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**Abstract**

In the early American republic, a universal honor code determined politicians' behavior in both public and private spheres. Early Americans were quick to resolve interpersonal conflicts with violence as their honor code dictated, yet their approaches to violence differed by social class. James Thomson Callender, a muckraking journalist living in the United States between 1793 and 1803, provides a useful lens for understanding honor culture in the early republic. Historians primarily recognize him for exposing the Hamilton-Reynolds and Jefferson-Hemings scandals. However, there is much more to learn from Callender's brief career in the early United States. He immigrated to the U.S. in poverty yet created honor disputes that sabotaged the public and private lives of politicians as high-status as Alexander Hamilton. Previous literature has analyzed American honor culture for its pervasiveness in the South, its influence on slavery, and its role in the behavior of early American politicians. To expand on the literature regarding honor culture, this paper analyzes violence in the career of James Callender to argue that honor was fundamental to all political behavior in the early American republic, not only for the upper classes but for society overall.

Two violent encounters, both consequences of Callender's smears, reveal varied applications of the honor rubric: a near-duel between Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe and the brutal caning of James Callender by George Hay, Callender's former defense lawyer. The Hamilton-Monroe conflict represents an honorable form of violence between gentlemen, while Callender's caning represents violence intended to dishonor a victim. Callender's career informs us of how honor dictated Americans' behavior toward one another and the consequences of dishonor for the lower classes.

**Keywords:** Alexander Hamilton**,** dueling, Early American Republic, honor culture, James T. Callender, James Monroe

**Introduction: James Callender Within Honor Culture**

Most famous for exposing the Hamilton-Reynolds and Jefferson-Hemings scandals, muckraking journalist James Thomson Callender sparked nationwide controversies that threatened the honor of public figures across the nation, and he sacrificed his own in the process. He resided in the United States between 1793 and 1803, during which he relentlessly dragged the private lives of political figures into public debate. Among his targets were national politicians, prominent members of the upper class, and fellow journalists. He lived in poverty as an exile from Scotland and faced dishonor immediately upon his arrival. Gradually, he embraced dishonor and scrutinized his opponents in the press with tactics that no other journalist dared to use. These tactics provoked conflicts between honorable men and elicited dishonorable attacks against him, demonstrating both honorable behavior and the consequences of living dishonorably.

Two violent incidents in Callender's career indicate that public figures handled violence differently depending on the social class of those involved. In particular, the near duel between Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe represents the archetypical honorable conflict, while Callender's violent persecution in an affair of honor demonstrates that honor culture applied to all members of early republic society, regardless of social class.

The political atmosphere Callender encountered in the United States festered with interpersonal conflict. He arrived in Philadelphia in search of a free press after the British government exiled him from Scotland for a libelous pamphlet entitled *The Political Progress of Britain*.[1] The political climate centered around individuals because only two fully developed political parties and a small elite population existed on the national stage. Hence, a single man represented an entire ideology. Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson emerged as the party leaders of the Federalist and Republican parties, respectively.[2] Callender's principles of Anglophobia, small government, and press freedom immediately resonated with Jeffersonians, who praised him as a champion of press freedom and a victim of despotic England. Despite his strong convictions, Callender switched political parties in 1801 after a private quarrel with Republican party leader Thomas Jefferson.[3] Callender took advantage of the increasingly

[1] Michael Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth: James Thomson Callender and America's Early National Heroes*, 43-8.
[2] While many refer to the Republican party as the Democratic-Republican party to distinguish it from the modern party of the same name, Jeffersonians (and Republicans supporting other politicians) referred to themselves as Republicans. In fact, Federalists used "democratic-republican" and "democrat" as pejoratives for Republicans. For example, the Baltimore *Republican; or, Anti-Democrat* was a Federalist newspaper whose title reclaimed the term "republican," as in supporters of the republic as a system of government, and attacked the Jeffersonian Republicans as "democrats," as in supporters of the system of government that Federalists viewed as mob rule. Throughout this paper I therefore refer to Democratic-Republicans as Republicans. For more on political parties in the early republic, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840*; Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*; Noble E. Cunningham, *The Jeffersonian Republicans in Power: Party Operations, 1801-1809*; and James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis*.
[3] Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth*, 77, 97–105. From Jefferson's perspective, he explained, "I knew [Callender] first as the author of the Political progress of Britain, a work I had read with great satisfaction, and as a fugitive from persecution for this very work." Jefferson later described Callender as the Federalists' "new recruit" and

