

## BELOW THE SMITH AND WESSON LINE: REFLECTIONS ON SOUTHERN VIOLENCE

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Lately, in the South, we've seen a lot of a human type that used to be more identified with the Midwest: namely, the civic booster. My town has its share, and I'm sure yours does, too, but the greatest concentration south of the Potomac and east of the Mississippi has to be found in Atlanta, "the World's Next Great City." There's one way Atlanta leads the nation, though, that its Chamber of Commerce doesn't mention much. Take any recent edition of the FBI's *Uniform Crime Reports* (I happen to have the 1972 volume) and you'll see that Atlanta's very near the top in the frequency with which its citizens murder one another. In 1972, it was number one in homicides per 100,000 population.<sup>1</sup>

Every year, it competes for this distinction with a number of other southern towns. In 1972, the runner-up was Gainesville, Florida; followed by Greenville, South Carolina; Little Rock, Arkansas; Columbus, Georgia; Tuscaloosa, Alabama; Richmond, Virginia; and Savannah, Georgia. We don't find a non-southern contender until we get to New York City, in ninth place. Think of that—the *locus classicus* of crime in the streets, three places behind Tuscaloosa! After New York, it's back to Dixie: to Raleigh, Memphis, and Lubbock. Las Vegas slips into this catalogue at unlucky number thirteen, but it's followed by five southern towns and that half-breed, Baltimore. Detroit is the only other unambiguously northern city to make the top twenty-five, tied with Houston for number twenty.

Perhaps these data come as no surprise to you. Most people who've looked into the matter at all are aware that southern homicide and assault rates are the highest in the nation: In the global context, the American South is about as violent as South America, and New England looks pretty much like Old England.<sup>2</sup> But whenever I speak of these data to

undergraduates, there are always one or two who respond with shocked disbelief. They argue—correctly, as the polls show—that people down here aren't afraid to walk the streets. Surely it's New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, that are lawless and violent—anyone who reads TIME magazine knows that. Gainesville? Tuscaloosa? Charlotte? Kojak couldn't even find them on the map.

These students have not been led entirely astray by their prejudices. To state these statistics flatly, without qualification, does suggest a misleading image of southern life. To say that there is more violence in the South (which there is) is not to say that there is more *lawlessness*—except perhaps in the purely legal sense of that word.

Consider: there is more than one way a society might come to have a high level of violence. One explanation, which used to be more popular than it is now, is that some peoples just have stronger “animalistic impulses” than others. I don't know about you, but I've reached the point where I find that almost flattering. Still, let's reject that one, and think about two competing *sociological* explanations.

On the one hand, we may have inefficient mechanisms of social control—people may not understand what's expected of them, or the system of sanctions that keeps most of us in line most of the time may be too weak to do the job. A situation like this produces what we mean by “lawlessness”—violence is *supposed* to be restrained, but isn't, because the forces of order are too weak. Some of the explanations for lynching that used to be put forward were in these terms: lynchers were “uncivilized” (that is, not adequately instructed in what society expected of them), or, people argued, in a sparsely-settled region, before the advent of highly mobile police forces, it was impossible to keep the lid on this sort of violence.<sup>3</sup>

But the fact is that some lynchings were carried out by solid, middle-class citizens—who surely knew what society expected of them—and many sheriffs and other peace officers didn't *want* to prevent lynchings (leave aside the question of whether they could). This suggests another way a society can have a high level of violence: it can permit or even demand violence in some circumstances. It can have, in other words, what some sociologists have called a “culture of violence.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, nearly all societies permit violence in some situations (in war, for example, or in self-defense). But some societies permit it in more circumstances than others; some expect or even require it where others merely allow it. The “culture of violence” tag is usually pinned on groups that require or allow more violence, in more situations, than the majority culture feels is appropriate—groups like delinquent gangs, the Mafia, or the Hell's Angels. But this is clearly a difference of degree, not

of kind, and there's no reason we can't use the idea as well with a regional culture as with a criminal or neighborhood subculture.

