involving a white woman's sexual chastity which results in the death of the accused. Gable lives in perpetual guilt of not defending his son - "and what did I do about them killing my boy like that?..It's been over forty years now, but every day of my life, every night of my life, I go through that rainy day again" (Gaines, 102). After several of the men have spoken, Beulah interjects, "You want any woman here to start? I can tell you things done happened to women round here make the hair stand on your head" (Gaines, 107). In the South, black women historically were not

treasured by the larger society as sexually chaste; therefore, black women frequently were vulnerable to sexual attacks by white men. Beulah's comment illustrates how unprotected black women in the South have been while their white counterparts receive complete protection. Essentially, the elderly black men have gathered to retaliate with violence for all of the insults committed against them and their families over the years. Once Luke Will and his crew arrive at Mathu's house, Clatoo comments that Luke Will is going to pay for a lot of things (Gaines, 194).

By standing, the elderly men have gained a sense of manhood and have begun to develop a reputation needed to survive in the Southern "culture of honor." Several of the characters exemplify this evolving manhood. One is Rooster. Referring to Mathu, Rooster says, "But I wasn't scared now. He knowed I wasn't scared now. That's why he was smiling at me. And that made me feel good" (Gaines, 181). Not only do the men begin to take pride in themselves, but their change is acknowledged by others. Mathu confesses that his attitudes toward the men had mirrored those of Sheriff Mapes until shortly before they entered his house to talk. However, Mathu admits that he recognizes these men as men. Mathu comments that the men changed him from being "a mean-hearted old man" (Gaines, 182) who hated whites for denying him citizenship and blacks for not trying to obtain citizenship. The deepening awareness of their strength causes the men to assert themselves against whites. Whereas Candy would usually dictate the actions of the black men, Clatoo bans Candy from joining the men in Mathu's house; when she threatens him in order to join them, Clatoo reminds her that he is prepared to go to jail or die (Gaines, 170). The typical threats, words and actions that typically would cower these men into submission and obedience provide ammunition for the men to defy

expected social norms.

Ironically, the men take a tough stance at a time when their physical bodies are frail and vulnerable. Gaines contrasts the elderly men's physical weakness with their emotional and mental virility. Rufe says of Johnny Paul, "thin as he was and kicking the ground like that coulda fractured his leg" (Gaines, 89). When he arrives at his father's house, Gil explains that he saw something in Marshall that he had never seen before. He tells Fix, "Old men, Papa. Cataracts. Hardly any teeth. Arthritic. Old men. Old black men, Papa. Who have been hurt. Who wait-not for you, Papa-what you're supposed to represent" (Gaines, 137). To the group of elderly men, Fix represents all the white men who have insulted and offended them for years. Fix represents the Southern culture that has empowered white men and protected white women while stripping black men of the ability to defend their reputations and defend their families. Early in the novel, Candy commands Merle to gather men and shotguns before she calls Sheriff Barnes to the murder scene. When Merle acts as if she does not know who to contact, Candy says, "There's not a black family in this parish that Fix and his crowd hasn't hurt sometime or other" (Gaines, 18). While Fix symbolically represents all the other white men who have violently retaliated against blacks, his acts of violence against black families on the parish have not gone unnoticed.

Another significant character who represents the men's transformation into manhood is Charlie. At the end of the novel, the reader learns that Charlie is Beau's murderer. Charlie fled from the murder scene in fear and asked Mathu, his mentor, to take the blame for the murder. Charlie comes out of the shadows of Mathu's house as the men are discussing whether to go home or stay. Throughout the chapter that Charlie

appears, he repeats, "I'm a man" (Gaines, 186) because he no longer wants to be known as "Big Charlie, nigger boy" (Gaines, 187). Charlie admits, "a nigger boy run and run and run. But a man come back. I'm a man" (187). To the black men of the parish, having a tough reputation is not important. What is important to them is being recognized as men, deserving of respect and the opportunity to protect and defend their families. While having and defending a reputation is important to the white men guided by the "culture of honor," the elderly black men are not concerned with possessing a tough reputation. Rather, they are concerned with being recognized, through words and actions, as men.

Like the other elderly men had done earlier in the novel, Charlie explains his motivation for killing Beau. For years, Charlie accepted abuse from Beau though Mathu attempted to make him intolerant of the abuse. Though Charlie worked the hardest, he was still abused, verbally and physically. Rather than defending himself as a man, Charlie explains that he has been running for 50 years.

Charlie describes the incident that led to Beau's death. Charlie was working, and Beau "cussed him" (Gaines, 190). Charlie's response sparked a verbal exchange between Beau and Charlie that eventually escalated to a threat. Beau told Charlie if he said another word then he would show him how he "treated a half-a-hundred year old nigger" (Gaines, 190). Charlie interrupts his story to comment to Mapes, "You don't talk to a man like that, Sheriff, not when he reach half a hundred" (Gaines, 190). The Sheriff agreed. Beau assaulted Charlie, and Charlie hit Beau back, causing Beau to fall to the ground. The day had come when Charlie had decided that he would not endure any more abuse. Out of fear of the retaliation he would face for hitting a white man known for a tough reputation, Charlie ran to Mathu for protection. However, Mathu promised to beat Charlie for

running. Having pursued Charlie to Mathu's yard on his tractor, Beau jumped off the tractor with his gun and began loading it as he walked into Mathu's yard toward Charlie. Mathu shoved his shotgun into Charlie's hand. Afraid to face Mathu for not defending himself, Charlie told Beau to stop. Again, he interrupts his story to explain to the Sheriff that his actions were extremely uncharacteristic - "He [Beau] knowed I had never done nothing like that, never even thought about doing nothing like that. But they comes a day, Sheriff, they comes a day when a man got to stand" (Gaines, 191). Steadily walking towards Charlie, Beau expressed his intent to kill Charlie. Once Beau raised his gun, Charlie pulled the trigger on Mathu's gun and killed Beau. Charlie became terrified of facing the consequences of shooting a white man and asked Mathu to take the blame since he knew Candy and Mathu's age would protect him from the electric chair. After running all day, Charlie returned to face his punishment. To signify his newly acquired manhood, Charlie demands to be called Mr. Biggs by Sheriff Mages, who complies.

Once Luke Will and his crew arrive, they experience firsthand the transformation of the elderly black men. Charlie refuses to drop to the floor on the Sheriff's command because he says that he is not afraid of Luke Will (Gaines, 194). Surprised at the aggressive and combative stance of the elderly men, Luke Will ponders, "I wonder what them niggers been drinking to make them all so brave" (Gaines, 204). Charlie becomes even braver, saying "we all in the dirt now" (Gaines, 205). Luke Will becomes worried after petitioning Sheriff Mapes; Sheriff Mapes responds that Charlie is in charge (Gaines, 206). Candy's boyfriend, Lou, attempts to talk Charlie out of killing Luke Will, explaining that Beau's death was self-defense so Charlie could not be severely punished. However, Charlie is determined to defend his manhood. Charlie even tells Red never to

be scared again; he explains, “Life’s so sweet when you know you ain’t a coward” (Gaines, 208). The early image of the elderly black men as cowards crawling under their beds gets completely overturned at the end of the novel as the men strategically scatter themselves on the plantation and begin shooting at Luke Will and his crew. Not listening to anyone, Charlie charges forward to kill Luke Will; he succeeds but gets killed in the act. The surviving black men, women and children touch Charlie’s body to acquire the bravery he demonstrated upon his return.

This novel provides clarity to the different ways in which blacks and whites adhere to the Southern “culture of honor.” As in Campbell’s novel, *A Gathering of Old Men* illustrates how the racial and social class codes of the South complement the “culture of honor.” In the hierarchy of race and class, the upper white class resides at the top of society with the black lower class at the bottom. Many of the whites’ initial reaction to the blacks for resisting is violence, so that blacks are reminded of their inferior status in the South. While the novel is focused on men, there are instances of retaliation by white women against black women. For example, when Merle tells the black housekeeper Janey to disregard the instructions given by her employer Bea, Bea reminds Janey of her superior authority, “At Marshall, I say ‘don’t’ and I say ‘do’” (Gaines, 21). Instead of responding to Merle, the white woman who instructed Janey to disregard Bea’s instructions, Bea retaliates against Janey for hesitating to do what she was asked. Janey mistakenly defies Merle shortly after being reprimanded by Bea. Attempting to protect the black men on the parish, Janey initially refuses to give Merle any names of black men; her noncompliance, which is insulting to Merle, provokes Merle to slap Janey. After the slap, Janey provides a list of names.

In the Southern “culture of honor,” violence serves as a means of retaliating against any black person for insulting a superior white person; the violence also serves as motivation to comply. Sheriff Mapes’ slapping of several black men when he first arrives at Mathu’s house attests to the practice of whites committing violence upon blacks to cause them to submit and obey. These practices indicate a larger context for the “culture of honor.” In Janey’s case, the violence works, but in Mapes’ case, it does not because the men are committed to defending themselves against violence. As a race, whites are personally insulted when blacks, the lesser race, refuse to obey; these whites react violently when they have been insulted in this manner.

Though Candy has an affinity to blacks on the parish not found in other whites on the parish, traces of an attitude of racial superiority are discernable in Candy. By defending Mathu and other blacks, Candy claims to be carrying on the tradition of her father and those before him of protecting the people on the land. However, this tradition is only followed when the blacks agree and comply with Candy. Candy becomes irate when Clatoo tells her that the men do not want her in Mathu’s house for their talk. Candy reminds Clatoo who she is, where he is and then demands that he get off her property. These remarks remind Clatoo of Candy’s superiority and her willingness to retaliate against an insult of noncompliance. Nonetheless, Clatoo fervently reminds Candy that he is fully prepared to be jailed or killed. Clatoo’s rebuttal is even more insulting since he is a black person addressing a white woman. Because the men are united and cannot be intimidated into obedience, Candy has no choice but to respect their desires.

Another illustration of the deferential behavior expected of blacks when in the presence of whites occurs when Gil arrives at Mathu’s house. Gil asks Mathu a question

and is surprised that Mathu answers him directly and dryly, without dropping his head or muttering. Even more, Mathu fails to turn his head to acknowledge Gil. This behavior is unexpected because blacks are expected to assume a timid posture when addressing whites.

A Gathering of Old Men presents many of the social behavior and racial attitudes of the characters as outdated. While Campbell's novel opens in the 1950s and spans several decades, Gaines's novel is set in the 1970s and spans one day. Yet, the mood of Gaines's novel reflects that of Campbell's *Mississippi* in the mid-1950s. Candy asserts that the times of beating blacks has passed; nonetheless, Beau "still thought he could beat people like his paw did thirty, forty years ago" (Gaines, 66). Ironically, Sheriff Mapes accuses Candy of living in the past by thinking that she can dictate and control blacks. What Candy considers being protective is perceived as something vastly different by others. In fact, Sheriff Mapes says that Candy wants to keep the blacks slaves all of their lives, not truly liberate them (Gaines, 174). By the end of the novel, the elderly black men have broken away from Candy and the outdated codes of the parish, which only permit white men to defend their reputations and families. Several traditions have died by the end of the novel. For one, Fix has decided not to retaliate because he does not have support from his two younger sons. Secondly, the elderly black men have refused to endure abuse at the hands of white men any longer. They have gathered to protect their status as men and to defend their families. Thirdly, the elderly black men have asserted their independence rather than relying on the guidance and protection of a white patron.

In terms of the Southern "culture of honor," *A Gathering of Old Men* contributes greatly to an understanding of black men's attitude towards this Southern institution. As

noted in an article in *Critical Reflections on the Fiction of Ernest J. Gaines*, the elderly men in *A Gathering of Old Men* not only transform into true men, but they also expand the notion of manhood. Several of the articles in the text are devoted to *A Gathering of Old Men*, but one by Sandra Shannon focuses on the notion of manhood. While the Southern “culture of honor” dictates that in order to be a man, one must possess a tough reputation and be strong, the elderly men in this novel admit their fears and weaknesses instead of constantly having to appear strong and tough. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, one man frankly asks his fishing buddy if he is afraid of getting his shotgun and meeting at Mathu’s house. The man responds affirmatively. While riding in the truck to the gravesite, several of the men discuss their fears. In contrast, none of the white men addresses or discusses their fears. It is not until the shoot-out at the end of the novel that the young, agile and strong Luke Will and crew exhibit fear and weakness when attacked by the physically weak and aged black men. Unlike the elderly black men, who openly discuss and share their fears and weakness, Luke Will and his crew, who had displayed courage and toughness for the majority of the novel, appear as cowards when displaying fears during the shoot-out. A role reversal occurs where the elderly black men become tough and strong, and the tough, young white men become cowards. One member of Luke Will’s crew openly cries and sniffles, which makes Luke Will and his crew easier targets for the elderly black men circled around them. When Luke Will tells him to quiet down, the young man declares he wants out since he is injured; he informs the Sheriff that he is only a child (Gaines, 203).

As noted previously, *A Gathering of Old Men* illustrates how black are more concerned with being respected for who they are and exhibiting courage when necessary to

defend themselves and their families. The elderly men do not consider their reputations as possessions to guard and defend; however, they do consider their sons, wives, brothers and relatives precious commodities deserving of protection. These elderly men are motivated to stand up in order to feel good about themselves, knowing that they inwardly have desired to protect their loved ones and chosen not to do so in the past because of fear. These elderly men are ready to shed their coats of fear and be clothed in courage. Therefore, when the opportunity arises to protect a beloved community member, the elderly men seize their final opportunity to protect and defend a member of their community against a violent assault. In the end, their toughness is not measured by their ability to fight deftly, to hurt or to maim; their toughness is measured by their resolve to stand and has nothing to do with physical agility.

Chapter Four

The Return of the Strong Black Male

We will not cry for those things that are gone, but find meaning in those things that remain with us
-Maulana Karenga

Just like the two novels examined in previous chapters, the film *Rosewood* is based upon historical reality; its name comes from the nearly all-black town of Rosewood, Florida, “a small African American community on the Gulf Coast of Florida” with a population “between 150 to 200 people” that was “less than 50 miles from Gainesville” (Jones and McCarthy, 83). The entire town of Rosewood was destroyed due to the Southern “culture of honor.”

Florida historians document the presence of the “culture of honor” in Florida during the early Twentieth Century. Historian Michael Gannon estimates that 40,000 blacks left Florida for the North between 1916-1920, leaving the black population of Florida at approximately 30% of the total population of the state during the 1920s (86). Nonetheless, documents show that Florida led the nation in lynchings during this time. The Southern states of Mississippi, Georgia and Louisiana recorded half the number of lynchings as Florida while Alabama had a third the number of lynchings as Florida (Gannon, 86). Most blacks who remained in Florida after the great migration populated “the backcountry,” (Gannon, 86) or rural areas such as Rosewood. Gannon notes the stark contrast in lifestyle of the white residents along the coast of Florida with the black

residents of the backcountry areas - “blacks in the interior knew that at any time, for the slightest offense, real or imagined, they could be subject to physical violence, even death” (Gannon, 86). Gannon describes the foreboding and threatening lifestyle of backcountry communities as “lawless” (86).