personal political climate, symptomatic of an honor culture, to build his career on smear campaigns regardless of political party. The party switch demonstrated that he aimed to dishonor individual men more than to advance a political ideology. With accusations of marital infidelity, sexual harassment, and interracial sex, Callender antagonized the private honor of public figures and thus created private interpersonal conflict. These conflicts turned violent, whether in duels or beatings, due to a universal honor code.

In the early republic, honor was the commodity that determined political power. It was entirely personal. As historian Joanne Freeman defines it in *Affairs of Honor*, her award-winning interpretation of the early republic, "Honor was reputation with a moral dimension and an elite cast."[4] Freeman's framework of early national politics supports an understanding of Callender's career within an honor culture. She argues that honor was the underlying factor in all early national political behavior. Additionally, she outlines a set of rituals for attacking and defending honor. To attack honor was to attack someone on a personal level in public, often inciting interpersonal conflict and a public reassertion of honor. Affairs of honor required tact and awareness of the rituals for journalism, dueling, and gossip that governed national politics.[5] Callender did not have the tact characteristic of gentlemen and found trouble for himself as a result. Despite his own dishonor, conflicts following these rituals appeared throughout Callender's career.

Current scholarship has overlooked the role of the lower class in early national honor culture and the relevance of Callender overall. Outside of Joanne Freeman's work, literature on honor culture focuses primarily on its pervasiveness in the Old South and its influence on slavery. *Southern Honor* by Bertram Wyatt-Brown is a strong example of the former as it explains the South's unique propensity for dueling and the sociocultural factors involved. *Slavery and Social Death* by Orlando Patterson exemplifies literature on honor culture about slavery, as its fourth chapter views slavery in world history through the lens of honor, as Patterson considers enslavement to be the ultimate dishonor and believes that enslaved people are dishonored at birth.[6] Furthermore, *Thomas Jefferson's Education* by Alan Taylor applies honor culture to Virginia's education system. Taylor provides evidence that honor culture defined southern universities such as Thomas Jefferson's alma mater, William and Mary. Likewise, "Negotiating the Honor Culture: Students and Slaves at Three Virginia Colleges" by Jennifer Oast argues that honor culture was so intense among young southern men due to slavery. She explores how students dueled to express the pressure of honor culture and conflicts regarding the enslaved people they brought with them to college. Both Taylor and Oast analyze the same population: upper-class young southern men.[7] Bringing the idea of

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remarked that the Federalists "revolted at his filth" due to his perfidy and lowliness. "From Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, 29 May 1801," *Founders Online*, National Archives "From Thomas Jefferson to Robert R. Livingston, 10 October 1802," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0131.

[4] Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*, xx.

[5] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 170.

[6] Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*.

[7] Alan Taylor, *Thomas Jefferson's Education*; Jennifer Bridges Oast, "Negotiating the Honor Culture: Students and Slaves at Three Virginia Colleges." in *Slavery and the University: Histories and Legacies*, ed.s James T. Campbell, Alfred L. Brophy, and Leslie M. Harris, 84–97.

honor culture out west, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch" by Elliott Gorn analyzes hand-to-hand combat as the lower-class version of dueling on the frontier.[8] Gorn's article is a clever approach to violence that expands beyond the upper class.

These interpretations of honor culture all highlight regional variations rather than how the nation embraced honor culture. They leave a gap in understanding the universality of honor culture throughout the country and attempts of the lower class to participate in upper-class rituals of honor, making Callender a crucial addition to our understanding of honor in the early republic, although overlooked. Callender has appeared most in recent years as a transition into discussions of the Hamilton-Reynolds and Jefferson-Hemings affairs. Callender's only biographer, Michael Durey, calls this "the side-road assassination technique," in which an author addresses and dismisses Callender in the same paragraph, so they do not have to grapple with him and his many contradictions.[9] He remains a challenging subject due to the range of issues he introduced and his behavior as an individual. Despite this oversight, Callender's tumultuous career provides necessary context for understanding not only specific affairs of honor but also honor culture overall.