I want to argue that, in this limited sense, and in the American context, the South displays a “culture of violence”; that regional differences in homicide and assault owe more to regional cultural differences than to differences in the effectiveness of socialization or other mechanisms of social control. These other differences may have existed in the past. In fact, the violent strain in southern culture—like other “cultures of violence”—may have originated as an adaptation to a period of anarchy. It may have begun as a frontier trait—either on the original frontier or “the frontier the Yankee made” (as W. J. Cash called the Reconstruction period). I doubt it, but a competent historian could persuade me.<sup>5</sup> Even so, the origins of the trait can't explain its persistence. I believe that some peculiar attitudes toward violence have been integrated into our region's culture and achieved a substantial measure of autonomy: they are not merely a response to rural conditions, ineffective law enforcement, or deprivation, past or present.<sup>6</sup>

When I say that, in the American context, the South displays a culture of violence, I mean it in the same sense that I might say, in the Italian context, Sicily has such a culture. If we no longer have the formal apparatus of the duel, the vendetta, and the blood feud, we still have attenuated forms of institutions like these. People understand this; sometimes the understanding has even been written into law. Colonial Louisiana, for example, had a law stipulating that a woman and her lover, taken in adultery, were to be turned over to the aggrieved husband for punishment. He could do as he saw fit, but if he killed one, he had to kill both.<sup>7</sup> We don't have to go back to the eighteenth century for these laws: until just recently Texas had a written version of the so-called “unwritten law” allowing a husband to kill his wife's lover.<sup>8</sup> My own state of North Carolina still has a law protecting the rights of individuals to assault others. It's less sexy and less lethal than the Texas and Louisiana laws, but still interesting: a state law forbids local school board interference with the right of teachers to use corporal punishment. I think a study of Southern state laws would turn up plenty of other examples. Certainly the way juries implement these laws reflects a regional propensity not to prejudge violence, and a study of “justifiable homicide” verdicts could tell us a lot about just what it is that justifies homicide in the South.<sup>9</sup>

Here I want to examine four implications of accepting a cultural, rather than a social-control, theory of southern violence, and then say a word or two in defense of southern attitudes on the subject (relying on the other folks in this symposium to state the case—obvious enough, I

should think—against them). The first implication of a cultural explanation is that many southerners will take a lot of violence for granted, maybe not even notice it—not simply because it is so frequent, but because it is a *type* of violence that they find “natural.” A second implication is that southerners will not be more violent than other Americans in *all* circumstances, but only in those where the culture permits or demands a violent response. A third implication is that, like other aspects of culture, an understanding of violence and the conditions that call for it will be *learned*, in childhood, and that violence will emanate from the *well*-socialized, not just from marginal folk who don’t know or care what’s expected of them. Finally, if violence is not just an uncontrolled growth on the surface of southern life, but part of its cultural bedrock, we should expect to find “outcroppings” of it (so to speak) in other areas of our common life: violence is not just something to be used when someone wants something, but something to be sung about, joked about, played with.

The first of those implications take us back to my unbelieving undergraduates. It helps explain how someone can live in a region with a homicide rate twice as high as anyone else’s and an assault rate half again as high, and believe that the rest of the country is more violent. I suggest that many southerners simply don’t notice what’s perfectly obvious to other Americans (and to deracinated southerners like sociology professors). They actually don’t *see* much of the violence around them, don’t register it as “lawlessness,” because it *isn’t* “lawless.” It is lawful violence, in the sociological if not the legal sense: more-or-less predictable, more-or-less expected, (in consequence) more-or-less taken for granted. It’s effectively invisible—something like wallpaper. What people notice, for more than the time it takes to read about it, is violence that *scares* them, violence that is out of control, violence that could strike them regardless of what they do themselves. And that kind of violence is no more common—probably even less common—in the South than elsewhere.

I said that a cultural explanation of violence implies that southerners should be more violent than other Americans only in *certain circumstances*, defined by the culture. If it were a question merely of the absence or breakdown of the system of social control, then we would expect southerners to be more violent across the board. But they’re not. The FBI catalogues two other violent crimes besides homicide and assault, namely robbery and forcible rape. For both of these crimes, the southern rate is *below* the national average—strikingly so, in the case of robbery.<sup>10</sup> If, as I’ve been arguing, we understand and even sometimes excuse violence in some circumstances, evidently those circumstances don’t include relieving someone of his property or her virtue.

We can get some more mileage out of those FBI statistics. The Bureau lists homicides under seven headings: spouse killing spouse, parent killing child, other intra-family homicides, one they call (rather quaintly, I think) “romantic triangles and lovers’ quarrels,” a category for “other arguments,” and two for “felony-type” homicides, known or suspected.<sup>11</sup> These last two categories the Bureau defines as “those killings resulting from robbery, sex motive, gangland slaying, and other felonious activities”—in other words, most of what we mean by “crime in the streets.” For four of the seven categories, the southern rate is higher—about twice as high as that for the rest of the country. Arguments and lovers’ quarrels and family disputes are a dangerous business in the South. But in three of the categories, the southern rate is about the same as that elsewhere. Southern parents are no more likely than other parents to kill their children, and southerners are no more likely to die in a “felony-type” murder—no more likely, that is, to experience the impersonal, professional violence of the armed robber, or the erratic, random violence of the psychopath.