While Gannon perceives the major difference between coastal and backcountry communities as the presence of violence and absence of the law, sheriffs, judges and courthouses existed in Florida backcountry communities. Gannon fails to recognize that it was the pervasiveness of the “culture of honor” in these backcountry communities that contributed to the sense of a lawless society. Gannon identifies “the slightest offense, real or imagined” (86) as the cause of a violent physical reaction and even death; this language reflects the characteristics of a “culture of honor.” White men in these backcountry communities had tough reputations to defend, and they retaliated against a perceived or actual insult to their reputations with violence. By identifying the character of these backcountry areas as “lawless,” Gannon negates the presence of the legal authorities in these communities, who, according to defining traits of the Southern “culture of honor,” were complicit partners in the violence rather than punishers of the violence. To defend his assertion of the backcountry communities as “lawless,” Gannon identifies two examples of how a black community “could be obliterated on the slightest suggestion of wrongdoing” (86) during these times. One of those towns is Ocoee, a town near Orlando, FL. In 1920, the entire black section of Ocoee was destroyed. Three years later, the predominantly all-black town of Rosewood was destroyed by fire during a massacre that began on New Years Day, 1923. The number of people officially recorded as having been killed during the Rosewood massacre is significantly smaller than the

number reported by the survivors of the massacre (Jones and McCarthy, 84). The film adaptation of the Rosewood massacre not only permits an examination of the presence of the Southern “culture of honor” in Florida, but it affords the opportunity to view how a black community interfaces with the codes embedded within the “culture of honor.”

While key differences exist between the historical burning of Rosewood and the film depiction of the event, several events and figures in the film mirror the documented records of the historical massacre. The film begins with the events of Thursday, December 31, 1922, the day preceding the massacre and ends on Tuesday, January 4, 1923. The actual massacre began January 1, 1923, and endured over a week’s time (Jones and McCarthy, 84). The action of the film centers on a group of white men’s violent response to a white married woman’s claim that a black man broke into her house and beat her. According to Florida archives, a white woman who lived in Sumner, a town a few miles from Rosewood, “claimed that an African American man had attacked her. African Americans, however, were certain that the white woman’s white boyfriend had beaten her” (Jones and McCarthy, 83). In the film, this white woman is Fannie Taylor, and she lives in the white town of Sumner, Florida. Fannie’s husband, James, works in the local sawmill, historically known as Cummer & Sons Cypress Company Sawmill. History notes that several of the black women in Rosewood did laundry for white families (Jones and McCarthy, 83). In the film, the Taylors have an elderly black woman named Sarah Carrier who cleans their home. Sarah, who is affectionately called Aunt Sarah by the Taylors and many residents of Rosewood, witnesses everything that occurs the day of the incident. In the film, Fannie Taylor is notorious for cheating on her husband while he is occupied at work; white and black residents alike are aware of

Fannie's infidelities.

The film opens the morning of the alleged attack. This particular morning, Fannie shuns the advances of her husband, telling him to go to work. However, later in the day, Fannie is in bed with one of her lovers. As the man leaves the room, Fannie asks if he has been "double-timing" her (Singleton). The man does not respond, so Fannie runs after him and grabs him. Once Fannie touches him, the man begins hitting, kicking and beating Fannie as well as calling her "swamp trash" (Singleton). He physically and verbally abuses Fannie for several minutes before leaving. The man's violent reaction to his lover is the first indication of the presence of the "culture of honor" in this small Southern community. The man gets insulted once Fannie grabs him and responds violently. Walking out the house, the man passes Aunt Sarah and a young black girl, both of whom are working outside the house and hear the entire commotion. A young black boy chopping wood in the yard across the road also witnesses the man leaving the Taylor residence. This violent retaliation establishes the plot for the film.

The Taylors are one of three critical white families in *Rosewood*. Another crucial white family is the Wright family, the only white family residing in Rosewood. The husband, Mr. Wright, is based upon the historical John Wright. While John Wright represents the sole white resident in the film, he and his family were one of several white residents in historical Rosewood (Jones and McCarthy, 84). In the film, Mr. Wright owns a store in Rosewood and is sleeping with his black store clerk, the sister-in-law of Aunt Sarah. Mr. Wright has two sons by his previous wife, who died earlier in the year. His new wife is adjusting to life in Rosewood and her two new sons, the oldest of whom defiantly reminds her that she is not his mother. While Mrs. Wright is a religious woman

who reads her Bible and prays, Mr. Wright parties to disguise his longing for his first wife. Duke and his son Emmett represent the third significant white family in *Rosewood*. Duke, a Sumner resident, is in the process of training his son Emmett to be a man. Therefore, Duke takes his son everywhere, instructing him on how to hunt, how to shoot properly, why not to cry, why he should stop befriending black boys and so forth. Throughout the film, Duke exposes his son to what, he believes, it is to be a man, which largely is based upon building and maintaining a tough reputation.

The day that Fannie Taylor claims a black man broke into her home and beat her, a strange black man riding a horse appears in the community; this man quickly becomes a central character of the film. He first visits Sumner but quickly heads to Rosewood upon observing the unfriendliness and hostility of the whites in Sumner. Upon entering Rosewood, he stops in front of the schoolhouse, where the teacher is disciplining two of her male students on the porch. Once she sees the stranger, she tells the boys to go into the school and introduces herself to the stranger by saying, “My name is Beulah but people who know me call me Scrappy” (Singleton). The stranger responds, “Folks I know call me Man, Scrappy” (Singleton). For the remainder of the film, this big, confident and pensive stranger is called Mr. Man by the entire community. Indeed, his physique and presence confirm that he is the epitome of a man.

Mr. Man is a World War I veteran plagued by nightmares of the war and seeking a place of rest and peace. He has stopped in this particular community because his horse needs new shoes. The name of Mr. Man’s horse attests to the strength of Mr. Man’s character. The horse’s name is Booker T., named after the famous African American writer Booker T. Washington, known for his “philosophy of African American education

and socioeconomic progress,” which included “industrial education; an emphasis on racial pride, solidarity and self help” (Gates and McKay, 489). While contemporary scholars perceive Washington as promoting black subservience, during his time period, Washington was seen as someone who encouraged blacks to be self-reliant. Because it is New Year’s Eve, the blacksmith is closing early to attend a New Year Eve’s dance, so Mr. Man must wait a day before Booker T can continue to travel.

During his short stay in Rosewood, Mr. Man begins to feel at home. A local family, the Carriers, exhibits hospitality by inviting Mr. Man to share New Year’s Eve dinner with them. At the dinner, it becomes apparent that Scrappy, the schoolteacher he met earlier, and Mr. Man are interested in one another; several of the family members notice the mutual attraction. Aunt Sarah encourages Mr. Man to settle in Rosewood and find himself a nice wife. Bragging about the prosperity and possessions of the town, Aunt Sarah informs Mr. Man that many of the black residents in Rosewood are better off financially than the white residents of Sumner. This depiction accurately reflects the historical town. Though small, the historical town of Rosewood operated its own school, churches, store, sugar mill and turpentine mill (Jones and McCarty, 83). The day following his dinner with the Carriers, Mr. Man follows Aunt Sarah’s counsel to settle in Rosewood and bids for five acres of land being auctioned off across from Mr. Wright’s store. Mr. Man’s day and night in Rosewood have convinced him that he has found his home.

An aspect of Mr. Man’s dominant character is revealed during the land auction scene. Racial tensions heighten during the auction as Mr. Man violates the Southern codes dictating blacks’ inferior position to whites. Mr. Man is bidding against Mr.

Wright, who plans on purchasing the five acres so that he eventually can move to Gainesville to open a larger store. The auction is held at a church, which is filled with white men while only three black men are present. Mr. Man, Sylvester Carrier (Aunt Sarah's son) and Mr. Bradley (the black man who owns the land) are the only black men in the room. Though Mr. Bradley is positioned at the front of the room near the auctioneer, Mr. Man and Sylvester stand at the back of the room. During the auction, Mr. Man boldly returns a higher bid for every bid made by Mr. Wright. At one point, an auction attendee says, "Johnny, you'll let that nigger beat you" (Singleton). Mr. Wright becomes frustrated, exclaiming to the auctioneer that the stranger is simply driving the price up so that Mr. Bradley can make money on the sale. The mounting tension is halted when a man interrupts the auction to inform the men of Fannie Taylor's attack.

Though Mr. Man is a man of minimal conversation, what he does say provides great insight into his strength of character. Like Armstrong in Campbell's novel, Mr. Man is an outsider to the community; therefore, he does not subscribe to expected Southern codes. Mr. Man does not defer to whites, fear whites or feel the need to bridle his tongue when speaking to or about whites, which is an abnormal attitude for a black man in the South. Rather than shying away from the increasing racial tension at the auction, Mr. Man comments that Mr. Wright should stop bidding if he does not have the funds to purchase the land. Once the auction is interrupted with news of Fannie Taylor's incident, When Mr. Wright stops at the door to address Mr. Man, Mr. Man comments to Mr. Wright that it looks as if they will be neighbors. Mr. Man's comment is considered insulting because they come from a black man. As someone who considers himself equal to white men, Mr. Man makes such remarks with no hesitation or reservation. Earlier in

the film when Mr. Man discusses war with Mr. Wright, who served in the Navy, Mr. Wright remarks that it seems strange that the country would draft black men to go overseas to fight and kill white men. With this comment, Mr. Wright insinuates that it is ridiculous for the inferior black race to be sanctioned by the government to harm the superior white. Mr. Wright does not believe blacks should have been authorized under any circumstances to kill whites; his belief and values stem from Southern codes. Instead of agreeing with Mr. Wright, which is what would be the expected response of a black in that situation, Mr. Man informs Mr. Wright that he volunteered for the war instead of being drafted. Mr. Man's tenacious response to Mr. Wright sends the message that he, as a black man, was not forced to hurt whites; he volunteered to kill white men. This comment clearly sends the signal that Mr. Man does not subscribe to Southern norms. Because Mr. Man believes that he is equal with whites, he is not afraid to confront whites or make comments that disagree with them. Early in the film, it becomes clear that Mr. Man symbolizes a different type of black man in the South.

Another black man comparable to Mr. Man is referenced throughout the film, but he never appears in person. Early in the film, the Sheriff has received word that a black man named Jesse Hunter escaped from a chain gang and is possibly headed for Rosewood. Initially, the deputy believes that Mr. Man is Jesse Hunter, but Sheriff Ellis quickly dismisses that notion after glancing at Mr. Man on his horse. No historical record accounts for the existence of these two strange men, Mr. Man or Jesse Hunter. In taking creative license to present these characters, Singleton presents black men who disregard Southern codes. Not coincidentally, these black men are outsiders to the Southern "culture of honor."

Two black males in the film, who are present in the historical records, are James and Sylvester Carrier. The Carriers, the central black family in the film, consist of several generations; there is the older generation of Sarah and her brother James. As noted earlier, Emma (James's wife and Aunt Sarah's sister-in-law) works at Mr. Wright's store. Aunt Sarah has a son named Sylvester, who is a music teacher married to an extremely fair-complexioned biracial woman; Sylvester represents the younger, more progressive generation. While Sylvester does not have the physical stature or defiant attitude of Mr. Man, he believes the time for blacks to be treated as inferior to whites has ended. Sylvester and his wife Gerti have a son named Arnett, who represents the future of the black community. Sylvester's cousin Beulah is called Scrappy by everyone. She is 17 years old and teaches the young black children of Rosewood.

Though the older Carrier family members do not agree with the Southern codes and institutions, they submit to them. However, Sylvester rejects them. For example, Sarah and her brother abide by the unwritten and unspoken racial codes of the South that dictate that blacks need to stay out of white community members' business, blacks should not challenge or question whites, blacks should not disagree with white and blacks should defer to whites. In contrast, Sylvester considers these codes to be outdated and insulting. Since he is a property owner, Sylvester feels no need to defer to whites. Rather, he asserts that he has the same rights as whites, and he and his family should be treated with the same respect as whites. For Aunt Sarah and her brother, Southern race codes remain intact though other circumstances have changed. In Aunt Sarah's words, "white folks will always be white folks" (Singleton). The older generation refuses to challenge Southern institutions that dictate gender and racial codes.

The differing perceptions of veneration towards Southern black and white women are visible in *Rosewood*. Southern white women are prized and known for their sexual purity. Depictions of the sexual image of blacks, especially in literature by former slaves, expose the black woman's historical sexual vulnerability in the South. The most notable early account of the sexual helplessness of Southern black women is found in Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. This slave narrative illustrates the pervasive sexual abuse endured by slave women at the hands of their white male masters. One of the first scenes in *Rosewood*, and the first sexual scene in the film, occurs between a white man and a black woman. The camera scene shows Mr. Wright bent over a woman on a table in the back of his store. Once he emerges from the back room, a black woman scrambles to button her blouse and fix her clothes. The first view that the audience sees of a black woman is that of her sexual dishonor and abuse at the hands of a white male in an authoritative position, even in this predominantly-black town.

This early impression of black female sexual exploitation at the hands of a white male is contrasted with the image of a black man protecting and defending his female relative's sexual innocence. As the adults seat themselves at the Carrier table for New Year Eve's dinner, Sylvester informs Scrapy that he approached Mr. Andrews about whistling at her. At this point, the film flashbacks to Sylvester's confrontation of Mr. Andrews. The scene shows Sylvester approaching Mr. Andrews with a shotgun thrust over his shoulder; Mr. Andrews is sitting on his porch with his dog and a friend. Sylvester addresses Mr. Andrews with, "I come to have a word with you about my cousin. Now, I expect you to show her some respect. I don't like Scrapy feeling scared" (Singleton). The friend of Mr. Andrews responds, "You expect, boy?" (Singleton). His

questioning of Sylvester's demands and reference to him as a boy are attempts to remind Sylvester of his inferior position as a black man. Though Sylvester does not back down, he adheres to some Southern codes. Rather than looking directly at the men in their eyes (which is part of the racial code-those in an inferior position do not look their superiors directly in the eyes), Sylvester stands sideways to the porch looking straight in front of himself instead of looking at the men sitting on the porch. Ignoring the man's rebuttal, Sylvester says, "I don't mess with your peoples, and I don't expect you to mess with mine" (Singleton). When Mr. Andrews asks, "Is that a threat?," Sylvester stays within certain racial boundaries by not directly answering the question. Instead, Sylvester states that no threat is needed, pauses, adds "sir" and walks away. While no man is around to protect James's wife from her white employer's sexual advances, Sylvester confronts white men about their demeaning behavior towards his cousin.