Some have argued that Freeman's framework applies only to the upper classes, but Callender demonstrates that honor dictated behavior for political outcasts as much as it did for elites. In David Waldstreicher's 2002 analysis of historiographical trends, "Founders Chic As Culture War," he points to Freeman as an example of exclusionary history. Founders chic refers to the recent trend of sensationalizing the Founding Fathers and prominent figures in the early United States while avoiding other aspects of society. Waldstreicher remarks of Freeman's approach to Callender, "Freeman herself misses the chance to investigate James Thomson Callender's exposé of the Jefferson-Hemings liaison as an honor affair: perhaps because it was not one, which would suggest limits to the honor rubric."[10] While it is true that Freeman largely neglects Callender, and Callender's smear campaign against Jefferson was decidedly not an affair of honor, Callender in fact reinforces Freeman's framework of honor culture as applying to the lower classes as much as the elite. The exception proves the rule, and Callender was a willing exception to the rules of honorable society. Due to the violent impacts of Callender's smear campaigns against honorable men and the dishonorable punishments he faced, Callender's departure from the norm expands Freeman's understanding of the early republic to the lower class.

Men in the early republic displayed honor through violence, making it a valuable window into early American culture. Duels were the honorable way of resolving interpersonal conflict with violence; meanwhile, canings, horse-whippings, and beatings intended to dishonor and degrade the victim.[11] As Callender embraced dishonor, he created honorable conflict and brought further dishonor to himself. Two violent encounters, both consequences of Callender's

[8] Elliott Gorn, "'Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch': The Social Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry."
[9] Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth*, 173. Examples of Callender's brief appearances include *Alexander Hamilton* by Ron Chernow and *Thomas Jefferson: The Art of Power* by Jon Meacham.
[10] David Waldstreicher, "Founders Chic As Culture War," Radical History Review 84, no. 1 (2002): 190. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/30274.
[11] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 400, 350; Jeffrey Pasley, "'A Journeyman, Either in Law or Politics': John Beckley and the Social Origins of Political Campaigning," 538.

smears, reveal varied applications of the honor rubric: a near-duel between Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe and the brutal caning of James Callender by George Hay, Callender's former defense lawyer. The Hamilton-Monroe conflict represents an honorable form of violence between gentlemen, while Callender's caning represents violence intended to dishonor a victim. Callender's career informs us of how honor dictated Americans' behavior toward one another and the consequences of dishonor for the lower classes.

**Honorable Violence: Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe**

Alexander Hamilton had been confronted about suspicious financial activity before, but only when Callender brought it into the public eye did it lead to an affair of honor. In December 1792, Senator James Monroe, Representative Abraham Venable, and Speaker of the House Frederick Muhlenberg approached Hamilton with the accusation that he had committed improper speculation with notorious criminal James Reynolds. Reynolds had been arrested for fraud, and transactions between Hamilton and Reynolds raised alarm among Republicans in Congress. Hamilton perplexed the congressmen when he admitted that the transactions were, in fact, not for speculation but were bribes for Hamilton to continue a sexual relationship with Reynolds's wife. Hamilton believed that the congressmen were satisfied with his explanation, but Callender proved that wrong a few years later when he exposed the affair with Jefferson's encouragement.[12]

In 1796, Thomas Jefferson approached Callender with $15.14 for copies of the pamphlet that threatened Hamilton's career as soon as it was published: *The History of the United States for 1796*. The *History* contained a commentary on the nation's political climate, ranging from foreign policy to soldiers' compensation, but gave Hamilton's affair with Maria Reynolds as much attention as it did to politics.[13] Most importantly, the *History* contained six of Muhlenberg's memoranda from when he confronted Hamilton in 1792. Callender's central argument was that Hamilton had been committing improper speculation and manufactured the evidence of his relationship with Maria Reynolds as a smokescreen for his true crime. As for the documents from Muhlenberg, Monroe, and Venable, Republican Clerk of the House John Beckley most likely provided Callender with them. Beckley was embittered because the newly Federalist-dominated House did not reelect him for the clerkship position he had held since 1789. Moreover, the clerkship guaranteed Beckley access to private congressional records such as Muhlenberg's memoranda.[14] Regardless of the actual source of the information, Hamilton believed that Monroe was responsible, and he was determined to hold him accountable. The support of prominent Republican politicians allowed Callender to undermine Hamilton's private life in a way that challenged his honor.