The homicides in which the South seems to specialize are those where someone is being killed by someone he (or, often, she) knows, for reasons both killer and killee understand. If an injustice is being committed, it’s injustice of a sort which occasions less comment and produces less fear than the injustice suffered by the unsuspecting, innocent, and wholly undeserving victim of robber or psychopath. The statistics show that the southerner who can avoid both arguments and adultery is as safe as any other American, and probably safer. Although the nine most murderous states in 1972 were all southern, if we make a rough calculation to remove the killings that grow out of family disputes, love affairs, and arguments—leaving, for the most part, what we think of as “crime in the streets”—then only two of the first nine states are southern.<sup>12</sup>

How do southerners learn that violence is acceptable in some circumstances, but not others? This aspect of culture, I suggest, is simply taken in like others. Like the words to “Blessed Assurance,” the technique of the yo-yo, or the conviction that okra is edible, it is absorbed, pretty much without reflection, in childhood. Southerners learn, as they grow up, that some disputes are *supposed* to be settled privately, violently sometimes, without calling in “the authorities.” Certainly southern boys of my generation learned that: after-school fights, arranged with considerable formality, were almost an everyday occurrence. Only the absence of the possibility of death distinguished them from duels. If you were called out for some offense, you fought. I guess you could have appealed to the teacher, but that just—wasn’t done. And that phrase speaks volumes. Robert Penn Warren, reflecting on his childhood in a

small Kentucky town not far from the Tennessee border, recalls: "There was a world of violence that I grew up in. You accepted violence as a component of life . . . You heard about violence and you saw terrible fights. . . . There was some threat of being trapped into this whether you wanted to or not."<sup>13</sup> Just so. Culture is like that.

There are countless anecdotes to illustrate the point that this shared understanding is not just a schoolboy phenomenon, Hodding Carter, the Mississippi newspaperman, once told the story of the only time he was ever called for jury duty. He was the youngest juror, and took his duties very seriously. Perhaps for that reason, he was elected foreman. The case before the jury involved an irascible gentleman who lived next door to a filling station. For several months, he had been the butt of various jokes played by the attendants and the miscellaneous loafers who hung around the station, despite his warnings and his notorious short temper. One morning, he emptied both barrels of his shotgun at his tormentors, killing one, maiming another permanently, and wounding a third. It was clear that the man had done it, and in the jury room, Carter looked over his fellow-jurors and said, "Well, gentlemen, there's no disagreement over what the verdict should be, is there?" Everybody allowed as how there was no question about it. "Well, Then he's guilty." Whoa, now—wait a minute. When the jury was polled by the incredulous judge, Carter was the only juror who recorded his vote as "guilty." As one of the others put it: "He wouldn't of been much of a man if he hadn't shot them fellows." Carter, for his trouble, got a reputation as a "hanging juror," and was never called for jury duty again.

Here's another Hodding Carter story: One time he wrote an editorial one of his readers took exception to, and the man called him up to say he was going to kill him. (One of the rules of the game is that a warning ought to be given.) Carter, sensible man, thought about calling the police or leaving town, but he knew that if he did that, he could forget about being a newspaperman in Mississippi. "He wouldn't have been a man" if he'd done that. So he cleaned his gun and waited for his caller (who, incidentally, never showed up).<sup>14</sup>

These examples come from real life. Dozens—probably hundreds—more can be found in southern literature. Let me just mention an unusual episode where a literary hero *refuses* to follow the prescriptions of his culture. In *The Unvanquished*, one of Faulkner's less-celebrated novels, young Bayard Sartoris's father is gunned down, unarmed, by his former business partner. Bayard is expected to avenge his father's death, but will not. Instead, he confronts the murderer, unarmed, and orders him to leave town. For reasons never satisfactorily explained, the man does leave. Bayard then undertakes, symbolically, to restore order to his dis-

ordered society—by going away to law school.<sup>15</sup> I mean no disrespect to the profession of the distinguished jurist for whom these lectures are named, but I must confess that strikes me as anticlimactic, not to say unmanly.