The older Carriers do not appreciate or applaud Sylvester's defense of his cousin; in fact, they believe it was a foolish decision. When the film returns to the dinner table scene, Sylvester's mother Sarah says, "You can't talk to white folks like that and not expect a rope around your neck" (Singleton). Sarah clearly articulates the fatal repercussions for insulting a white man; with this comment, Sarah attempts to remind her son that blacks cannot address whites as equals or abide by the same codes regarding family protection and honor because they will end up dead. Sarah then explains how a man from another town was burned for winking at a white woman the previous summer. Her story illustrates the presence of the "culture of honor," where white women are considered sexually pure and in need of protection by white men. Rather than responding to Sarah's story with fear, Sylvester retorts, "But it's all right to whistle at Scrappy?"

(Singleton). Sylvester wants his mother to acknowledge that the women in their family are as worthy of honor and sexual protection as white women. With this comment, even Sylvester's uncle agrees that it is not acceptable for a white man to whistle at Scrappy. In essence, this scene attests to the belief among black men that black women possess sexual purity and need protection from sexual affronts.

Sylvester not only believes that black women need to be held in just as much honor and esteem as white women, but he also believes that he is obligated to protect his black female family members. Consequently, Sylvester feels compelled to defend his cousin when she is threatened and feels uncomfortable. To indicate to the men that he is serious, Sylvester carries a gun, signaling his willingness to use violence. Granted, Sylvester verbally warns the men rather than immediately retaliating with violence, which is the action that white men would have taken in adherence to the Southern "culture of honor." Unlike the two novels studied in previous chapters, *Rosewood* shows a black man doing what is expected of white men in a "culture of honor." Sylvester visits a man who has compromised his female family member's sexually. Rather than retaliating with violence or explicitly threatening the white man, Sylvester implicitly warns him that violence is imminent by carrying his shotgun and articulating his expectation that his "people" will be left alone.

An ironic aspect of the Southern "culture of honor" illustrated in *Rosewood* is seen in the contrasting characters of Scrappy and Fannie Taylor. While Scrappy is portrayed as a pure, innocent young black woman, Fannie is known to be a sexually promiscuous white woman. Nonetheless, because of the need to explain her bruises and more importantly, to cover up her adulterous activities, Fannie cleverly plays into the

codes of the Southern “culture of honor” to prevent her infidelity from being discovered by her husband. After Fannie is beat and abandoned by her lover, she cries, tidies up, cleans herself and changes her clothes. Having heard the physical and verbal abuse of Fannie’s lover, the young black girl assisting Aunt Sarah runs inside to help Fannie; Aunt Sarah calls after the young girl and then gets her so that they can stay out of the situation. Fannie tells them both to leave the house, so they go back to work outside. Shortly thereafter, Fannie emerges from the house, walks down the steps and into the road, falls to her knees, cries and yells, “Help me! Help me! It was a nigger; he broke into my house and beat me” (Singleton). A young white boy who hears Fannie’s plea runs to the mill to inform the men that “Fannie Taylor got herself beat by a nigger” (Singleton). The entire Sumner community responds.

Suspicion about Fannie’s claim is expressed from the outset of the incident. When Sheriff Ellis arrives at Fannie’s house, he asks, “Who raped you?” Fannie quickly corrects him by saying, “I wasn’t raped; I was beat” (Singleton). While Fannie wants to cover up her activities, she is unwilling to have the community believe that she has been touched sexually by a black man, which would be degrading. She describes her assailant as being “so big and so black” (Singleton). Because the Sheriff is familiar with Fannie’s sexually loose ways, he pulls her away from the crowd she has attracted to remind her that they have known each other for a long time; he then asks her, “Are you sure a colored done this to you?” (Singleton). Knowing that Fannie is lying and that he will have to respond seriously to her allegations, Sheriff Ellis gives her the opportunity to tell him the truth instead of escalating the situation to violence.

Sheriff Ellis and Fannie Taylor thoroughly understand the dire implications of a

white woman in Sumner, Florida, accusing a black man of beating her. While the Sheriff wants Fannie to tell the truth, Fannie is committed to taking all attention off her. To keep the community fixated on her alleged attacker and retaliating against him, Fannie responds to the Sheriff's private questioning by turning back to the crowd and responding loudly, "It was a nigger, a nigger" (Singleton). Fannie continues to bask in the attention of being a victim. In the meantime, the white men of Sumner begin gathering to "do something" (Singleton). Still determined to find some type of evidence to disprove Fannie, Sheriff Ellis approaches Aunt Sarah to ask whether she knows something about the incident. Sarah responds, "No, Mr. Ellis, I ain't seen nothing" (Singleton). Sarah understands the fruitlessness of disputing a Southern white woman's word, so she remains silent. Alarmed at the news regarding his wife, James Taylor runs home to comfort his wife. James thinks his wife is an angel and tells her so. This image of Fannie reinforces the notion of white Southern women as pure. Fannie reminds her husband, "I am just a woman" (Singleton). Fannie recognizes that she is not everything her husband believes her to be.

In the film, Fannie Taylor represents the white sexually pure woman and the men committed to protecting a sexually pure white women and retaliating to any insult with violence are the townsmen of Sumner. Once news of the attack spreads, black and white mill workers are given the day off to help search for Fannie's assailant. Like Lily Cox in Campbell's novel, Fannie is not innocent and others know this as well. Several of the white men in the retaliating crowd have slept with Fannie. As already noted, Sheriff Ellis doubts Fannie's story from the beginning of the incident just as Lily's in-laws doubted her innocence in the pool hall incident. Nonetheless, the ideal that Fannie (and Lily)

represents as a white woman is motive enough for the men of Sumner to respond with violence, just as it was sufficient motive for the Cox men to retaliate. The “culture of honor” in the South dictates that the slightest intimation of a black man touching a white woman is insulting and must be dealt with by the white men in the family or by the larger white community. Therefore, the entire town of Sumner is willing to protect and defend a white woman who they know to be sexually promiscuous.

However, other motives for retaliating emerge as the men head for Rosewood. The white Sumner men resent Sylvester Carrier for his superior attitude and possessions. One townsman laments the fact that Sylvester owns a piano when he, as a white man, cannot afford one; he explains that he has only known one person to own a piano and that was a wealthy white man. In another scene, another Sumner man notes that Sylvester is married to a white woman; however, Sheriff Ellis quickly corrects him by saying that Sylvester’s wife is not white; rather, she is part black and part Indian. Furthermore, the white men of Sumner work at a mill while Sylvester is a music teacher, which means he does not have to perform hard, manual labor like them. The mere presence of Sylvester is insulting to the white men of Sumner because he is a black man whose profession, family, lifestyle and possessions indicate that he is just as good as, if not better than, the white men.

Just as Fannie Taylor represents the sexually pure white woman of the Southern “culture of honor” who must be protected, Duke epitomizes the white man committed to retaliating to insults with violence. While there is a crowd of at least 10 white men led by Sheriff Ellis hunting down Fannie’s assailant, Duke repeatedly initiates the violence. First, the men get the hounds, who lead them to Big Boy. Historical documents indicate

that a group of white men gathered to locate the white woman's assailants, and the hunting dog they used led them to Rosewood (Jones and McCarty, 84). In the film, once the group of men arrives at the location where the hounds lead them, they beat Big Boy, place him in a wagon with a noose around his neck and take him to the woods. They encounter Mr. Wright on their journey, who pulls Sheriff Ellis aside because he knows that the young man did not hurt Fannie. As Mr. Wright and Sheriff Ellis converse on the side of the road, the crowd of white men, led by Duke, begins harassing Big Boy. Duke jokingly tells Big Boy the story about how several white men caught a black man watching a white woman through the window as she was bathing. He describes how the men beat the boy half to death and took him to the railroad tracks. Laughing and joking as he tells the story, Duke explains how the railroad tracks completely severed the man's head. This is yet another story that attests to the strong presence of the "culture of honor" in the South. Duke's story terrifies Big Boy into confessing that Sam, the blacksmith, took the assailant to some destination.

The crowd, led by Duke and monitored by Sheriff Ellis, finds its next victim. The crowd of men beats Sam the blacksmith until he agrees to lead them to the spot where he dropped off the man. Once there, the dogs are unable to pick up a scent, so Duke shoots Sam, and the men hang his body from a tree in the swamp. Historical documents note that the mob of white men cut off Sam Carter's ears and fingers to keep them as souvenirs (Jones and McCarty, 84). Appalled at Duke's action, Sheriff Ellis confronts Duke for his unnecessary violence. However, the other men in the crowd support Duke. One of the men responds to the Sheriff's outrage with exclamations that a white woman has been raped and what are they to tell her husband and kids; the man's response of, "He's got to

pay!” (Singleton) attests to the rule of retaliation, which provides that death must be inflicted in order to restore honor. Interestingly, though Fannie claims that she was only beat, the men still identify the crime as rape. The crowd must kill somebody so that Fannie’s husband and his family will feel their honor has been restored. Nonetheless, Sheriff Ellis’s contention that he is supposed to uphold the law illustrates that he does not agree with aspects of the “culture of honor.” The man retorts, “What? The nigger law!” (Singleton). Killing Sam is Duke’s second violent act, and whets the violent appetite in the rest of the men, provoking them to commit random violent acts of their own.

As impending violence threatens Rosewood, Sylvester emerges as the character to defend the black community. Black community members gather at the church to strategize a defense against the violent retaliation expected. One of the men poses the question, “What you mens prepared to do if they come back?” (Singleton). Another man corrects him by saying, not “if” but “when,” indicating that the code warrants another visit. Even though Big Boy was hurt and Sam Carter killed, the alleged attacker has yet to be captured; therefore, the community expects more retaliation. One man suggests sending the women and children to Gainesville. As talk of leaving to avoid the white mob continues, Sylvester exclaims, “Colored folks got to take a stand and stop running all the time. This our land; we pay taxes. This is our property” (Singleton). Sylvester is determined to defend his property and land. In the midst of the discussion, Mr. Wright arrives at the meeting; however, the people continue to talk as if Mr. Wright is not present.

To everyone’s surprise and dismay, Mr. Man, the epitome of male strength and courage, not only remains silent during the discussion but stands to leave. When someone

questions him about leaving, Mr. Man states, “I just came from one war. I ain’t looking for another one” (Singleton), and he walks out wishing the community luck. Mr. Man recognizes the impending clash and considers himself to be the prime target of a violent retaliation. Mr. Man’s departure disappoints the Rosewood residents, who expected Mr. Man to defend and protect the black community. After Mr. Man leaves, the men ask Mr. Wright to leave.

Once outside, Mr. Wright questions Mr. Man’s manhood and courage in hopes of motivating him to stay and fight. Mr. Wright insults Mr. Man by indirectly calling him a coward. Recalling their earlier conversation about the military, Mr. Wright says that the Navy did not teach him (Mr. Wright) to run but maybe the Army taught its soldiers to run. However, the characteristically pensive Mr. Man does not respond to the insult. Therefore, Mr. Wright elevates the insult by directly calling Mr. Man a coward for running at the first sign of trouble. Once again, Mr. Man reserves his words. Rather than responding violently or remaining in the town to prove that he is tough, Mr. Man simply asks Mr. Wright how long he has lived in Rosewood. After Mr. Wright answers, Mr. Man points out that he (Mr. Man) has only been in Rosewood one day but the residents want him to stay. On the other hand, Mr. Man notes that Mr. Wright has been in the community nine years, and the blacks of Rosewood would not stop him from leaving. Then, Mr. Man walks away. Mr. Man’s comments insinuate that he is embraced by the Rosewood community and considered more of an asset to Rosewood than Mr. Wright. Also, his remarks reinforce his lack of fear of expressing himself completely to a white man. Finally, Mr. Man’s actions or lack of actions illustrates that he does not adhere to codes of the Southern “culture of honor” which would have dictated that he prove that he

was not a coward.

Mr. Wright is not the only Rosewood community member to express disappointment that Mr. Man is not staying to support the community in its moment of need. Scrapy comments to Mr. Man as he leaves Rosewood, “I didn’t think you was gon run off and all; ain’t you a soldier?” (Singleton). Her question intimates what Mr. Wright expressed to Mr. Man, that a soldier stays and fights at all times. Mr. Man’s response indicates that he is not neglecting the community; rather, he is protecting himself. Mr. Man reminds Scrapy that the crowd of white men is looking for a stranger. Referring to the preacher’s comments that maybe Mr. Man was involved in the incident since the Rosewood community does not truly know him, Mr. Man says, “Your own preacher ready to hang me up” (Singleton). To Mr. Man, the white community is prepared to kill him and the black community is ready to sacrifice him to avoid bearing the brunt of the retaliation. Mr. Man believes the wisest thing to do to preserve his life is leave. Unbeknownst to Mr. Man, the preacher’s suggestion that Mr. Man might have been involved in Fannie’s attack provokes Aunt Sarah to confess to the residents that she saw the assailant, and he was white. After explaining to Scrapy that he must protect himself, Mr. Man informs her that he plans to return to Rosewood in three to four weeks. Essentially, Mr. Man reassures Scrapy that he is not abandoning her or the community. Mr. Man’s actions illustrate that his is focused on personal survival and long-term stability while the residents of Rosewood are seeking protection.

Several authority figures in the film represent the complicity of legal and punitive figures in the “culture of honor.” The judge, who is also the coroner, arrives to examine Sam Carter’s butchered body. Unlike Sheriff Ellis, the judge blindly supports and

protects the white men of Sumner. Rather than focusing on examining Sam Carter's body, the judge chides Sheriff Ellis for not handling the blacks and reminds him that it is re-election time. The judge comments, "We need a sheriff who can handle nigger problems," someone who can "handle our coloreds" (Singleton). The judge tells the Sheriff that it was his responsibility to locate and punish Fannie Taylor's accuser. The judge superficially turns his attention to Sam Carter's body after scolding Sheriff Ellis. As he examines the body, the judge notes "multiple gunshot wounds, a missing ear, missing fingers and other parts" and announces the official cause of death as "mischief at hands unknown" (Singleton). Though the judge knows that the white men of Sumner tortured and killed Sam Carter, he records the cause of death as mischief at hands unknown to protect the white men of Sumner, who acted to protect a white woman as well as signal to black men that that type of behavior will not go unpunished. Just as the Sheriff in Campbell's novel had no intentions of punishing the Cox men for their murder of Armstrong Todd, the judge, as the authority of the county, dismisses the actions of the mob because they are retaliating against an insult to a family. Disregarding the actions of the white mob of Sumner, the judge believes these men are justified in killing the black man and any other black resident who might get in the way.