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[12] "Printed Version of the "Reynolds Pamphlet", 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0138-0002.

[13] "The history of the United States for 1796; including a variety of interesting particulars relative to the federal government previous to that period." https://name.umdl.umich.edu/N24129.0001.001. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Pages 190-255 regard Hamilton's affair.

[14] Noble E. Cunningham, "John Beckley: An Early American Party Manager," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1956): 40–52, https://doi.org/10.2307/1923388, 49-51.

As a high-profile politician and man of honor, society required Hamilton to defend himself according to the honor code. The knowledge that Republicans gossiped about Hamilton's affair haunted him, but it did not truly damage his honor until Callender brought the charges to the public when he published the *History*.[15] He turned Hamilton's private vice into a political matter and therefore threatened Hamilton's personal honor. In July 1797, Hamilton arrived at James Monroe's house demanding answers about the *History*. He brought with him John Barker Church, his brother-in-law, to act as an arbitrator. Monroe had David Gelston, a Republican ally, with him to negotiate on his behalf and ease tensions. Gelston's diary described the tension of the meeting driven by Hamilton's distress over his private life. According to Gelston, Hamilton panicked because the matter was one in which "his character the peace & reputation of his Family were so deeply interested…"[16] Callender had exposed Hamilton's private life, pushing him to hold someone accountable. Hamilton demanded that Monroe admit to providing Callender with the documents, but Monroe refused. Monroe claimed that he was in Philadelphia when the *History* was released. He was allegedly sorry to see that the documents had been published but had no part in their publication. In Gelston's account, Hamilton retorted:

> this as your representation is totally false…
> the Gentlemen both instantly rose Colo M. rising first and saying do you say I represented falsely, you are a Scoundrel—Colo H. said I will meet you like a Gentleman Colo M Said I am ready get your pistols, both said we shall not or it will not be settled any other way…[17]

When Monroe may have threatened Hamilton's honor with the documents, Hamilton threatened Monroe's honor by calling him a liar. Monroe called Hamilton a "scoundrel," and both agreed that violence would settle the matter. The code of honor defined a lie and a physical blow as "the two greatest offences."[18] Since Hamilton asserted that Monroe lied to him about providing Callender with the documents, Monroe, as a man of honor, knew he had to defend himself with a challenge.

During the initial challenge, Hamilton and Monroe indicated that they knew how to operate an affair of honor. They demonstrated this not only by knowing the grounds for a duel but also by using the proper logistics. A duel consisted of two principals and two seconds, the principals in this case being Hamilton and Monroe, the seconds being John Barker Church and David Gelston. The principals initiated the conflict and wielded the pistols, while seconds worked as arbitrators by carrying messages to one another, interpreting aggression in

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[15] Jefferson's private journal of the Washington administration, the Anas, indicates that he knew about the Hamilton-Reynolds affair in 1792. Franklin Sawvel, ed., *The Complete Anas of Thomas Jefferson* (New York, NY: Round Table Press, 1903), 100.

[16] "David Gelston's Account of an Interview between Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe, 11 July 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0093.

[17] "David Gelston's Account of an Interview between Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe, 11 July 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives. For a description and compiled documents involved in the Monroe-Hamilton dispute, see Stello and Good, "The Near-Duel Between James Monroe and Alexander Hamilton," https://academics.umw.edu/jamesmonroepapers/2015/09/03/the-near-duel-between-james-monroe-and-alexander-hamilton.