Notice what's going on here. If southern violence were due simply to a lack of social control, we'd expect the most violence from those who are the least well-socialized, those who haven't learned to *want* to do what they're *supposed* to do. A cultural explanation means the opposite: the best-socialized, those who understand what's expected of them, will be violent sometimes, because sometimes violence is "what's expected." That's why Carter oiled his gun. That's why we're disappointed in Bayard Sartoris. Sometimes people are violent because they want to be and there is nothing to stop them. But sometimes people are violent, even when they *don't* want to be, because there will be penalties—disgrace is a very effective one—for *not* being violent.

Finally, if violence is an integral part of our regional culture, we ought to find it turning up in odd places here and there: in our literature, for example; in our music, our humor, our everyday pastimes. I'll leave the discussion of literature to scholars more qualified than I am, but I can't help remarking that the two most widely-viewed television programs of all times were adaptations of books about the South, *Gone With the Wind* and *Roots*, and both were shot through (unfortunate phrase)—served up with healthy dollops of violence. If nothing else, this insures that other Americans' stereotypes of the South will continue to include violence, reinforced by other films and cultural products as diverse as *The Heat of the Night*, *Mandingo*, *Deliverance*, and the entire oeuvre of Tennessee Williams.

Of course, there's another possible explanation for the presence of violence in these works. It could be that, since they're produced for a national audience, the violence is just thrown in, to gratify the consumers' desire to believe strange things about the South. Faulkner spoke once of the "strange, almost volitionless gullibility" of northerners when it comes to the South, and Billy Carter said recently that "The Yankee press will believe any damn thing you say, and print it."

I think these gentlemen have a point, and it probably disqualifies as evidence most works about the South produced for national consumption. But violence plays a remarkable role in indigenous southern popular culture as well, in products and pastimes enjoyed by southerners themselves. Through these media, violence is an ever-present, obvious, but taken-for-granted feature of our everyday lives, not just something that surfaces on Saturday nights when the moon is full and the corn liquor flowing freely.

Sometimes violence is *celebrated* in our popular culture, but it's probably even more significant that it's so often treated as simply "natural"—part of the landscape. The sheer *ordinariness* of violence may indicate its importance in our lives. And our popular culture may not only reflect, but reinforce southerners' distinctive attitudes toward violence and the use of force. By way of example, let's examine—briefly, unsystematically, and in no particular order—country music, southern humor, and football.

It's no longer possible to draw a hard and fast distinction between "country" music and "popular" music. Each has influenced the other, and country music has followed its audiences in their migrations, to Bakersfield, California; Chicago; Detroit; and throughout the country.<sup>16</sup> Still, the music retains its identification with the South: dozens of nostalgic songs attest to that. Nearly all country-music singers (and most of its audience, I'm sure) are either southern-born or only a generation removed from the South. The economic and demographic changes of the last few decades have affected the country-music audience, like other southerners. Country music, so called, is now the music of an urban, blue-collar population. I'm convinced that a study of country music, and a comparison with other American popular music, could tell us a great deal about the emerging culture of the New South—that urban, industrialized society now taking shape all around us.

If you look for urbanization and industrialization to erode Southern attitudes toward violence, you can't take much comfort from the statistics, which show that southern cities are more violent than rural areas.<sup>17</sup> Rural southerners gone to town take violence with them—and this is perfectly evident in the music they listen to. I haven't done a systematic analysis of it, but if you don't believe me, just listen for a few hours to any country music radio station.<sup>18</sup> You'll hear songs like "Ruby," where a paraplegic war veteran tells his wife that he'd kill her, if he could move, for "taking her love to town."<sup>19</sup> Merle Haggard is a fine singer who has based his career largely on articulating working-class *ressentiment*. You'll hear him sing "Walkin' on the Fightin' Side of Me," a song addressed to war protesters. (I haven't seen any protesters for years, but I heard the song again just last week.) The image of barely-concealed menace Johnny Cash exploited, before middle age and religious conversion mellowed him, is still a highly marketable commodity, as half-a-dozen imitators are proving today. Cash's use of violence in his songs is perhaps most obvious in some albums recorded before audiences of prison inmates (who cheer lustily at the appropriate places), but a couple of the individual songs bear close analysis. Sheldon Hackney has suggested that southern violence is part of a cultural pattern of "extrapunitive-

ness"—a tendency to fix the blame for individual or societal frustration and failure on *outside* agencies rather than internal shortcomings (the fault is not in ourselves, but in our stars, or our spouses, our parents, "society," Wall Street, or wherever).<sup>20</sup> A number called "Kate" illustrates this pattern marvelously. The song is sung by a man in prison for murdering his wife. He sings to her: "There's no two ways to figger/Your cheatin' pulled the trigger./As sure as your name's Kate/You put me here."<sup>21</sup>