The sole authority figure in the film who does not wholeheartedly support the "culture of honor" is Sheriff Ellis, who attempts to warn the black Rosewood residents and chastises Duke for his violent actions. While he may be the only official to attempt to protect the blacks, he is not the only white character who tries to help the Rosewood residents. As he stops to deliver goods in Rosewood, Mr. Bryce, a train conductor, warns Aunt Sarah to get out of town because he "doesn't much like the looks of round here"

(Singleton). Shortly thereafter, Sheriff Ellis asks Sylvester to visit his relatives for awhile. The Sheriff explains, "I'm only trying to help because the men in Sumner are drinking and making nooses" (Singleton). Sylvester says that the Sheriff can help by keeping the boys in Sumner. Sylvester's response reminds the Sheriff that it is his responsibility to keep peace, investigate crimes and stop violence. Sheriff Ellis says he is there to warn Sylvester that he should not still be in town after sundown. When Sylvester tells Sheriff Ellis to tell the Sumner men something, Ellis responds, "Tell em your damned self...colored fool!" (Singleton). Sheriff Ellis is visibly frustrated because he knows that, though he is the Sheriff, he cannot thwart the pending violent retaliation of the Sumner men. Nonetheless, the Sheriff hopes to prevent the violence by encouraging the blacks to leave.

Mr. Wright also hopes to avert a clash between the white men of Sumner and the determined Sylvester. A witness to the exchange between Sheriff Ellis and Sylvester, Mr. Wright encourages Sylvester to leave later that day. When Sylvester arrives at the Wright store to purchase bullets, Mr. Wright says, "Sheriff give you good advice, why won't you listen? I thought you was smart Sylvester" (Singleton). At this point, Mr. Wright tries to force Sylvester to leave by not selling him bullets until his account is settled. Like Sheriff Ellis, Mr. Wright would like the blacks to leave so that the Sumner men will not have anyone to harm when they arrive. Sylvester becomes infuriated at Mr. Wright's request, angrily takes out cash to settle his account and forcibly takes the bullets though Mr. Wright puts up physical resistance. Sylvester remains steadfast in protecting the community and citizens of Rosewood. Unlike the white Sumner men, Sylvester seeks to defend his family and community just as he attempted to protect his cousin Scrapy

earlier from white men whistling at her.

In contrast to Sylvester, the white men of Sumner are reacting to a concept within the “culture of honor” rather than defending and protecting a white women’s sexual innocence. The mob returns to Rosewood, heading straight to the Carrier house. The Carrier family is celebrating Arnett’s birthday. While the children are enjoying themselves, the adults are on edge because they are expecting retaliation from the whites in Sumner. Led by Sheriff Ellis, who hopes to keep the mob under control, the white men arrive at the house. Duke shoots the barking dog in the Carrier yard to stop it from making further noise. Again, Duke is the one to initiate violence, which infuriates Sheriff Ellis who wants to prevent violence. The white men call for Sylvester from the gate. Inside the house, Sylvester instructs the women and children to get down as he loads his guns. Aunt Sarah steps outside to talk to the men to prevent a violent confrontation between Sylvester and the mob. While Aunt Sarah speaks calmly to the men, reminding them that she watched most of them and encouraging them to go home, the men begin yelling and screaming. Once Aunt Sarah says, “most of you mens know that man was white” (Singleton), a shot is fired. Aunt Sarah violates the code by accusing a white man of harming one of their precious white women; her insult is repaid with a deadly shot. Sylvester pulls his mother’s body into the house while Sheriff Ellis turns to the crowd to demand to know who fired the shot that killed Aunt Sarah.

Much like Sheriff Barnes in Gaines’s novel, Sheriff Ellis becomes a figurehead who lacks any real power; he can neither stop the violent retaliation of the white men nor can he stop the black community from defending itself. More yelling and screaming occur; several of the men rush the front door of the Carrier house when they notice

Sylvester pulling his mother's body inside. Sylvester shoots and kills two of the white men at the door. Though Sylvester's shots are an act of self-defense to protect the women and children inside, he has committed the ultimate insult by killing tough white men. A shoot-out ensues and the mob leaves to get ammunition from Mr. Wright's store.

Several insults have occurred against the white men of Sumner, which justifies further violence. Not only has a black man supposedly beat a white woman but a black woman accused a white man of hurting his own and a black man has killed two white men. Part of the racial code of the South dictates that black people not offend or harm a white person, even if it is self-defense. At the store, Sheriff Ellis and Mr. Wright pull away from the crowd to discuss what happened at the Carrier home. When Mr. Wright asks if Sylvester is dead, Sheriff Ellis responds that he does not know but says that Aunt Sarah is dead. Mr. Wright asks, "You call that upholdin the law? What kind of sheriff are you?" (Singleton). It is evident that Mr. Wright does not subscribe to several of the codes of the "culture of honor;" his comment illustrates his concern for blacks as people deserving of protection from the authorities. Once the Sheriff comments he wants to know where Sylvester obtained his bullets and informs Mr. Wright that two white men are dead, Mr. Wright knows not to pursue the issue. The Sheriff tells Mr. Wright this to remind him that the men of Sumner can come after him for supplying blacks with ammunition to hurt whites. Furthermore, Mr. Wright fully understands that the death of two white men at the hands of a black man necessitates a violent retaliation.

Once the crowd of men leaves Mr. Wright's store, they become a mob of violent white men rather than a group of white men led by one violent man. Returning to Sylvester's house with a vengeance to compensate for the two dead white men, the men

discover that the house is practically empty since Sylvester had time to direct the women and children into the swamps to hide. The violent and lawless mob shoots the Carrier house; then begins scouring the town to commit cruel, violent acts. The mob hangs various men and women. In one particular scene, a white man cuts off the ear of one black man hanging from a tree before the man dies. In another scene, white parents force their kids to witness the hangings of blacks, providing firsthand lessons in violence. Other opportunities for violent training and educational experiences are provided. For example, Duke teaches his son how to tie a noose in the midst of the chaos. The mob arrives at Mr. Wright's house believing he has hidden some blacks. Initially, Mr. Wright refuses to release anyone. However, he is persuaded to release James so that the men can "talk" to him. After Mr. Wright acquiesces, Duke shoots James at point blank range when the black man says that he honestly does not know anything. Consistent with his character and violent tendencies, Duke decides to kill then move to the next victim. In addition to the violent, physical harm the mob inflicts on Rosewood residents, it burns homes and establishments.

Once Sylvester has disappeared, the other strong black male, Mr. Man, returns to assist the women and children. Against the wishes of the women, two children leave the woods to return to Rosewood once they hear their father's church bell, believing it to signal a safe return. As the children peruse the burnings and hangings throughout the town, Mr. Man rides up in time to kill a white man who is about to shoot the children. Mr. Man returns the children to their hiding spot. Once reunited with the children and women, Mr. Man calls Arnett to explain that he is now his lieutenant and a man. Then, Mr. Man returns to town to see who else he can rescue. He encounters Mr. Wright, who

provides bullets to Mr. Man and informs him where to take the women and children to meet a train to take them out of the area. Historical documents attest to the fact that the Bryce brothers commuted women and children on their train from Rosewood to safety. The film never addresses why Mr. Man returns to the town.

However, the return of Mr. Man causes the truth about the Fannie Taylor incident to surface. After being ordained a soldier, Arnett goes off to find a girl who wandered away from the crowd. Searching for Arnett, Mr. Man gets spotted by Duke. The mob believes it has finally caught its culprit. The men call Mr. Man Jesse Hunter. Even though Mr. Man says, “My name ain’t Jesse Hunter” (Singleton), and Sheriff Ellis knows that he is not the fugitive, Sheriff Ellis hits the horse on which Mr. Man is seated to commence the hanging and end the ordeal. Though Sheriff Ellis knows that Mr. Man is innocent, he prefers to sacrifice an innocent man to stop the senseless violence of the mob. After Booker T. rides off, Ellis comments to the crowd, “Truth be told, he probably had nothing to do with it. Some of ya’ll know better than others what Fannie been doin at lunch time” (Singleton). At this comment, Mr. Taylor physically attacks Sheriff Ellis for this insulting comment, and a fight ensues. During the fight, Mr. Man escapes. While the men run after Mr. Man, Sheriff Ellis informs Johnny Taylor, “Fannie lied to you, me and the whole damn town” (Singleton). When Mr. Taylor asks why the Sheriff pursued everything, Sheriff Ellis responds, “What choice I got? I’m the sheriff” (Singleton). Sheriff Ellis’s comments illustrate his obligation, as the law, to uphold aspects of the “culture of honor.” Though Ellis warned the blacks and attempted to save them, he confesses that, as an authority, he must abide by the codes of the “culture of honor” and seek retaliation on a black man simply because a white woman accused him of a crime.

The end of the film illustrates a rejection of aspects of the “culture of honor” by several key characters. Mr. Taylor returns home to beat his wife Fannie for lying. His actions indicate that the community is no longer willing to overlook the scandalous behavior of a white woman simply because she is white. The woman he once considered pure and innocent faces the ultimate disrespect by being beaten by her husband. Furthermore, like Lily Cox in Campbell’s novel, Fannie Taylor has insulted her husband. Fannie has not only been unfaithful to her husband, but the other men were aware of and involved in Fannie’s infidelity. As soon as Mr. Taylor learns of Fannie’s behavior, he returns home to retaliate against her with violence. Like Lily, Fannie’s attempt to cover up her indiscretions causes widespread harm. Young Emmett runs away from his father’s house the day following the massacre. His final rejection of his father’s manhood training comes when Duke forces him to look at a grave of dead blacks. When Emmett comments that there are dead babies and children, Duke callously replies, “they are niggers” (Singleton). However, Emmett sees fellow human beings. As he leaves his father’s house, Emmett exclaims, “I hate you. You ain’t no man. I don’t know what you are!” (Singleton). Obviously, Emmett’s comments and actions confirm his refusal to foster the codes and mentalities of the Southern “culture of honor.”

Finally, both Sylvester and Mr. Man emerge as defenders of their community in the end of the film. Mr. Man ends up being the strong, courageous man that everyone believed him to be. To everyone’s surprise, Sylvester survives the massacre. Both men illustrate the black male’s commitment to protecting his family and his community. Rather than being motivated by a desire to project a tough reputation, to be willing to maintain that tough reputation through violence and to retaliate with violence to any

insult, these men illustrate what actual defensive violence is – ensuring the safety of those who are not strong enough to protect themselves against violent threats.

Chapter Five

Not on My Watch: Refusing to Succumb to the “Rule of Retaliation”

I shall forgive the white South much in its final judgment day...but one thing I shall never forgive, neither in this world or the world to come: its wanton and continued and persistent insulting of black womanhood, which it sought and seeks to prostitute to its lust

-W.E.B. Du Bois

The final film selected for this study chronicles seminal events in the life of a distinguished Civil Rights leader and spans several years. Though Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rosa Parks are readily recognized as Civil Rights pioneers, myriad men and women served as Civil Rights leaders in their communities and states. Undoubtedly, Mississippi’s most prominent Civil Rights leader was Medgar Evers, a man who had just begun his ascent to national recognition when he faced an untimely death at the hand of an assassin. Like Rev. Dr. King, Evers left behind a community that he had personally mobilized to fight segregation and discrimination. Like Rev. Dr. King, Evers was survived by a dedicated wife and loving children. The made for television film *For Us, The Living – The Story of Medgar Evers* is based upon a book by the slain Civil Rights leader’s wife, Myrlie Evers. Myrlie’s book was first published in 1967, four years after her husband’s murder. At that time, the suspected murderer, Byron de la Beckwith, had been released because the jury deadlocked. The film about Evers was released 20 years following his murder; at that time, Beckwith had faced two trials and been released both times due to hung juries. Michal Schultz’s *For Us, The Living - The Story of Medgar*

Evers highlights seminal events and conversations during a 10-year span of Medgar's emergence to Civil Rights leadership; several of the highlighted dialogues and occurrences reveal several elements of the Southern "culture of honor" with which black men have grappled.

For Us, The Living is told as one long flashback through the narration of Myrlie Evers. The film opens on June 12, 1963, the night that Medgar Evers was shot. Actual footage of President Kennedy's address to the nation regarding the integration of an Alabama college are interspersed with scenes of Myrlie and the three Evers' children watching the address from the bed, awaiting Evers' arrival home. The opening scene also shows a man stepping out of a car with a shotgun across the street from the Medgar home. The next scene follows Medgar driving, listening to Kennedy's address on the radio. Once he arrives home, Medgar is shot in his carport; Myrlie hears the shot and runs to the door. At this point in the film, the voice of the actress portraying Myrlie Evers says, "Somewhere in Mississippi is the man who murdered my husband; this is their story" (Schultz). This quote illustrates that the film is not only about Medgar but also about the white man who murdered him. The film then flashbacks to July 1953, as the narrator explains that the bullet that shot Medgar was first fired years ago. This chapter explores several of these scenes in-depth, in order to provide an analysis of the "culture of honor," focusing on the determination of this black male to resist the "rule of retaliation." A few differences in the portrayal of Medgar in the film and the historical Medgar Evers provided by Myrlie highlights the filmmaker's recognition of the "culture of honor."

Through early scenes of the film, several characteristics of the Southern "culture

of honor” become evident. One of the first white men portrayed in the film has a tough reputation that he is willing to defend with violence. Medgar and Myrlie arrive at a small, run-down home; Medgar gets out of the car, instructing Myrlie to stay inside. As he approaches the home, a middle-aged white man comes to greet Medgar; he has a gun visibly tucked in his pants. He asks Medgar, “What do you want, boy?” (Schultz). The language, tone and address used by this white man indicate his adherence to Southern racial codes. “Boy” was a term used to demean black men and remind them of their inferior position to whites. In turn, blacks were expected to address superior whites as “sir” and “ma’am.” Dressed in a suit, Medgar explains that he needs to see Mr. Lovett. As the white man calls Mr. Lovett, he also questions Medgar about his visit, indicating that he understands Medgar is trying to sell Mr. Lovett insurance. When Medgar responds yes and identifies the insurance company for which he works, the rotund gentleman responds, “this doesn’t look like insurance” as he retrieves a pamphlet and asks, “So what’s the NAACP?” (Schultz). During this exchange, Mr. Lovett announces his arrival on the porch with a “Yessir.” As the conversation between Medgar and the white man continues, the audience learns that the white man owns the land, and Mr. Lovett is a sharecropper. Though Mr. Lovett arrives on the porch, the white man speaks for him, explaining that Lovett does not need the NAACP because if he has any questions or needs help, he (Lovett) can get help from him (the white man). Then, he looks to Lovett and says, “Ain’t that right?” To which Lovett replies, “yessir” (Schultz).

The white man’s command of Lovett and his conversations with Medgar illustrate that the stratified racial code of the South oppresses blacks and subjects them to the demands of whites. The white man rips up the NAACP (National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People) pamphlet, advises Medgar to return to Mound Bayou and throws the torn pieces of the brochure on the ground. Medgar walks off when the white man demands, “Wait up, where you goin boy? You come back and clean this mess you made in Lovett’s yard” (Schultz). Medgar keeps walking, which is a blatant insult. As was shown by Lovett’s immediate response to the white man, a black person is to comply without hesitation or resistance when a white man instructs him or her to do something. By disregarding the white man’s instructions, Medgar insults the white man. The white man responds to the insult by pulling the gun out of his pants, pointing it at the back of Medgar’s head and saying, “Take one more step boy and I’ll blow your damn head off. Now, you can come back here and clean this mess up, like I said” (Schultz). He then cocks the gun. Medgar stops walking but does not turn around, so Myrlie pleads with Medgar to comply with the white man’s command. Medgar does, looking the white man in the eyes (an act of defiance) as he walks back. As Medgar picks up the pieces of the brochure from the yard, the white man holds the gun close to Medgar’s head the entire time. The white man’s action indicates that he is prepared to retaliate to any further resistance with violence, a gunshot to Medgar’s head. Before the next scene begins, the voice of Myrlie explains that Medgar pulled his army pistol out when they arrived home, placed it in his glove compartment and “vowed never to face such humiliation again” (Schultz). Medgar’s actions indicate that he felt insulted and should he face such an insult again, he would be equipped to defend his reputation with violence.