[18] John Norris, *Pistols at Dawn*, 79; Archibald Williams Patterson, *The Code Duello, with Special References to the State of Virginia*, 66.

correspondence, and enforcing safety if the conflict did result in a duel.[19] Hamilton's challenge gave Monroe the chance to demonstrate his knowledge of these rules, and, if negotiations failed, they would meet face-to-face with weapons of equal strength. Even Monroe's immediate response to the challenge indicated Monroe's knowledge of dueling etiquette. When Hamilton declared "I will meet you like a gentleman," Monroe knew that a "meeting" involved pistols, and quickly ordered Hamilton to prepare his weapons.[20] Hamilton's challenge indicated respect from one honorable man to another as both displayed their gentility on the spot.

Within the honor code, duels were an honorable approach to violence because they provided both adversaries with equal footing. Joanne Freeman explains that any threat to a man's "private character" demanded "a demonstration of honor, bravery, and self-sacrifice that would vindicate his character and justify his claim to leadership."[21] In the early republic, the proper way to demonstrate one's honor, bravery, and self-sacrifice was with a challenge to a duel. While this reflex may seem violent, men typically used duel proceedings as a time to demonstrate their knowledge of social expectations rather than to physically harm their rival. The *code duello* codified these expectations. Adopted in Ireland in 1777, the *code duello* contained twenty-six rules for preserving honor; it outlined which insults and offenses required a duel to defend one's honor, how to communicate once proceedings had begun, and how to ensure a fair duel if two men met on the field.[22] John Lyde Wilson printed the Irish *code duello* alongside an original American code of honor in his 1838 *The Code of Honor*. Wilson had not been aware of the *code duello* until a friend showed him a version that had been published in 1824, but his American code of honor was strikingly similar, suggesting that Americans had long acted according to the code.[23] Even in a code for dueling, Wilson discouraged violence. Americans developed the code of honor to *prevent* violence. Wilson prefaced, "That if wrong be done to another, it was more an act of heroism and bravery to repair the injury, than to persist in error, and enter into mortal combat with the injured party."[24] If a man correctly abided by the code of honor, he would never actually meet on the dueling ground.

Hamilton and Monroe abided by these expectations and cleanly avoided a duel. Following the *Code Duello*, Freeman outlines the next steps for gentlemen: "Once an insult had been proffered, the insulted party was supposed to request an explanation from his offender, giving him the chance to clear up any misunderstanding or misrepresentation."[25] Monroe followed expectations and wrote to Hamilton asking "if [his] object is to render this affair a personal one."[26] Whether or not a conflict was an affair of honor often depended on language and tone. Traditionally, the principals would consult with their seconds to analyze the phrasing

[19] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 177–179; John Lyde Wilson, "The Code of Honor; or, Rules For The Government of Principles And Seconds in Duelling."
[20] "David Gelston's Account of an Interview between Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe, 11 July 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives.
[21] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 172.
[22] Wilson, "The Code of Honor," 33-44.
[23] Wilson, "The Code of Honor," 33.
[24] Wilson, "The Code of Honor," 9.
[25] Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 176.
[26] "James Monroe to Alexander Hamilton, July 25, 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

and tone of letters before proceeding. Monroe wrote to Aaron Burr to determine if one of Hamilton's letters constituted a formal challenge or if Hamilton had interpreted a challenge and accepted it. Monroe emphasized that he did not want to "persecute this man," but, as a man of honor, he could not concede to Hamilton. He outlined travel plans and his family situation to demonstrate that, although he did not want to duel, he was prepared for it to become a reality. Later that month, Monroe authorized Burr to close the affair of honor, at which point Hamilton formally recognized its termination to Monroe:

> The intention of my letter… was to meet and close with an advance towards a personal interview, which it appeared to me had been made by you.
> From the tenor of your reply of the 6th, which disavows the inference I had drawn, any further step on my part, as being inconsistent with the ground I have heretofore taken, would be improper.[27]

Hamilton explained his interpretation of Monroe's letters as a challenge and withdrawal due to the "tenor." Hamilton only withdrew when he believed that Monroe had withdrawn, and they closed the affair with neither man jeopardizing their honor. Nowhere do the correspondents use the word "duel." They relied on phrases such as "interview," "honor," "satisfaction," "conversation," and "challenge." This was the gentlemanly approach to violence, and they resolved the affair accordingly. Hamilton's reaction to Callender indicates that attacks on Hamilton's personal life were attacks on his honor. The resulting affair of honor with Monroe exemplifies gentlemanly proceedings surrounding violence and honor rituals. Although he was not present, Callender's writing and access to information brought public figures to threaten each other's lives over matters that had as much to do with family as finances. Neither Hamilton nor Monroe sacrificed his honor during their negotiations.