Another Cash song, a very popular one, shows how country music uses violence almost incidentally, just as one of the givens of life, nothing unusual, and how the music can often be even *cheerful* about violence. (Incidentally, I heard a song the other day with a title something like "The Old-Time, Traditional, Saturday-Night, Redneck Drunken Brawl," but I haven't heard it again, and I'm restricting my examples to songs which have achieved popular acceptance.) Getting back to Cash—In "A Boy Named Sue," the protagonist, named Sue, at long last meets the father who gave him that name. His natural reaction is to try to kill him. Father and son have a good fight, "Kicking and a-gouging in the mud and the blood and the beer."<sup>22</sup> Afterwards, the father explains that he named the boy Sue so he'd learn how to take care of himself, and he's pleased to see the plan worked.

Contrast both the prevalence and the treatment of violence in country music with that in American popular music generally. I've really only mentioned four country songs, but I'll bet there's more violence or threat of it in those four songs than in all of the "top forty" songs of the past twenty years put together. Moreover, as I've indicated, country music treats violence as something ordinary and natural. The very few occasions I can think of when violence appeared in top forty music were during the marketing of revolution in the late sixties, in such songs as "Street Fighting Man," by the Rolling Stones, and in these cases the violence was there for its shock value—serving somewhat as the pornography of the sexually-liberated. Violence has no shock value in country music; it's too common, too every-day.

And certainly popular music doesn't *joke* about violence, ever. Country music sometimes does. Southern humor in general relies heavily on violence. I'm tempted to say this is because southern violence is sometimes so *funny*. Ever since the pre-Civil War days when southwestern humorists made their reputations and their livings by telling funny stories about their violent neighbors. Southerners have dined out—especially when their dinner companions are Yankees—on hilarious, if hair-raising, tales of violence, some of which are even true. My own favorite is the story about the time the good people of my hometown in Tennessee

hanged an elephant for murder.<sup>23</sup> That happened in 1916, but there's a constant supply of new stories. Since I agreed last fall to give this talk, I've heard about a woman in Tennessee who shot her son for blowing up the Thanksgiving turkey with a cherry bomb, as his father was about to carve it, and a South Carolina man who pulled a .22 pistol and wounded a restaurateur and his wife for serving him a chicken neck in his sandwich.<sup>24</sup> I could go on, but the point is that southern humorists, amateur and professional, have a lot of raw material to work with.

Notice, however, what *kind* of violence strikes us—some of us at least—as funny. There's nothing funny about Charles Starkweather or Richard Speck—cold-blooded killers aren't amusing. I think the common element in the funny stories is an exaggerated response to a legitimate (if somewhat grotesque) grievance, by someone we can identify with. We can share the exasperation of a mother with a malicious son, the annoyance of a customer with an incompetent or stingy sandwich-maker, even the righteous anger and fear of a group of citizens with a murderous elephant on their hands—in some sense, in each of these cases, the victim “asked for it,” although most of us would restrain ourselves, I hope. We can't share the feelings of a Starkweather or a Speck. Their murders are in the FBI's “felony-type” category, and most of us can't understand them, much less be amused by them: they frighten us. But violence *for cause*—although it probably ought to be punished—that's something we can live with. It's something we *do* live with.

We also live with violence *for sport*. Although the taste for violent entertainment is not uniquely southern, by any means, Johnny Cash's songs, the research of some historians, and many studies of Americans' leisure-time activities suggest that southerners enjoy both watching and participating in blood sports and other violent pastimes more than other Americans. Ponder the datum that southern city folk are more likely to hunt for sport than non-southern rural people.<sup>25</sup> Consider the recent renaissance of organized dog-fighting, centered in the South and especially in the Southwest. Reflect on the role of football in southern life.<sup>26</sup>

I know as well as you do that football's becoming (if it isn't already) the great *American* pastime, but I view that as simply one instance of what's been called “the Southernization of America,” and I want to argue that the game still has a place in our regional life which is unparalleled elsewhere. Where else would a house-and-garden magazine like *Southern Living* name an all-star team and publish recipes for tailgate parties? Where else would a minister conclude the invocation at a high-school game (as one did in Pflugerville, Texas) by saying “Lord, we need this one tonight. We've just got to have it. . . .”? (Where else, for that matter, would a high-school football game have an invocation?) Is

South Carolina the only state where the highest-paid state official is a football coach? (If there are others, I'll bet they're southern.) In 1974, the South was home to only five of the twenty-six teams in the National Football League, but about 43% of the players in the NFL came from southern colleges, and half the quarterbacks did. It seems we not only *like* football, some of us play it pretty well.