The early tensions depicted in the film illustrate the exceptional and dignified character of Medgar. Unlike the majority of the black men in the South, Medgar is not afraid to challenge a tough white man. Furthermore, he refuses to be humiliated by a

tough white man. Even scenes of Medgar at home attest to his strength and resolve. Myrlie is understandably upset by Medgar having a gun at his head and expresses her dismay over the fact that Medgar puts himself in danger by recruiting NAACP members instead of simply selling insurance like other agents. However, Medgar's response illustrates his commitment to improving the status of Southern blacks. Medgar wants Myrlie to understand that Lovett, though he has a wife and 10 kids, cannot speak for himself in front of the white sharecropper boss because of his fear of the white man, so he needs an advocate; Medgar says, "I sell insurance but these people need more than that; they're our people Myrlie" (Schultz). Myrlie is not convinced and tells Medgar to "mind your business" (Schultz). Even though Medgar says that the people are his business, Myrlie reminds him that he has his own family who needs him alive.

While Medgar wants to assume responsibility for the community, Myrlie explains that she believes he did his duty for the country while in the Army. Myrlie wants Medgar to enjoy what he has, a nice home, family and job. Medgar retorts, "What do we have? I want everything that everyone else is entitled to" (Schultz). Medgar recognizes that though he and his wife are doing well, compared to the privileges, benefits and lifestyle that his white community members enjoy, he and his wife are not doing well. Therefore, he wants to live at the same level of those who consider themselves superior because Medgar considers himself their equal. During this conversation, Medgar informs Myrlie that the NAACP plans on opening an office in Jackson, MS, and appoint him as the field director. Myrlie wants Medgar to focus on his family and refuse the position.

A few scenes later, elements of the "culture of honor" emerge involving a black woman who is sexually threatened by a white man. Myrlie's mom and step-father Lee are

returning from a night at the movies; leisurely strolling along, they are almost home when a black car with a couple of white men pulls behind them harassing them. One of the white men sitting in the back seat is intoxicated. He is holding a bottle, hanging out the window yelling and whistling. One of his statements is, “Fat black bitch, how about it?” (Schultz). Lee pleads with the men to move on, exclaiming that he does not want any trouble. The man in the backseat commands the driver to pull over; the driver cuts the couple off by driving over the curb in front of them. The driver grabs Lee and holds him; Lee tells his wife to run. When she begins to run, the drunken man says, “Oh, no you don’t!” (Schultz) and grabs her. He then grabs one of her breasts and unbuttons her shirt while pushing her against the car. He begins to push her into the car when another black car suddenly pulls up, and Medgar jumps out with a gun. He puts the gun in the man’s face and commands him to “Get your filthy hands off that woman!” (Schultz). Medgar tells his in-laws to go inside, turns back, points the gun at the men as they drive off and yells, “You filthy lowlife” (Schultz). Upset, but understanding the consequences of hurting a white man, Medgar chooses to ward off the white men with his gun, instead of using it, as the “rule of retaliation” dictates.

This scene illustrates some of the generational differences in black men as was evident in the film *Rosewood*. Lee represents the older generation, who submits to whites and avoids confrontations with them. Like Sarah’s brother in *Rosewood*, Lee believes that women are worthy of protection; however, he is unwilling to retaliate against white men who disrespect black women. Rather than aggressively or physically defending his wife, Lee pleads with the white men to leave and instructs his wife to run instead of becoming violent with the men. Like Sarah’s son Sylvester of *Rosewood*, Medgar not only believes

that black women are worthy of protection, but he is willing to protect them through violence. Therefore, Medgar confronts the white men with impending violence and prevents his mother-in-law from sexual molestation. Had Medgar not arrived on the scene, Myrlie's mother would have been carried away in the car to be raped because Lee's fear of the white man's violence was stronger than his willingness to protect his wife.

A conversation resulting from the incident between Lee and Myrlie's mother-in-law illustrates the attitude of the older generation of Southern black women towards being protected from sexual violence. Medgar, Myrlie and her parents are on the porch discussing the incident. Myrlie's mom is looking into the distance reflecting on the predicament and comments, "Rape isn't the worst thing that can happen to a Negro woman in Mississippi. We live with it everyday of our lives down here. Mostly we just shut our eyes and grit our teeth and lie there. We never tell our men. We don't say nothing to nobody" (Schultz). These statements illustrate the sexually vulnerable state in which Southern black women must reside. Yet, her comments indicate that this precarious situation does not apply to all black women. Because she specifies "Negro women in Mississippi" and then notes the threat of rape is something that women "down here" face daily (Schultz), Myrlie's mother distinguishes black women in Mississippi from white women as well as black women in the South from black women in the North. The Southern "culture of honor" causes certain attitudes to prevail in the South that do not exist in the North. Her comments imply that black women in the North do not live in fear of rape daily.

Myrlie's mother's comments also reveal that black women fail to communicate to

black men the sexual violations they experience. In fact, her comments mirror one of Beulah's comments in Gaines's *A Gathering of Old Men*. As all the elderly, black men relate stories of abuse, insult and pain, Beulah makes the comment that none of them would want to hear some of the things that black women have had to endure in the Louisiana parish. Beulah does not continue, so none of the men hear a story given by a black woman about abuse she has experienced. While the larger white society recognizes the value and need for white men to protect white women, it does not legitimize the desire of black men to protect black women. Black women and men acknowledge the powerlessness of black men to protect their women. Because black women know that a black man who attempts to protect a black woman from a white man will face violent retaliation, they choose to "never" tell their men about the sexual violations. Rather, they opt to preserve their men's lives by remaining silent about sexual abuses they face.

Disregarding her body and sexual vulnerability, Myrlie's mother explains that all she wanted was for her husband not to be killed by the white men who accosted them. While black men feel as strongly about black women as white men do about their women, Southern institutions make it a fatal endeavor for black men to develop a strong, tough reputation. Therefore, the majority of black men in the South suppress the urge to protect black women, knowing they are risking their lives because black men with strong, tough reputations encounter fatal violence at the hands of Southern white men who feel that black men are not entitled to defend their reputations. Nonetheless, Myrlie's mother recognizes the risk that Medgar took and expresses appreciation for his willingness to protect her; she tells Medgar, "I don't know about Myrlie, but if you were my man, I would follow you to hell and back" (Schultz). Medgar's act of protecting his mother-in-

law encourages Myrlie to support him wholeheartedly in accepting the position as the NAACP field director.

Medgar's strength and nobility of character are evidenced by several conversations about him portrayed in the film. One such conversation occurs between the men of the Silver Knights, a white supremacist group, and a black male known as Mr. Sampson who aligns himself with racist whites. When Mr. Sampson informs the leaders of the Silver Knights that Medgar is an Army veteran who applied for Law School at Ole Miss, the white men laugh at the thought of a black man attempting to enter the prestigious white school. Nonetheless, Medgar's decision to apply demonstrates his confidence and willingness to challenge and change Southern institutions. While Mr. Sampson describes Medgar as a nobody, he also calls Medgar a "rabble rouser" (Schultz). The Silver Knights want to Mr. Sampson to explain why Medgar was selected to head the NAACP office in Jackson since more influential black men reside in Jackson. Mr. Sampson responds that no one else would take the job. This simple, straightforward answer illustrates the exceptional character of Medgar. He distinguishes himself as a brave and tough young man willing to challenge entrenched Southern racial codes that most, if not all, other black men are fearful of overtly resisting. The black community realizes the imminent danger that accompanies a position such as NAACP field director.

Another description of Medgar attests to his notable character. National NAACP field director Gloster Curren arrives from New York to announce the opening of the regional office in Jackson. When introducing Medgar as the Mississippi Field Director, Curren says that Medgar is a man who "loves Mississippi but loves honor more... but loves justice more...but is fearlessly determined to make Mississippi loveable" (Schultz).

He describes Medgar as a man determined to bring the democracy for which he fought abroad as an Army soldier “to his native state of Mississippi” (Schultz). Medgar wants to fight against Southern institutions, such as the “culture of honor.”

The presence of violent retaliation is documented several times in the film. One instance occurs to several community members who sign a voting petition. Once numerous citizens sign the petition, Medgar takes the petition along with a dozen petitioners to the proper authorities to enact the petition. One of the white officials attempts to intimidate several of the petitioners into removing their names from the petition. When the people refuse to comply with the white men’s suggestions, several of the petitioners become victims of violence. The first threatening act occurs when the Silver Knights use the petition against the petitioners by publishing all the names, addresses and phone numbers of the petitioners in the local newspaper. The same officials who are publicly charged with maintaining justice are those who privately fight to prevent it. This initial act of retaliation is meant to alert the petitioners to impending violence since the Silver Knights are a white supremacist group that commits acts of violence against blacks who insult whites by not staying in their expected “inferior” position in relation to whites. The newspaper ad makes the petitioners public targets. While some face only economic repercussions, such as losing jobs and employment contracts, others encounter physical violence, like a plumber who is beat up and gets robbed of his tools.

Several scenes later Myrlie hysterically drives up to Medgar as he is visiting a petitioner to inform him that a violent retaliation has occurred, a fellow NAACP member has been shot. As she narrates the scene, Myrlie expresses concern because Reverend

George Lee was the third NAACP leader killed that year; whites are insulted by these workers' challenging of Southern ways. Few people attend the Reverend's funeral, which is disheartening to those in attendance. One gentleman vocally laments the fact that the Reverend sacrificed his life for people, yet hardly anyone attends the funeral because of fear. The frustrated and disgruntled man demands of Medgar, who is presiding over the services, what they are to do next. Medgar responds they are to continue the voting drive and find the man's killer. To this, the attendee explains they already know the murderers are two white guys because someone witnessed the murders. In fact, he explains that the black man who witnessed the murder ran to the Sheriff's office when the murder occurred to inform him of the killers; however, the man had not been seen since. Another aspect of the "culture of honor" is revealed, the passive aiding of authorities in covering up the violence. Violence is inflicted upon this witness for seeking to bring two murderers to justice. The next scene shows a disgruntled Medgar receiving an unnerving phone call; the voice on the other end states, "Just a reminder that somewhere someday soon, we're gonna kill you, boy!" (Schultz). Again, Medgar's attempt to end discrimination directly insults the Southern lifestyle and tough reputation of white men; therefore, these white men remind Medgar that he can expect violent retaliation for his insulting behavior. Refusing to be deterred and intimidated, Medgar prepares himself to retaliate to any attacks on him or his family and begins sleeping with a gun in his bed and remaining alert to any suspicious activity. The "rule of retaliation" forces Medgar to live in a defensive mode.

In addition to recruiting new members to the NAACP and getting signatures for voting petitions, Medgar's position as field director requires him to investigate crimes

(Evers). One of the most notorious crimes that he is assigned to investigate is the murder of Emmett Till (the story fictionalized in Campbell's *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*). The film depicts a young black boy being pulled from a car by two white men late at night. One of the white men comments, "This will teach you to molest white women" (Schultz) as he pulls the tied-up 14 year old from the car to the ground. The men then drag the boy along a dirt road as the boy responds, "but I didn't do it!" (Schultz). One man kicks the boy and yells, "Shut up, nigger!" (Schultz). The white men drag the boy inside a stable, beat him some more and shoot him. A black elderly man witnesses the entire incident from outside the stalls.

Narrating Till's murder, the voice of Myrlie explains that the beating and death of a black man at the hands of whites was common; however, what made Till's case exceptional was the presence of the New York press, which was in Jackson interviewing Medgar when the murder occurred. Consequently, the Northern press covered the death, bringing attention and exposure to the violent tendencies of Southern white men and the senseless deaths of black men at the hands of white men seeking to protect white women as well as protecting their tough reputations.

As a result of the publicity over Till's murder, the entire country hears of the injustice; Myrlie comments, "for the first time, Mississippi justice was exposed to the whole country" (Schultz). This segment of the film confirms aspects of the Southern "culture of honor" surrounding Till's murder that Campbell depicted in *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*. Mainly, a black man allegedly sexually compromised a white woman and a violent deadly retaliation ensued. Furthermore, this depiction of the response from the Northern press confirms the differing attitudes between the North and South toward

violent retaliations.

Another critical aspect of the Southern “culture of honor” portrayed in the film is the complicity of authoritative and legal figures in disregarding the law when it conflicts with values of the “culture of honor.” Medgar sponsors a petition drive to permit blacks to enter integrated schools. Once he has gathered a number of signatures, Medgar and a dozen petitioners present the petition to the appropriate government office. In the office, three white men are present to receive the petition. Rather than seriously considering the petition brought by the citizens of Jackson, the board attempts to intimidate the petitioners to remove their names from the list. Not only is the board unsuccessful in dissuading the petitioners to remove their names (even when threatening them that it is in their best interest to remove their names), but Medgar demands that the group of petitioners receives an official response from the board. After attempting to dismiss this request, the chairman of the board assures Medgar and the petitioners that each person could expect to be contacted. With his comment, the board chairman implies that each person could expect violent repercussions for their insulting defiance. This “official board,” commissioned to address citizen concerns, releases the personal contact information of the petitioners to the Silver Knights, an organization comparable to the violently notorious Klu Klux Klan. The Silver Knights print the petitioner’s contact information in a full page of the local newspaper, making them public targets for violent retaliation. Rather than fulfill their public obligation by properly addressing the concerns of the citizens, the board decides to facilitate the rule of retaliation against the petitioners, who have insulted whites by not heeding their urgings.

Similarly, the response of the Sheriff to Reverend Lee’s murder is as

inappropriate as the board's response to the petitioners. A black man runs to the Sheriff's office to inform him that he witnessed the Reverend's murder and can identify the murderers. Rather than perform his civic duty of locating, questioning and arresting the alleged culprits, the Sheriff causes the black witness who comes forward to disappear. Though it is his responsibility to execute justice, the Sheriff chooses to abide by dictates of the "culture of honor" by overlooking the violent crime and penalizing the man attempting to have him do his job. The Sheriff's apathy towards the murdered black man and retaliation against someone attempting to bring justice to a murder attests to the fact that legal and police authorities were committed to protecting white men who committed crimes in defense of their honor.