After the confrontation, Hamilton responded to the *History* with the "Reynolds Pamphlet", announcing his marital infidelity to the world.[28] The "Reynolds Pamphlet" was a lengthy self-exposé in which Hamilton denied the charges of improper speculation by meticulously documenting his affair with Maria Reynolds as the real explanation for his suspicious transactions. Callender's claims threatened Hamilton's integrity to the extent that Hamilton asserted, "Of all the vile attempts which have been made to injure my character that which has been lately revived in No. V and VI, of the history of the United States for 1796 is the most vile."[29] Documents V and VI both implied that Hamilton was guilty of improper speculation rather than marital infidelity. Hamilton successfully defended his honor when faced with violence, although he forfeited his honor publicly. Hamilton and Monroe settled their differences like gentlemen and followed the strict procedures imposed upon men in the early republic.

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[27] "Alexander Hamilton to James Monroe, August 9, 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives.

[28] The actual title of the Reynolds Pamphlet is *Observations on Certain Documents Contained in No. V & VI of "The History of the United States for the Year 1796," In Which the Charge of Speculation against Alexander Hamilton, Late Secretary of the Treasury, is Fully Refuted. Written by Himself*. "Printed Version of the "Reynolds Pamphlet", 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0138-0002.

[29] "Printed Version of the "Reynolds Pamphlet", 1797," *Founders Online*, National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0138-0002.

**Dishonorable Violence: James Callender and George Hay**

As a dishonorable individual, Callender's experience with violence could not have been more different. One assault on Callender occurred in December 1802 after he switched political parties due to a personal conflict, sacrificing the relationship that had provided the foundation for his career altogether. Callender had written *The Prospect Before Us*, a pamphlet criticizing John Adams, on behalf of Jefferson during the Adams administration. The *Prospect* landed Callender in jail for sedition, and he expected compensation from Jefferson upon his release. To Callender's disappointment, Jefferson refused to provide him with a job and pay for his fine in full.[30] In retaliation, Callender joined the *Richmond Recorder*, a Federalist newspaper, and used it to accuse Jefferson of interracial sex and the sexual assault of a close friend's wife.[31]

Callender made other enemies along the way, especially among his former allies. George Hay, James Monroe's son-in-law and a prominent Virginia lawyer, launched a merciless attempt on Callender's honor and life. Hay beat him with a cane several times in front of a bookshop. The nature of the attack, a caning, did not afford Callender the opportunity to fight back. Worse yet, the beating was in public, further dishonoring Callender by showing that he not only deserved such treatment but was incapable of defending himself. Hay struck in December 1802, at the height of Callender's retaliation against his former Republican allies, his smear campaign against Jefferson, and his newspaper war with Meriwether Jones of the *Examiner*. Like many of Callender's opponents, Hay had once been his ally; in fact, Hay had served as Callender's defense lawyer during his sedition trial two years earlier.[32] Their relationship soured after Callender switched parties and grew resentful toward Monroe and other Virginia Republicans.