Not surprising, it seems to me, because in some ways the function of violence in football is a scaled-down version of its function in southern life. It's not the *purpose* of the game, but it's a legitimate and often desirable means to that purpose. Among football coaches, the “character-building” school of thought tends to emphasize the training in teamwork and self-sacrifice the game provides. That's what Chuck Mills, the Utah State coach, had in mind when he said that “football is a microform of the American adventure.” But violence is part of the game, too, and every bit as necessary as teamwork. The difference between football and a free-for-all, like the difference between southern life and a state of nature, is that the ever-present violence is focussed and channeled by a set of commonly accepted rules. I can't find a football coach to quote on the subject of football as an education in the constructive use of violence, but Konrad Lorenz, the student of animal behavior, has argued that “the main function of sport [in general] lies in the cathartic discharge of aggressive urge. . . . It educates man to a conscious and responsible control of his own fighting behavior. . . . More valuable still is the educational value of the restrictions imposed for fairness and chivalry which must be respected even in the face of the strongest aggression-eliciting stimuli.” Football players learn the southern lesson that violence is often useful, and that it's allowed in some circumstances, but not others.

Is a culture that accepts violence as a natural part of life and merely channels it and curbs its excesses more realistic, even more healthy, than one that sees violence as generally undesirable and tries to suppress it? The answer depends on your view of human nature: yours may be different from Professor Lorenz's, and I don't plan to debate that subject tonight.

Certainly violence, whether culturally-patterned or anarchic, inevitably leads to tragedy for individuals and their families, and sometimes contributes to the oppression of entire populations. It has done both in the South. A nonchalance about violence—even if only in defense of honor—gives license to sadists, and may (as it probably has in the South) encourage an exaggerated sensitivity to slights, real or imagined.

But it may be that some of us, nowadays, underrate the fair fight as a device for settling disputes. It's simply not true that “fighting doesn't

settle anything"—and nobody knows that better than southerners, who've seen it settle the questions of slavery and secession pretty thoroughly. If southerners have been perhaps too quick to fight, it seems to me that they've usually coupled that tendency with a willingness to accept the outcome, win or lose.

And, as Samuel Johnson said once, although sins of excess may be no less sinful than sins of insufficiency, most of us find them easier to sympathize with. There can be an exaggerated distaste for violence, it seems to me, which is as unwholesome in its own way as bloodlust. The pacifist merits our respect, but the coward doesn't. The one says fighting's always immoral (a defensible position, although we may disagree). The other says fighting is scary, or nasty, and nothing's worth fighting for, anyway. Whatever southerners' faults in the matter (and they've usually been obvious), our people—black and white—have witnessed with some consistency and often at great cost to the belief that there are enemies who cannot or should not be appeased, conflicts which cannot or should not be negotiated, affronts which should not be ignored, trespasses which should not be forgiven; in short, that there *are* things worth fighting for. We may disagree about what those things are, but, especially at this point in our nation's history, I think we can use the reminder that they exist.

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#### NOTES

1. Clarence M. Kelly, *Crime in the United States: 1972* (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 61 ff. More recent figures are available in the 1975 edition: 1975 was a quiet year in Atlanta, and it slipped to a tie for twenty-sixth place with Nashville. But 18 of the 25 Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas with the highest rates of murder and non-negligent manslaughter were still Southern. (*idem.*, *Crime in the United States: 1975* [Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1976], pp. 49 ff.)
2. Like most of the economically developed nations of Western Europe, Britain has a homicide rate of around one per 100,000 population per annum. Latin American statistics are sometimes unreliable, but their rates tend to range from five or so per 100,000 to around 20 per 100,000. Compare New Hampshire's 1972 rate of 1.7 per 100,000 (the same as Vermont's) and Alabama's 14.1/100,000, or North Carolina's 12.8/100,000. (Kelly [1973], *loc. cit.*)
3. The best general account of lynching is probably still Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933). Also instructive is