Charged to investigate crimes in Mississippi, Medgar encounters the formidable challenge of confronting a Southern institution committed to upholding aspects of the "culture of honor." Mentioned earlier, Medgar was assigned to investigate the notorious murder of Emmett Till. Excited about the case because of a witness to the murder willing to risk his life by testifying in court, Medgar decides to hide the witness, Mr. Henry, until the trial. During his explanation of what occurred, Mr. Henry informs Medgar that he had already spoken to the Sheriff about what he witnessed; however, this act proved fruitless. Again, the Sheriff refuses to perform the duties of his office when they require him to punish white men for murder committed in defense of honor – the honor of white women, the honor of white men's tough reputations or the honor of the codes of the Southern "culture of honor." In the Till case, the Sheriff not only overlooks the violence but so does the jury of white men charged to hear the case. Though Medgar was successful in hiding Mr. Henry for three months, the jury still found the accused men not-guilty of

killing 14-year old Till.

Some of the final aspects of the Southern “culture of honor” occur at the end of the film. While the film depicts Medgar receiving a threatening phone call after the murder of Reverend Lee, actual attempts to harm him occur as a result of some insulting actions and statements he makes months following Reverend Lee’s death. The older generation of blacks in Jackson becomes fearful after their names are printed in newspapers and following the murder of Reverend Lee; however, the younger generation gets involved. Staging a sit-in at the library of a segregated white college without the knowledge or consent of Medgar, four black students are beat and jailed because of the sit in. Their actions not only prompt hundreds of college students to become active in asserting their rights but provoke the black community, old and young, to join the fight for their rights. Sensing the momentum, Medgar calls for blacks to boycott white Jackson businesses that deny and limit blacks. Medgar’s boycott becomes so successful that it expands, economically damaging numerous white businesses and garnering national attention to the NAACP movement in Mississippi. The film shows news footage of the actual historical boycott of Jackson, where newscasters describe the financial loss white businesses are facing as hundreds of blacks march the streets of Jackson. Myrlie narrates Medgar’s strategies, explaining that the local police could not stop or hinder the boycott because as one group of boycotters was arrested, Medgar had made arrangements for another group of boycotters to be positioned to resume the boycott. The activity generated became so frequent that Medgar began having nightly meetings to encourage citizens to continue the struggle. These actions of the NAACP, under the leadership of Medgar, insulted the white community and undermined the values of the Southern

“culture of honor.” In the South, blacks were expected to acquiesce to white needs and demands. Therefore, the black boycott not only defied the subservient roles that blacks were expected to assume, but it outright declared that blacks were ready to develop and assert their own tough reputations against the insulting and degrading behavior of whites. While there were a group of white businesses who began to succumb to the economic pressure of the boycott, the Silver Knights counteracted by threatening to boycott any white businesses who attempted to change their policies against blacks.

As media attention and pressure increased from the activities of the boycott, a group of white men decided to retaliate against the man responsible for bringing public dishonor to the whites of Jackson. While Medgar was at a meeting one night, a fire bottle was thrown in the driveway of his home. Fortunately, Myrlie was home, heard the noise and rushed outside to prevent the fire from spreading. Rather than harm Medgar, the group of white men anticipated that the message they sent to Medgar would communicate their intention of harming him or his family, if necessary. They expected the fire to be ample motivation to halt the boycott and more importantly, stop inspiring blacks to disregard the Southern “culture of honor.”

However, the scare had the opposite effect. The next night at a meeting, Medgar relayed the attack to the audience and said that instead of allowing the attack to intimidate him, he was more committed to seeing blacks obtain justice. Medgar called for an expansion to the scope of the boycott. Since Medgar had rallied so many blacks, his meetings began being publicized on local radio and television stations, so his attackers were able to witness his speeches. In the meeting, Medgar audaciously declared that he would not be driven from Mississippi. The new fervor Medgar displayed insulted his

white attackers and the white community of Jackson even more. Unbeknownst to Medgar, a violent crowd was forming outside of the meeting location; therefore, shortly after Medgar finished his speech, his aides suggested that Myrlie and the kids be taken home. On their way out of the building, Myrlie and the children were not only yelled at, but they became the targets of violent retaliation as bottles shattered around them as they walked. Meanwhile, Medgar was being interviewed by a local white reporter, who asked Medgar whether the NAACP had asked him to move out of Mississippi for fear of his life; Medgar answered yes. The reporter then asked whether Medgar was planning to leave, to which Medgar responded no. Medgar had no intention of succumbing to the pressure of the violent retaliation of the white men in Mississippi.

That same night, Medgar was shot in the back as he walked from his car to his home carrying NAACP t-shirts. Medgar died that night. The same men who warned Medgar to stop mobilizing the black community felt threatened enough by Medgar's actions and leadership to retaliate with fatal violence. Refusing to bow, Medgar became a victim of the "rule of retaliation." He had insulted a group of Southern white men who were accustomed to preventing blacks from insulting them through intimidation (when these blacks stepped out of line). However, Medgar responded with even greater public insults to the initial private retaliation of the white men. The "culture of honor" dictated that the white men needed to publicly restore their honor. Medgar's public death accomplished this restoration of honor.

While the movie *For Us, The Living*, which was released in 1983, ends with the death and burial of Medgar, the historical events following Medgar's death attest to the potent level of the "culture of honor" embedded within the Southern state of Mississippi.

Medgar Evers was killed in 1963; Myrlie Ever's book about Medgar's life, also titled *For Us, The Living*, was published in 1967, four years after his death. Ever's book does not end with the burial of Medgar as the film does; the book documents the months and a few years following the murder of Medgar. From the beginning of the book and movie, Myrlie explains that the story of her husband's life and death is as much about the story of his murderer since both men were products of Mississippi. At the publication of Myrlie's book, no one had been convicted in Medgar's murder; however, suspect Byron de la Beckwith had been indicted twice for the murder. The book delineates the evidence connecting Beckwith to the murder. Not only was Beckwith's rifle found at the scene of the crime, but Beckwith's fingerprints were found on the scope of the rifle (Evers). A man was found who said he had had traded an identical telescopic scope a month before the murder with Beckwith. Two Jackson cabdrivers said Beckwith had asked for directions to Medgar Ever's home. Several witnesses placed Beckwith's company issued car in a parking lot close to the vacant lot from which Medgar was killed on the night of the murder. Both Beckwith and the car had been seen in the area previously. FBI agents noticed a circular scar on Beckwith's right eye, a scar that could be inflicted by a scope being held too closely to the eye (Evers, 359-360).

Consistent with the "culture of honor," Southern officials supported the murderer. Beckwith's initial trial began on January 27, 1964. To combat the evidence from the prosecution, the defense produced three witnesses that placed Beckwith 90 miles away. These three witnesses were officers, who the prosecution criticized for not coming forward earlier (even after Beckwith was arrested) though they were well acquainted with policies regarding withholding evidence. The book even records that the Mississippi

Governor attended the trial and shook Beckwith's hand while in the courtroom. The presence of the Governor and the testimony of three police officers supporting Beckwith illustrate the complicity of government officials in supporting murderers who retaliate in defense of honor, in this instance the honor of Mississippi to remain a segregated state. The all-white jury deliberated overnight but realized they could not reach a verdict; the judge declared a mistrial and Beckwith was released.

In April 1964, Beckwith was retried for Medgar's murder; Beckwith received even greater support during his second trial. According to the newspapers, Beckwith was being treated as a hero in jail; he was able to have his gun collection and a television in jail (Evers, 354). For the second trial, the white supremacist group known as the White Citizen's Council (depicted as the Silver Knights in the film) began a legal fund for Beckwith. His defense team consisted of three lawyers – a city attorney, a former district attorney and a partner in the Governor's law firm. The second jury deliberated overnight and claimed it could not reach a verdict. Though indicted for murder, Beckwith was released on a \$10,000 bond. At the release of the film *For Us, The Living* nearly two decades after Medgar's murder, Beckwith was still a free man.

Though the evidence for the prosecution outweighed the defense, both juries chose to support the codes of the Southern "culture of honor" rather than convict a white man for violently retaliating against an insulting black man and inciter of others. Myrlie disclosed that the second jury included Northern college students who were most likely instrumental in causing the jury to deadlock. Had either jury consisted of all Southern white men, a not guilty verdict would have been returned. Though Myrlie moved to California after these two trials, she committed herself to bringing her husband's

murderer to justice. In 1990, Beckwith faced a third indictment for Medgar Evers's death, and the Mississippi Supreme Court began a new trial in 1993. Nearly a year later, Byron de la Beckwith was sentenced to life in prison at the age of 73.

A comparison of Myrlie's book with its film rendition exposes some of the creative liberties taken to depict Medgar Evers as a truly honorable man. The film portrays Medgar as the hero who prevents Myrlie's mother from being kidnapped and raped by a white man. In actuality, Medgar did not run to the rescue of Myrlie's mom and stepfather, fending off two white men by brandishing a gun and calling them derogatory names for touching his mother-in-law. In her book, Myrlie describes the incident as follows: Lee and Myrlie's mother were returning from a movie when a car with two white men began harassing them and targeting Myrlie's mom. Lee advised his wife to run; she ran to a white neighbor's house. When the person opened the door, the white men took off in the car. However, the film portrayed Medgar as the insulted man who retaliates against two white men for putting a female member of his family in a sexually compromising position. Had the situation been reversed, the white man would have killed a black man for such an offense. Remaining true to the racial limitations of the South, the director had Medgar threaten the white men with violence rather than retaliate with violence (just as Sylvester did in *Rosewood*; a black man threatened first because he did not have the status to kill). Similar to what filmmaker John Singleton did with Mr. Man, Michael Schultz makes Medgar Evers a rescuer of women. Unlike Mr. Man, Medgar Evers is not the product of the director's creative mind. Singleton creates Mr. Man to be the lone black male who rescues the women and children of Rosewood. Likewise, Schultz has Medgar do something in the film which he did not do in his life; in the film,

Medgar rescues his mother-in-law from a potential rape and points a gun in the face of a white man in Mississippi. Though Medgar was not the one to protect Myrlie's mother from a potential rape, Myrlie describes the intense anger that she observed Medgar display over situations involving black women, white men and sex.

Also, the film portrays Medgar's heroic act and Myrlie's mother's expression of appreciation as the reasons for Myrlie having a change of heart to support Medgar's decision to take the NAACP field secretary position. While the visit to her mother had a great impact on Myrlie's decision to support Medgar more in his new position with the NAACP, the change was due to the conversations shared between Myrlie and her mother, not because of Medgar's assertion of his tough reputation. On the contrary, Myrlie was thankful for the position since it would move the family from the rural community of Mound Bayou, which she detested. Myrlie also was looking forward to the new position because she would be working in the office with her husband so that she could see him more. In the Southern "culture of honor," women expect their men to defend and protect them, with violence if necessary. Therefore, inserting Medgar into the story of the near rape attack and depicting his heroic act as Myrlie's motivation for supporting her husband intensifies the role that insults and retaliation plays in bringing families closer.

The actual events surrounding the murder of Reverend George Lee depicted in Myrlie's book attest to several aspects of the "culture of honor," but mainly the attitude of government officials in not punishing murders committed in defense of honor. According to Myrlie, Reverend George Lee died while driving late at night; gunshots pierced his car. The police who responded to the call claimed that Reverend Lee lost control of his car and declared the death an accident. Further, local hospital authorities

claimed that dental fillings, not gunshots, were deposited in what was left of his jaw. Once Medgar and others began identifying witnesses and uncovering the truth, the Sheriff then said the Reverend was most likely killed by a jealous black man. After this, eyewitnesses that Medgar had secured changed their stories and one witness disappeared (as depicted in the film). No arrests were made in Reverend's Lee's murder (Evers, 157). Evidently, Reverend Lee's offense was that he insulted the Southern way of life and whites by attempting to vote. Myrlie described his death as "a warning, a threat, an example, and it was backed by the blatant lies of the sheriff's office and local police" (Evers, 157). In this instance, not only do the police refuse to investigate the murder and find the murderer, but they make it impossible for the murderer to be apprehended and charged for the crime. Though the film depicts Medgar exhorting followers to continue the struggle at Lee's funeral, the book does not mention Lee's funeral or Medgar being involved with Lee's followers.

Another noticeable difference between the film and the book concerns Till's death. In the film, the narrator attributes the presence of the national media in Mississippi during Till's murder to their interest in interviewing Medgar. However, it was the murder of this 14-year old Chicago boy that brought the national print and news media to the Mississippi Delta. Again, the "culture of honor" enters as Myrlie explains the insult that was committed - "because of the overtones of sex, by which Mississippi often justifies its use of violence against male Negroes" (Evers, 170). Though Medgar did not harbor a secret witness to the crime, as the film depicted, Medgar regularly located secret witnesses and had them taken to another state for protection. In her book, Myrlie provides the detailed brutality of Till's murder that was missing from the film; the teenage boy

was “kidnapped in the middle of the night, pistol-whipped, stripped naked, shot through the head with a .45-caliber Colt automatic, barb-wired to a seventy-four pound cotton gin fan, and dumped into twenty feet of water in the Tallatatchie River” (Evers, 170-171). Medgar used the violent crime as publicity to inform the country of the injustices that occurred in Mississippi. In fact, Myrlie credits the Till murder for providing a national spotlight on Mississippi racism (Evers, 173).

In her book, Myrlie compares two murders preceding Till’s murder with the young boy’s murder. Myrlie expresses shock that the two murders committed before Till did not garner the same attention as Till’s murder; however, the “culture of honor” can provide an explanation. On May 7 and August 17, two local men were killed for their activities with the NAACP; these men had registered to vote. While their acts insulted the Southern lifestyle, Till’s insult outweighed the other two because his insult involved a white woman and sexual impropriety. Therefore, the retaliation had to be brutal. Furthermore, Till was a Northerner while the other two men were local Mississippi residents. Such offenses regularly produced death in the South; Southerners expected and tolerated such brutal deaths. The fact that Till was a Northerner attracted unusual attention. Northerners did not understand such dire repercussions for speaking to a white woman. However, Myrlie notes, “the Till case, in a way, was the story in microcosm of every Negro in Mississippi” (Ever, 174). Myrlie recognizes that any black boy or man in the Mississippi could expect such fatal retaliation for insulting a white man by dishonoring a white woman through a sexual innuendo.

Sadly, legal and policing officials would overlook the deaths of blacks. As Myrlie explains, part of the situation was that “upper and middle class white people of the state

would uphold such killings through their police and newspapers and courts of law” (Evers, 174). Even the presence of police at Civil Rights demonstrations did not bring a sense of security to blacks because they believed the police were insulted by the actions of the demonstrations. Myrlie attests to this attitude, “Everyone knew that these men in uniform who occupied our streets were not there for our safety and protection. They were there to harass, to intimidate to arrest” (Evers, 262). Myrlie illustrates that blacks were indeed fighting a Southern institution.