Callender attacked Hay in the *Recorder* without concern for violent consequences. Their conflict began in April 1802, when Callender accused Hay of insulting Henry Pace, Callender's partner at the *Recorder*, under the pseudonym "Hortensius."[33] Hay denied being Hortensius, but Callender pursued a months-long quarrel. In December, Callender ridiculed Hay's classical education, high status, and "ignorant and dastardly conduct."[34] Callender's accusations were particularly sensitive because of the honor code. Hay followed in his father-in-law's footsteps and resorted to violence when accused of lying. As outlined in the *code duello*, a lie was the greatest insult.[35] Hay then felt obligated to respond. According to Hay, these were "wanton and unprovoked malignity, endeavors to wound the feelings, and blast the character of an

[30] Jefferson declines to pay Callender's fine and provide him with a job in "To Thomas Jefferson from James Thomson Callender, 12 April 1801," *Founders Online*, National Archives.
[31] Durey, *With the Hammer of Truth*, 157-162.
[32] Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase, a strong Federalist, presided over *United States v. Callender*. Chase harassed and interrupted Hay during the trial until Hay refused to proceed and Callender's entire defense counsel withdrew. With no legal defense, Callender went to jail. James Morton Smith, *Freedom's Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties*, 354; United States Circuit Court, *Trial of James Thompson Callender: For Sedition, on Tuesday the Third Day of June, 1800, in the Middle Circuit Court at Richmond, in the District of Virginia*, 59–60.
[33] Richmond *Recorder*, April 17, 24, 1802.
[34] Richmond *Recorder*, December 15, 1802.
[35] Wilson, "The Code of Honor," 9.

individual, while he thramples on the peace, and happines of families." [sic].[36] Hay condemned Callender's willingness to attack individual reputations and private families, seeing it as proof that Callender lacked any sense of honor. Hay asserted that he would openly admit to any wrongdoing if guilty, but he denied Callender's accusations and claimed the right to defend himself.[37] He was arguing that he did not attack Callender's honor with a lie and it was an attack on his own honor to assert that he did. The following month, Hay argued that he was right to cane Callender of "motives the most natural and honorable to the human mind, the protection of his own feelings, and those of his family." Hay felt his honor threatened with Callender's attacks and the involvement of his family.

Hay's self-defense began with a threat. Callender and Hay met on the morning of December 15, 1802, to discuss their quarrel. After establishing their mutual hatred, Hay snapped, "if your treatment of some other persons had been applied to me, YOU SHOULD NOT BE LIVING." Hay threatened him with death directly, devoid of the respect that Hamilton gave to Monroe when he said he would meet him like a gentleman. Nonetheless, they parted ways with the agreement that Hay would ignore Callender if Callender ignored him.[38] In Callender fashion, he did not, and reported the incident on the same day with enough vitriol to make Hay lash out. Their first encounter demonstrated the lack of respect Hay had for Callender.

Callender planned to elaborate on his meeting with Hay in the next issue of the *Recorder*, but they had a more urgent encounter within the week. On December 20th, Hay attempted to deliver on his threat. He beat Callender with a cane several times in front of a bookshop. Callender burst out in the Recorder, "The cowardly villain (it was George Hay), came *behind my back!* Without a moment's warning he struck me over the forehead." Hay attacked from behind and he did not give Callender the chance to fight back. The beating was severe enough that Callender believed he would have died if not for a high crowned hat protecting his skull. He believed the hat was a "mere species of foppery" until it saved his life.[39] Worse yet for Callender, Hay caned him in public. Callender recalled that a crowd gathered around as he tried to defend himself with a bundle of books. The beating lasted nearly two minutes until Hay abandoned the scene. Callender, left bleeding on the ground, had been thoroughly humiliated.

Callender attempted to use the assault and its publicity to attack Hay's character. He shamed Hay for attacking from behind and refusing to give him a fair fight. Callender claimed that he could have strangled Hay and defended himself if Hay had given him the opportunity, but Hay was too cowardly to face him. Callender mocked Hay's courage, "…now he goes home to his respectable wife, and plumes himself upon his heroism in striking me before I had leisure to take him by the throat." [sic][40] Callender was attacking Hay's physical strength and domestic capability, which appealed to the American concept of male virtue. Hay's method of attack, Callender believed, was cowardly and unworthy of a family's respect.