- Jessie Daniel Ames, *The Changing Character of Lynching* (Atlanta: Commission on Inter-racial Cooperation, 1942).
4. See, for instance, Marvin E. Wolfgang and Franco Ferracuti, "Subculture of Violence: An Integrated Conceptualization," in David O. Arnold (ed.), *The Sociology of Subcultures* (Berkeley: Glendessary Press, 1970), p. 147. For the most explicit application of this notion to the culture of the South, see Raymond D. Gastil, "Homicide and a Regional Culture of Violence," *American Sociological Review* 36 (June 1971), pp. 412-427.
  5. I doubt it because I can no longer discern, within the South or comparing it to other parts of the United States, any pattern of greater violence in areas closer to the frontier, physically or temporally. As for the experience of Reconstruction, there seems to be abundant evidence that the patterns we are talking about predate the Civil War: see, for instance, John Hope Franklin, *The Militant South: 1800-1861* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956).
  6. Both Gastil (*op. cit.*) and Sheldon Hackney (in "Southern Violence," *American Historical Review* 74 [February 1969], pp. 906-925) examine differences in homicide rates between southern and non-southern states, controlling statistically for other characteristics of those states, and come to the same conclusion. Although their work has been criticized on methodological grounds by Colin Loftin and Robert H. Hill (in "Regional Subculture and Homicide: An Examination of the Gastil-Hackney Thesis," *American Sociological Review* 39 [October 1974], pp. 714-724), their argument does not rest entirely on the statistical presentation, and is, in addition, supported somewhat by my own data, reported in "To Live—and Die—in Dixie: A Contribution to the Study of Southern Violence," *Political Science Quarterly* 86 (September 1971), pp. 429-443.
  7. This statute was included in the summary of the law issued by His Excellency Don Alexander O'Reilly, Governor of Spanish Louisiana, in 1769, as reported by Herbert Asbury, in *The French Quarter: An Informal History of the New Orleans Underworld* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973 [Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1936]), p. 36.
  8. The Texas law, as I recall, required that the adulterous couple be apprehended *flagrante delicto* and the killing be done promptly, the assumption being that if those conditions were met, the aggrieved husband could be presumed to be acting under an "irresistible impulse." Texas, of course, is not the only place where those impulses are understood, and juries elsewhere have often been inclined to acquit in similar circumstances. See Rupert B. Vance and Waller Wynne, Jr., "Folk Rationalizations in the 'Unwritten Law,'" *American Journal of Sociology* 39 (1933), pp. 483-492.
  9. Within a month of returning to North Carolina after the symposium at which this paper was read, I read of a North Carolina judge who suspended the sentence of an apparently upright young woman who murdered her apparently worthless husband at the house of his mistress, and of a North Carolina sheriff who neglected to gather enough evidence to indict a filling station operator who shot and killed a thief. In the latter case, the victim was a college student returning from Florida to the Northeast who drove off from a self-service gasoline pump without paying, so the case has attracted more attention in the press than the killing of a garden-variety burglar, but some North Carolinians don't see the distinction.
  10. Kelly (1973), *loc. cit.*; Kelly (1976), *loc. cit.*
  11. Kelly (1973), p. 9, presents a table of the percentage distribution of homicides of different types, by region. Those percentages, applied to the regional rates per 100,000 on pp. 61 ff., give the regional rates per 100,000 of the different types. The definition of "felony-type" homicides is also taken from p. 9.
  12. This approximation was developed by applying the percentage of all homicides which were "felony-type" for each region to the homicide rate for each state in the region, since the *Report* does not give a breakdown of "felony-type" homicides by state. It is obviously crude, but may serve to give an idea of how the rankings would change if we were able to look at a more refined breakdown.

