



Honor and Violence in the Old South

Bertram Wyatt-Brown

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Hailed as a classic by reviewers and historians, Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor* now appears in abridged form under the title *Honor and Violence in the Old South*. Winner of a Phi Alpha Theta Book Award and a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in History, this is the first major reinterpretation of Southern life and custom since W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South*. It explores the meaning and expression of the ancient code of honor as whites--both slaveholders and non-slaveholders--applied it to their lives.

Wyatt-Brown argues persuasively that Southern ethical habits and traditions are the basis of regional distinctiveness and helped to perpetuate and justify the South's most cherished peculiarity: the institution of slavery. Using both literature and anthropology in innovative ways, Wyatt-Brown shows how honor affected family loyalty and community defensiveness. He also explains why, though it preceded and outlasted the demise of slavery, honor thrived on race oppression and was manifested in such violent acts as rape, lynching, and slave discipline.

The work begins with a study of Hawthorne's famous story of a tar-and-feathering, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," and ends with an authentic lynching, an absorbing and chilling example of a public shaming ritual. Between these studies of fictional and historical violence, Wyatt-Brown deals with such wide-ranging topics as childbearing, marital patterns, gentility, legal traditions, duelling, hospitality, slave discipline, lynch-law, and insurrectionary panic--all of which were matters that gave white Southerners a special sense of themselves.

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