After the attack, Callender emphasized the trauma Hay had caused him. The attack was humiliating but he attempted to use it as a tool to guilt an audience. On January 12th, 1803, he confessed to his readers that he had not been able to write because of his injuries. He claimed

[36] *Commercial Register*, January 4, 1803.
[37] *Commercial Register*, January 4, 1803.
[38] *Recorder*, December 15, 1802.
[39] *Recorder*, December 22, 1802.
[40] *Recorder*, December 22, 1802.

to have gone blind in one eye and that his hand, which had gotten a cut two days prior to the attack, was still healing. Callender apologized that the article would be incoherent because he was too injured to read his own manuscript. He was in "a situation almost as critical as any which the human mind can conceive."[41] He advertised his suffering to paint Hay in a crueler light. Over four months later, when subscribers claimed that the *Recorder* had declined in quality, Callender agreed and pointed to Hay as the cause. He stated that he never fully recovered his senses because of "an accident" which led him to faint three times in only a few hours and lose four pounds of blood.[42] His readers would have known that he referred to the assault from Hay. Callender's drama was an attempt to gain sympathy. However, he contradicted the standard of male virtue by constantly portraying himself as a victim and humiliated himself further. Hay's attack served its purpose of degrading Callender's honor.

The form of Hay's attack was the greatest dishonor to Callender because it did not allow Callender to negotiate on the spot. A meeting would have provided Callender with some respect and allowed him to negotiate. Hay did provide Callender with the opportunity. Callender rejected Hay's attempt to settle the matter in a meeting. Callender originally had bargaining power when Hay gave him the opportunity to stop insulting him in exchange for safety. Later, Hay referred to the caning as an "accidental meeting." Callender argued that "There was no meeting; for you do not meet a man, when you only come behind his back."[43] He found the attempt on his life an attempt on his honor as a man; it was dehumanizing. This was especially true in the South where hierarchies were rigidly defined. The weapon of choice, a cane, equated Callender with servants and enslaved people. Gentlemen caned servants, not other gentlemen. While duels and hand-to-hand combat allowed both parties to show respect for one another, beatings and horse whippings expressed that the victim was beneath notice. The style of violence degraded Callender to a lower status.[44] Hay and Monroe reacted to the same insult, a liar, but Callender's status and behavior made the difference in the outcome. When Hamilton demanded that Monroe grab his pistols, he was prompting Monroe to defend himself. When Walker demanded a document from Jefferson to preserve his honor, he was giving Jefferson a chance to comply before turning to violence. Meanwhile, a caning did not give Callender the privilege of self-defense or negotiation. Hay dehumanized Callender when he beat him.

**Conclusion: The Universality of Honor Culture**

As we recollect American history, respectable historical figures initiated duels. In fact, some duels, such as the duel between Hamilton and Aaron Burr, are enshrined in history largely for the figures' personalities and the interactions leading to the duel. Callender can never

[41] In Callender's first report of the attack, he bemoaned that "Hay had the meanness to aim his bludgeon at a finger, which, two days ago, had been accidentally cut." *Recorder*, December 22, 1802. James Cheetham of the *Republican Watch-Tower* mocked Callender's drama over the cut on his finger. *Republican Watch-Tower*, January 1, 1803.

[42] *Recorder*, May 28, 1803. Hay referred to the attack as an "accidental meeting." *Recorder*, February 2, 1803.

[43] *Recorder*, February 2, 1803.

[44] Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 400, 350; Jeffrey Pasley, "'A Journeyman, Either in Law or Politics': John Beckley and the Social Origins of Political Campaigning," 538.

receive this level of fame, however, in part because violence dishonored him so much. A comparison between a duel and a beating reveals the role of class and the universality of honor culture. Everyone was subject to cultural expectations in an honor culture, but for lower-class individuals like Callender, this often meant facing brutality. Furthermore, a comparison between politicians' near-duel and Callender's near-murder distinguishes between an affair of honor and a successful attempt to dishonor. The conclusions of the conflicts equally show the discrepancy in honor. Hamilton never faced actual violence because he and Monroe knew how to maneuver an elite social code. Callender, however, suffered violently and never recovered. The two violent incidents reveal how honorable and dishonorable men functioned within a universal honor culture. Overall, Callender and the violence he provoked show how dishonor manifests and how it distinguishes the honorable and the dishonorable.

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