13. Robert Penn Warren, Oral History Memoir, Oral History Collection, Columbia University, 60-62. Quoted in Daniel Singal, *The Development of Modernism: Intellectual Life in the South, 1919-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, forthcoming).
14. The story about Carter's jury duty is told in his *Southern Legacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), pp. 48-51; the story of the outraged reader is from the same book, pp. 10-11. Compare these stories from the Mississippi Delta to H. C. Brearley's observation in the Southern mountains, at about the same time: "It has been found impossible to convict men of murder . . . provided the jury is convinced that the assailant's honor was aggrieved and that he gave his adversary notice of his intention to assail him" ("The Pattern of Violence," in W. T. Couch [ed.], *Culture in the South* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934], p. 687).
15. Since writing this, I've been persuaded that I've misinterpreted the novel, and done an injustice both to Bayard and to Faulkner, but I shall let the passage stand as an example and a warning for other sociologists tempted to try literary criticism.
16. See Richard A. Peterson and Paul DiMaggio, "From Region to Class, The Changing Locus of Country Music: A Test of the Massification Hypothesis," *Social Forces* 53 (March 1975), pp. 497-506. It may be of interest that, in 1975, Bakersfield ("the Nashville of the West"—i.e., the West Coast center of the country music industry) was in the "top forty" of SMSA's with regard to its homicide rate, which was about the same as those of Mobile, Jackson, San Antonio, and Augusta (Kelly [1976], *loc. cit.*).
17. This is true for the country as a whole, not just for the South. See Kelly (1973), *loc. cit.* However, Hackney's data suggest that *urbanized states* have lower rates than others, so the question is evidently more complicated than this offhand observation implies.
18. "Coward of the County," with its punch-line (so to speak) "Sometimes you have to fight when you're a man," was released too late to be considered here, but country music fans will recognize that it is a classic of its genre. ("Coward of the County," by Billy Edd Wheeler and Roger Bowling, © 1979 by Sleepy Hollow Music and Roger Bowling Music. Used by permission. All rights reserved.)
19. "Ruby (Don't Take Your Love to Town)" by Mel Tillis, © copyright Cedarwood Publishing Co., Inc., 1966-1977. All rights reserved. International copyright secured.
20. Hackney relates this hypothetical tendency ingeniously to regional variation not only in the homicide rate, but in suicide rate as well. (The two tend to vary inversely.) See "Southern Violence," *op. cit.*
21. Excerpts from the song "Kate" were written by Marty Robbins. Used by permission of the publisher, Mariposa Music, Inc.
22. "A Boy Named Sue." Words and Music by Shel Silverstein. © 1969 Evil Eye Music, Inc., New York, N.Y. Used by permission.
23. The elephant was hanged from a railroad crane used to wreck boxcars. The hanging took place in Erwin, Tennessee, but the elephant's crime—killing her trainer—took place in Kingsport, Tennessee. I know of no contemporary accounts of the execution, but I have a photograph of the hanging in my office.
24. Both of these incidents were reported in wire service stories in the fall or winter of 1976. The second one can be stretched to a half-hour: the gunman ran off into the woods, but returned to burn the place down. The car bringing the bloodhounds broke down, delaying them considerably, and when they finally arrived they took off on the trail of what turned out to be a cat.
25. Unpublished analysis of data from Gallup Poll no. 704 (1965). See also Reed, *op. cit.*, pp. 433-434.
26. The data and quotations in the two paragraphs following are from Raymond Manley Strunk, Jr., "The Southern Gridiron: Reflections of a Culture," (Unpublished research memorandum, Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1975).

## SOUTHERN VIOLENCE: THE KU KLUX KLAN

Allen W. Trelease

Three distinct Ku Klux Klan movements have appeared in American history. The first began during the Reconstruction era, the second flourished in the 1920's, and the most recent came into existence after World War II. Having no institutional connection, the three movements were organically separate. They had different geographic ranges, as well as varying objects of wrath, but their similarities in membership and method outweighed these differences.

The first Klan was all but exclusively southern. It aimed to perpetuate white supremacy in the wake of black emancipation, civil rights, and above all black voting and officeholding. It assumed this role in 1867, when the Unionist Republican state government of Tennessee under William G. (Parson) Brownlow enacted Negro suffrage. It spread rapidly across the South in the spring of 1868 when that policy was extended throughout the section.

Klansmen had different objectives, varying in emphasis from time to time and place to place, even from one raiding party to another. But the most general purpose, first and last, was to deter or punish Negro voting. (In many cases, raiding for this purpose was more widespread after elections than before, thereby diminishing its effectiveness and calling into question the political astuteness of the men involved.) Related to this were attacks on the Union League, a Republican secret society which many whites mistook for a criminal conspiracy, and raids on individual Republican politicians of both races. Apart from politics, the Klan here and there sought to deter blacks from owning or even renting land; to drive black tenants from good land sought by whites, or, alternatively, to keep black tenants from moving away; and to punish real or alleged Negro crime and just plain independence—not tipping their hats or giving up the sidewalk. Klansmen occasionally punished cases of im-



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