While the film gives a sense of the ways in which Medgar insulted white men, Myrlie’s book provides greater understanding as to why the murderer chose to kill when he did. For years, Medgar was successful in getting blacks to register to vote and sign up for the NAACP. He was even active in securing and protecting witnesses for crimes committed against blacks. All of these actions insulted the Mississippi way of life and expected roles of blacks. The more successful Medgar became, the more insulting he became to Southern white men. Myrlie explains that Mississippi officials had already stated that they would not abide by federal and Supreme Court mandates to integrate schools and public facilities. In fact, the local mayor, Mayor Thompson, appeared on television to announce that the city would not integrate. Medgar decided to refute the Mayor and asked for equal time on the television station. Surprisingly, the station granted Medgar the time. By directly responding to many of the things Mayor Thompson had said in his speech and requesting what the Mayor had already said he would not grant, Medgar publicly insulted the mayor. As a result of Medgar’s public rebuttal, the Mayor met with Medgar and other black officials, agreeing to integrate. However, almost immediately, the Mayor recanted the agreement. So, some young people staged a sit-in.

Medgar called a strategy meeting to organize blacks to sit-in and demonstrate in reaction to the Mayor's renege; this was Medgar's retaliation to the Mayor's rebuttal. Soon thereafter, the firebomb was thrown on Medgar's driveway, a violent attack to the insults of the demonstrations. Nonetheless, sit-ins and protests continued the day following the firebomb. In the few weeks following Medgar's televised speech, Medgar became bigger and more influential. It was three short weeks after Medgar's televised speech that Medgar was murdered.

While many may speculate as to why Medgar was killed at that particular time, the "culture of honor" provides an answer. Once Medgar publicly insulted a high-ranking white man, he had to contend with the code that dictates a man must be willing to retaliate to an offense with violence, death when necessary. Medgar's heightened activities in the weeks following his public speech demonstrated that he was unwilling to mitigate the insults. On the contrary, he added to the insults and paid the price dictated by the peculiar Southern institution known as the "culture of honor" – death!

Chapter Six

Murdered in the Name of Honor

Violence says that suffering can be a powerful social force by inflicting suffering on someone else...It believes that you achieve some end by inflicting suffering on another
-Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The works examined in this study illuminate interesting aspects of racial relations that are generally not connected to the peculiar Southern institution known as the “culture of honor.” While the violent acts of whites against blacks are well-documented in the South in history and literature, little to no attention is given to the motives behind the violence other than racism. While the vital role racism has played in the ways in which blacks have been treated in the South cannot be discounted, the presence of distinct attitudes found among white men in the South that is not found among white men in the North cannot be neglected. Undoubtedly, racism exists in the North, yet some of the pervasive attitudes and actions committed against blacks in the South are not present in the North. Herein, enters the “culture of honor” in the South, which has strict codes dealing with insults, male reputation and violent retaliation.

Interestingly enough, almost all of the works used for this study are available in written and visual form, which, from a cultural perspective, testifies to the potential wide appeal of these works to a range of audiences. Gaines’s novel *A Gathering of Old Men* was developed into a made for television film by the same title. The film *Rosewood* was not based upon a particular book; however, *Like Judgment Day* is a book of more than

300 pages documenting the events and lives of the families of the Rosewood massacre. In addition, Florida professors prepared a document for the Florida government about the Rosewood massacre. Myrlie Ever's book, *For Us, The Living*, (published in 1967) was released as a made for television film in 1983 by the same title. Campbell's novel, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, is the only work explored that is not available in both written and film media forms. More and more novels and historical texts are being transferred to the film industry to reach a broader audience. Therefore, it becomes important to examine texts in both forms to discover ways in which a film director adapts and alters characters and plot to reach a visual audience.

An examination into these four works illustrates that black men in the South are indeed governed by aspects of the "culture of honor." Like white men, black men possess a sense of personal and familial honor; black men desire and are willing to protect their women from the threat of violence; black men are known within and outside of the black community to have tough reputations; and black men are willing to retaliate to insults to their reputations and character with violence. Each work examined proves that black men promote aspects of the "culture of honor." Characters and events not touched upon in the previous chapters will be discussed in this chapter in order to provide a comprehensive summary of how these works contribute to a better understanding of the Southern "culture of honor."

However, this study illustrates that black men and the black community are motivated by their love for family and community rather than by their allegiance to a set of codes. Notion of family for blacks extends beyond immediate family members to a community of people linked through blood lineage and shared experience. Just as white

men felt obligated to protect their wives, sisters, nieces and mothers from sexual abuse, black men felt ashamed because of their inability to protect the female members of their families. Black men had the same conception of familial honor as whites and desired to exhibit physical toughness; however, the race relations in the South prohibited them from displaying physical strength against whites without facing certain death. In fact, black men not only felt responsible for protecting the women in their families, they felt responsible for protecting boys and men in their families. In *A Gathering of Old Men*, several of the elderly gentlemen lament the fact that they were unable to protect their sons and brothers from assault and abuse. For instance, one man did not protect his mentally challenged son; another man witnessed his brother get beat to death with a cane. Floyd Cox felt this type of shame for years because he was not tough and strong like the other two men in his family; Floyd's brother always seemed to know what to do, and Floyd's father was a skilled hunter. Similar to the elderly men in *A Gathering of Old Men*, Wydell Todd from *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* condemns himself for not being present to protect his son from the Cox men. He becomes so remorseful that he drives himself to drunken stupors to drown out the memories of his son calling for his help. Beyond his self-condemnation, Wydell's estranged wife, Delotha, and her mother blame Wydell for abandoning his son and not raising and protecting his son. Though Wydell could not save Armstrong from the brutality of the Cox men, he is able to save his second son from other deadly threats - gang life, drugs and the dangerous Northern inner city streets. At the same time, there are instances of protection occurring among black men. In *A Gathering of Old Men*, Mathu is willing to face jail and even the electric chair for his godson Charlie.

While the notions of honor within the white communities in the South were limited to family members, blacks in the community applied notions of family to those unrelated to them because of their communal perspective. Medgar Evers felt obligated to the black communities of Mississippi and regularly experienced personal outrage when those in the black community, especially black women, were insulted. Even as an insurance salesman, Medgar desired to protect blacks by exposing the fraudulent and manipulative practices of white sharecroppers. His perception of the larger black community as his responsibility was the source of early marital tension because his wife wanted him to focus on protecting his own family by not risking his life to protect others in the community. Nonetheless, Medgar asserted that the black community was his responsibility. Similarly, Mr. Man in *Rosewood* quickly grew a familial affinity to the blacks in Rosewood though he had just arrived in the town. Against his personal desires not to engage in warfare, Mr. Man returns to Rosewood to protect the women and children from the attacks of whites after he initially left the town to avoid the conflict. Likewise, the black community of Rosewood expected Mr. Man to protect them though he had just arrived in the community. Evidence of the familial ties occur when Mr. Man tells Mr. Wright that the community wants him, though he is a stranger, to stay yet they would willingly assist long-time resident Mr. Wright in packing and leaving the neighborhood. In *A Gathering of Old Men*, the elderly men are able to overcome divisions of ethnicity, social class, family background and skin tone that have divided the black community for years to join together to protect one black man in the community who does not even want their protection. Ironically, under the initial pressure of the affluent white woman named Candy (who aligns herself with the black community more

than the white community), this community of black men come together as one family. Once banded, the community of black men makes it evident that they do not consider Candy a part of the family. Late in the novel, the black men decide to have a meeting to strategize their next move. When Candy attempts to join them, they tell her to remain outside. As Candy vehemently insists on joining them, even the black man who raised her says that it is time for her to go home. In *Rosewood*, the white community of Sumner joins together to find Fannie's attacker. However, these men are fueled by their jealousy and hate of Sylvester Carrier, not their love for and desire to protect Fannie Taylor, a fellow community member. Rather, the men are seeking a reason to be violent.

Scenes of communal gathering occur in each work to signify the familial unity and oneness of the large black community. In *Rosewood*, the people gather at the Carter house, in the woods and on the train. In each gathering, they are protecting or defending themselves against an attack from whites. In *A Gathering of Old Men*, the men congregate in the truck, at the graveyard and at Mathu's house. Rather than gathering for defensive purposes, the elderly men are gathering in an offensive stance against Southern men with tough reputations. Even when the old men spread out for the final shoot-out with Luke Will and his crowd, the men are unified in their strategic positions and cadenced shooting. In *For Us, The Living*, the black residents gather for strategic meetings, boycotts and sit ins; they gather in churches, at the NAACP office and various sites in the community. These gatherings are offensive gatherings intended to provoke change in the white community. *Your Blues Aint Like Mine* has several scenes where blacks gather. They gather en masse at Armstrong's funeral in Chicago. The blacks of the Delta gather to dance and eat at Ida Long's house on Saturday nights. They gather in the

quarters to talk. They gather outside the new fish plant to strike. Collectively, these gatherings symbolize a unity of celebration, solidarity of purpose, singularity in protection and oneness to attack.

Several relationships illustrate the broad family connections in the black community in comparison to the white community. In the Southern “culture of honor,” socialization of young boys into protecting their reputations and retaliating to insults is imperative. Two white families in *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* and the white father-son pair in *Rosewood* demonstrate this socialization process, just at different stages. At a young age, Lester Cox takes his sons hunting to develop a killer instinct in them. While the oldest son does well, the younger Floyd grimaces at the sight of blood and never becomes a hunter, yet his father still expects him to exemplify the tough reputation of being a Cox man. Also, Stonewall Pinochet regularly requests the presence of his son Clayton at monthly meetings and yearly hunting gatherings of the Honorable Men of Hopewell, training his son on the importance of the family name and preserving and protecting that name. At critical junctures, these fathers expect their sons to protect the honor of their family names. Therefore, Lester holds Floyd accountable to restoring honor to himself and his wife by shooting Armstrong. Stonewall Pinochet sends his son to threaten Delotha Todd not to take her son's body from the state of Mississippi.

Both sons obey their fathers; however, their actions backfire on them. Floyd's actions cause him and his brother to be arrested and eventually lead to the financial draining of the entire family. Instead of threatening Delotha to stay, Clayton attempts to bribe and warn Delotha, who, because of Clayton's visit, is able to successfully transport her son's body to Chicago. In *Rosewood*, a white father is training his son in manhood by

teaching him how to shoot, tie a knot for a lynching, not socialize with blacks and so on. However, at the end of the film, the son becomes disgusted with his father's perspective and training. Instead of continuing his father's ways, the son dishonors his father by running away from home.

In contrast, a few of the black familial relationships end with more success. As Charlie's parrain, Mathu serves as a father figure to Charlie. Charlie explains that for years, Mathu has attempted to make Charlie behave like a man and respond to insults by asserting himself. Like Lester Cox, Mathu in *A Gathering of Old Men* forces Charlie to retaliate to an insult to his reputation with violence. When Beau Bouton comes looking for Charlie to beat him, Mathu gives Charlie his gun and forces him to go to the porch to face the Beau. Both Floyd and Charlie were more afraid of facing the wrath of their fathers than the act of retaliating, so they obeyed. In the end, Mathu is successful in his fatherly training of Charlie, as evidenced by Charlie's return to the scene to face his punishment as well as his insistence on killing Luke Will. Ironically, Mathu is a father figure, and not a father to Charlie, yet he properly socializes Charlie to be a man and protect his honor. The actual father (Duke) of the young white boy (Emmett) in *Rosewood* loses the respect and honor of his son. Likewise in *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, Floyd shames his entire family by becoming a thief. In addition, Clayton Pinochet decides not to continue the Pinochet family tradition, as his father had expected, by selling the Pinochet portion of the stock and dividing his inheritance with his black half-sister Ida Long.

Another common thread that occurs across the works studied is the sexual vulnerability faced by black women and the inability of black men to protect their

women. As the elderly men in *A Gathering of Old Men* recount the numerous insults they and the men in their family have endured, a black woman on the porch makes the comment that the men would not want to hear the atrocities that have been inflicted upon women. Whereas the stories of insult that the elderly men recite are common knowledge among the blacks on the porch, what Beulah has to share is known only among the women in the community. Beulah's comment mirrors a remark made by Mrylie's mom in *For Us, The Living* after she and her husband are accosted on their walk home from the movies. She notes that black women opt not to tell the black men of the rapes they have been subjected to at the hands of white men. Because black women know that black men do not have the luxury of protecting and defending their women as white men do within the Southern "culture of honor," black women choose to keep the sexual insults they face to themselves rather than jeopardize losing a black man who would attempt to avenge the insult. Ironically, another black woman protects Ida Long from being raped by the Sheriff in *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*. As Ida is running to clear her mind one night, Sheriff Barnes accosts her and begins to undress her; however, a shot is heard from the woods and the Sheriff falls. The well-known black cook of a local restaurant quietly instructs Ida to leave after she has shot the Sheriff. Ida is sexually protected by another black woman, not a man. The most silent rape victim is the black woman in *Rosewood*. One of the first scenes of the movie involves the married white store owner Mr. Wright having sex with his black clerk before the store opens. Only later in the film does the audience learn that the black clerk is Aunt Sarah's sister-in-law. While the film does not clearly state whether the sexual activity between Mr. Wright and his store clerk is consensual, the power dynamics of the relationship insinuate that the clerk truly does not have a choice in

consenting to the relationship because Mr. Wright is her boss. Later in the film, the clerk is placed in a power struggle between Mr. Wright and Sylvester, who has come to purchase ammunition to protect the family against the expected violent retaliation of the white mob. Sylvester demands that the female relative leave with him, but Mr. Wright commands her to stay. Only after Sylvester displays some violence and yells at her to come does she finally leave the store with him. Due to black men's inability to effectively enforce the codes of the "culture of honor," they are prevented from retaliating against insults, sexual or otherwise, to their women without the fear of death.

More than anything, this study illustrates the dynamic effects of the "culture of honor" on both the black and white communities. Just as fictional and non-fictional works such as Victor Sejour's "The Mulatto," Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* and Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* reveal aspects of slavery that had yet to be exposed, the works in this study show aspects of the Southern "culture of honor" not yet considered. These literary works reveal the extent to which slavery not only physically, mentally and emotionally damaged blacks, but illustrate how slavery dehumanized white slave owners and their families. The works document the cruelty with which slave drivers, slaver breakers and slaver owners abused their slaves with senseless beatings, using black men and women as slave breeders and inflicting other forms of torture. They display how white women, enraged by the actions of their husbands, released their anger, jealousy and envy on the victims - slave women who had been raped - and the innocent children produced by the rapes. These white women often mistreated the slave women and children by depriving them of necessities or having them sold off the plantation. These literary works detail ways in

which slave owners manipulated situations to force themselves upon slave women and prevent them from forming healthy, loving relationships of their choice. Similarly, the works of this study show different ways in which the “culture of honor” damaged white families. These works show how the violent, tough reputations of fathers and husbands destroyed the relationships of these men with their wives and children. Marriages were ruined; children refused to respect or talk with their fathers. These men were unable to develop healthy relationships with family members and community members because of their mean dispositions. Sadly, the women in the family were often the objects of the men’s violent retaliations. In addition, the women of these families developed a warped perception of men and expected them to be violent. Furthermore, the violent retaliations of these men caused great economic, psychological and personal losses.

The pressure that the “culture of honor” placed on men to develop a tough reputation and continue the reputation of other men in the family greatly damages the white families in Campbell’s novel. From the outset of the novel, Floyd displays a sense of insecurity in relation to his older brother and father. Furthermore, Floyd believes that he is not loved or respected by his father, wife, brother or mother. After murdering young Armstrong Todd, Floyd not only feels accepted by his brother and father for the first time, but he feels that he has finally reached an equal status with the other Cox men. Floyd is so excited that he states that the feeling he felt while sandwiched in the truck between his brother and father after murdering Armstrong surpassed the feeling he derives from being intimate with his wife. Sadly, the efforts that Floyd makes to prove that he is worthy of the Cox name destroys his business, his marriage and his family. Floyd loses his pool hall; he resorts to stealing to provide for his family and is jailed

several times; this predicament leaves his wife Lily dependent upon Mamie Cox, Floyd's mother, for financial support. Eventually, Mamie blames Floyd and his not-so-innocent wife for disgracing the family and causing the disintegration of the family. Because Floyd is not around to raise and provide for his two children, they both grow up to resent their father. By the end of the novel, Floyd loses his relationship with Lily and his children.

Similar to Floyd, the upper class Clayton Pinochet of Campbell's novel has a formidable reputation to fulfill in terms of male family legacy. Clayton's father, Stonewall, is known for his shrewdness and expects Clayton to continue to oppress blacks in the community in order to keep himself rich. However, Clayton feels an affinity with the black community and does not agree with the oppressive practices of the Honorable Men of Hopewell, led by his father, Stonewall Pinochet. Yet, because Clayton fears his father and the consequences of disobeying him, he refuses to voice disagreement or defy Stonewall's commands. It is because of Stonewall and his demands that Clayton leaves the journalistic work that he enjoyed in the North to return to the South to continue the work and business of his father. Furthermore, Clayton does not marry any of the women that he loved because his father did not approve of them. Initially, Clayton loves Dolly Cox; once he impregnates her, Clayton planned to marry her. However, Stonewall forbids the marriage and demands that Dolly get an abortion since she is not a member of upper class Hopewell society. When the Cox men arrive at the Pinochet house to restore their sister's honor, they are summarily dismissed by Stonewall. Until Stonewall's death, Clayton lives his life according to what his father dictated since he dare not insult his father by defying him. It is only after Stonewall's death that Clayton makes his own decisions, independent of the Pinochet reputation.

As documented above, the Southern “culture of honor” has been the motivating force for many a white man to harm his family and community in numerous ways. In the name of honor and the desire to preserve his good reputation in the community, Stonewall Pinochet never acknowledged his daughter, prevented his son from pursuing his dreams and prohibited his son from marrying the woman he truly loved. In the name of honor, Floyd Cox murdered a young, black teenage boy even though he knew his wife was not an innocent victim. In the name of honor, a mob of white men of Sumner, Florida, accompanied by the sheriff, destroyed their neighboring black town based on a false accusation by a white woman known among the white men for her infidelity. In the name of honor, a white father instructed his son to stop playing with his black playmate, showed his son a grave filled with the dead bodies of innocent black men, women and children and forced his son to shadow him as he violently assaulted and killed innocent blacks. In the name of honor, a white man shot a Civil Rights leader in the back as he left his car to enter his home, where his wife and three children awaited him and ran out to see the man they loved lying in a pool of blood. In the name of honor, a white farmer called his 50-year-old faithful, dedicated worker “boy” and demanded strict compliance to his orders as if this older black man were a child. The Southern notion of honor and need to protect a reputation against insults created these incidents.

While in contemporary terminology the phrase dysfunctional family applies to many households, families were not considered dysfunctional in the early and mid Twentieth Century. However, many of the white families in these works that abide by aspects of the “culture of honor” would undoubtedly be classified as dysfunctional by today’s standards. However, it was not just single families that were dysfunctional; it was

also official Southern organizations, such as the court system and police, who were also dysfunctional. Unfortunately, the “culture of honor” allowed the same violent treatment of blacks during the slavery period to continue during the post bellum, Reconstruction and Civil Rights periods of American history. During any of these time periods, any black who insulted a white man immediately faced violent retaliation.

As discussed in the opening chapter, the ante-bellum period in the South saw the advent of the duel among the upper class, or the “gentlemen,” of Southern society, which is considered by some, such as historian John Hope Franklin, as evidence of the violent nature of Southern white men. Many a judge, lawyer, politician and land owner was wounded and killed as a result of insulting another gentleman. Those in the lower classes were not exempt from the violent retaliation of a gentleman; rather, they did not have the dignity of defending themselves; they were simply horsewhipped or caned. It is not coincidental that, along with flogging, these were prevalent methods of punishment inflicted upon slaves. Though the Civil War officially obliterated the caste system and the duel in the South, the Southern attitude of honor as a personal possession needing to be defended and protected remained intact following the war. Thus, violent retaliations for offenses to honor continued, especially against the newly freed slaves, who were still inferior to whites in the white Southern mind.

More than any other work examined in this study, *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine* illustrates the damaging effects of the “culture of honor” on white families. The violence that anyone in the community could expect to face for insulting a Cox man could also be anticipated for those within the family who insulted a male family member’s reputation. Throughout the novel, Floyd Cox physically abuses his wife Lily. Floyd smacks her,

kicks her or hits her anytime he feels she has insulted his honor as a man. The first attack occurs when Lily enters the pool hall after Floyd told her to stay in the truck; as he returns to the truck, Floyd greets Lily with a smack across the cheek for her act of dishonor. For the remainder of the novel, Floyd blames his wife for their losses because he maintains that she if had listened to him then young Armstrong would never have had the opportunity to speak French to her. From this first incident, Floyd continues to physically abuse Lily anytime he feels that she insults his honor by questioning his ability as a husband to provide for and protect his family, which was listed earlier as an indication of a Southern man's honor. Floyd's brother also physically abuses his wife Loretta; however, Loretta masks the abuse until the end of the novel. Violent retaliation in the form of domestic abuse also occurs in the film *Rosewood*. Fannie Taylor experiences abuse at the hands of two white men, her husband and her lover. Early in the film, Fannie insults her lover by pushing him after questioning his faithfulness. The lover retaliates to this insult by beating and kicking her. Embarrassed and ashamed of her bruises and needing to protect her husband's innocent view of her, Fannie accuses a black man of the beating. In the final scenes of the film, once Mr. Taylor discovers, through the Sheriff, that neither the Sheriff nor the white mob believe a black man attacked Fannie since she has been sexually active with several men in the community, Mr. Taylor returns home to beat his wife. His motivation for the abuse is Fannie's insult to him by sleeping with other men and lying about it to make him believe that she was an innocent victim.

Interestingly, while the Southern "culture of honor" depicts white Southern women as chaste and pure, these two works reveal that this was an image to be maintained to practice aspects of the "culture of honor." Even though Floyd Cox and the

white men of Sumner know that Lily and Fannie were not pure, sexually innocent women, they present a united front to the outside communities and defend these women as pure once accusations of black men behaving sexually improper towards these white women are made public. Because the “culture of honor” dictates that men respond to an affront to white women with violence, the men respond, regardless of whether the affront is real or fabricated. However, the husbands privately retaliate against these women for their behavior. Nonetheless, there is a difference in the retaliation against a woman who brings disgrace on her family in the South from women in other “cultures of honor.” In Mediterranean “cultures of honor,” women are the victims of “honor killings” for their sexual disgracing of their families. White women in the South are not killed in the name of honor; they are simply beat in the name of honor. The existence of the “culture of honor” could very well cause higher rates of domestic violence in the South as compared to the North, an aspect of Southern violence not addressed by social psychologists.

Both of the films studied in this work display the callousness developed in white men as a result of following codes embedded within the “culture of honor.” The mob of white men from Sumner mercilessly beat their victims, drag them to the woods, cut off ears and other body parts and hang and lynch men and women. They needlessly shoot victims who honestly confess that they do not know the information the mob is seeking instead of releasing them. They even shoot unarmed and innocent Aunt Sarah who simply comes out of her house to calm the men down and get them to leave. Though the mob is seeking one man, they destroy everything in their path. Because Sylvester, in the process of defending his home after his mother Sarah was killed, shoots and kills two white men with guns who attempted to enter the house as Sylvester dragged his mother’s body in the

house, the mob gets ammunition and returns to burn homes, churches, businesses and everything else. Any black person the mob encounters faces the fullness of their violent retaliation. The actions of the white mob indicate that they consider blacks expendable. Likewise, the violent actions of the whites in *For Us, The Living* permeate the film. Blacks are beat, robbed, shot, kicked, verbally harassed and the targets of glass objects simply for attempting to exercise their constitutional rights. The violence culminates in the shooting of Medgar Evers. Again, the only rationale provided for the violence is that these blacks stepped out of their place and insulted the Southern reputation for being able to control its blacks and govern its own society.

The character of Mathu from *A Gathering of Old Men* adds an interesting dynamic to the study of the Southern “culture of honor.” For one, he is unlike other blacks in the community because of his Senegalese heritage. Therefore, he and others relate to him based on his ethnic heritage rather than his skin color. What also distinguishes Mathu from others in the community is his close relationship to wealthy, white Candy Marshall. Mathu filled the role of father to Candy after her parents died; therefore, those in the community recognize that he has what most blacks lack, protection from a white person of stature in the community. Candy is not an ordinary white citizen of the community; rather, her family owns the land on which the blacks live and work. Despite this association, Mathu has earned a reputation in the community, among blacks and whites, as a courageous, strong, tough black man. In fact, Mathu is the exceptional black man who has fought a white man, beat a white man and been permitted to live after the fight. Mathu has not just fought any white man; he has fought a reputable white man sensitive to the “culture of honor” and adamant about defending any insults to his

reputation. Therefore, Mathu has a unique position in the community; he does not socialize with other blacks because he considers himself better than the cowardly black men surrounding him, and he is respected by white men and authorities in the community though he is not accepted as having equal status with them.

Yet, late in the novel, Mathu reveals truly who he had been. Mathu confesses that he is full of hate for both blacks and whites; he hates whites for not giving him citizenship when he applied. Like many other whites, Mathu reveals that he hated blacks. Mathu specifically aligns himself with Sheriff Mapes in confessing that, he did not believe that the men would amount to anything in life. Mathu hated blacks for not attempting to assert themselves and become citizens. He hated blacks for their apathetic, complacent attitudes and their unwillingness to challenge the racial codes. However, Mathu admits that the men had changed him from being a “mean-hearted old man” (Gaines, 182). Mathu admits that he recognizes them as men and admires them. In the end, hate is revealed as the true motivating force in Mathu’s development of a tough reputation, not nobility of character. Mathu was as blindly guided to develop a tough reputation as the white Beau Boutan. Mathu was willing to fight blacks and whites alike because of his hatred for them, a hatred that did not allow him to feel compassion for them or identify with them as fellow humans. This is the same type of hatred evident in the white mob of Sumner, Florida, the whites who resisted Medgar’s Civil Rights’ work, the whites who oppressed blacks in Hopewell, Mississippi. These whites did not consider blacks to be on equal status with them; therefore, they were as incensed when a black person insulted them and would retaliate with a vicious type of violence. However, in the end, Mathu comes to appreciate the great strength of character and courage of these men

who had endured years of insults.

Another similarity between the works in this study and literary works written by blacks about the slavery period is the ways in which they bring to the forefront those who were able to overcome the ills of these peculiar Southern institutions. Just as courageous, determined individuals such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs emerged from the atrocities of slavery, many black men and women defied the oppressive, negative aspects of the Southern “culture of honor.” However, too many of them, such as Medgar Evers, gave their lives for their defiance. Recognizing those who defy the dehumanizing circumstances of such peculiar Southern institutions as slavery and the “culture of honor” is important.

Several men of strong character emerge as a result of being victimized by the Southern “culture of honor;” some of these men emerge early in their lives while others decide to defy after enduring years of degradation. Other than the elderly men who gather to stand at Mathu’s house, Charlie is the other noteworthy gentleman of *A Gathering of Old Men*. Charlie admits that Mathu attempted to make him a man by beating him for running even as a young boy of five or six years of age; however, it took him to reach the age of 50 to demand respect and be willing to retaliate against anyone who refused to acknowledge him. When he returns to face the consequences of killing Beau Boutan, Charlie insists that the Sheriff addresses him as Mr. Biggs to indicate the transformation that has taken place within him; previously, he was known as Charlie and “nigger boy Charlie.” Unlike Charlier, Medgar Evers emerges as a man to rise above the harrowing codes of the “culture of honor” from the beginning of the film. Before becoming a pioneering Mississippi Civil Rights leader, Medgar worked to pave the way to help

blacks assert themselves. He applied to the segregated Ole Mississippi law school. Medgar was not the only honorable man to be depicted in the film. His NAACP colleagues also resisted the peculiar institutions of the South. Several, such as Reverend George Lee, were murdered before Medgar, for their challenges of Southern systems. At the end of *Your Blues Ain't Like Mine*, Wydell Todd emerges as a father committed to forgetting his past failures to protect his family and commits himself to rescuing his surviving son from the streets of Chicago, which are just as threatening to a young black man as the violent South. Of course, the heroic figure of Mr. Man in *Rosewood* provides an example of a survivor and fighter that even, when he wants to rest, will take up arms to defend his community. As a war veteran, Mr. Man sought a community of peace and rest. So when mayhem erupts in the town, Mr. Man leaves. His departure is only temporary because he returns in time to rescue those most vulnerable to the attack, women and children.

Even in the midst of harrowing circumstances, triumph and victory prevails. The works of this study not only illustrate how the Southern “culture of honor” has contributed to a more fatally violent South as identified by social psychologists, but it shows other ways in which the culture has negatively affected Southern communities. Nonetheless, blacks and whites of notable character emerge to overcome the restricting codes of this peculiar Southern institution. While this work focuses on black men, there a myriad of black women and whites who have contributed to the negation of the damaging effects of the “culture of honor.” This work is not only a tribute to the Medgar Evers of the world, but is also in honor of the Charlies, the Clayton Pinochets, the Beulahs, the Sylvesters, the Ida Longs and others in the South who have decided, at any stage in their

lives, to challenge the negative, degrading aspects of the Southern “culture of honor.”

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About the Author

Vernetta K. Williams earned her Bachelor's degree in Journalism and Mass Communication from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her Master's Degree in English from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. She entered the University of South Florida in 1999 as a Richard F. Pride Fellow.

During her tenure at USF, Vernetta has held an array of teaching and administrative positions, from conducting project coordination on multi-million dollar grants to serving as the liaison between the Diversity and Equal Opportunity Office and Presidential Advisory Committees to teaching composition and literature courses.

For the past two years, Vernetta has managed the Arts and Sciences Department at Southwest Florida College, a small, private senior college.