

This week's readings explore the practice of dueling in early Canada, and the patriarchal structures that supported and even romanticized its use. For the purposes of this journal entry, questions of why people participated in duels, how it's used was perceived, and what it said about Upper Canadian society will be explored. The literature suggests that while this hyper masculine means of conflict resolution existed outside of the law, the legal system at the time often accommodated notions of honor in its rulings.

Cecilia Morgan suggests that people participated in duels in Early Canada in an effort to restore honor in the face of perceived insult, injury, or humiliation<sup>1</sup>. Dueling re-enforced the existing legal system by allowing paternalistic cultural norms to underpin and provide context to existing laws, thus developing and maintaining structures of power<sup>2</sup>. Those who supported dueling generally felt that as long as the event was acted out according to the "Code", the law should not be factored in to its value system; those who opposed dueling saw it as brutish and without merit, and later this opposition portrayed shifting attitudes towards gender, race, and class<sup>3</sup>. The history of dueling reveals a strong desire on behalf of the patriarchy to establish dominance and structural oppression of lower classes, and in particular, uphold traditional values in terms of gender roles. Indeed, the motivation for dueling as revealed in Bown's article reflects the opposing parties' desire to correct a perceived injustice and re-establish honor; the outcome, however, is a relatively hollow victory despite the resulting acquittal<sup>4</sup>.

Contemporary views on dueling may consider romantic notions of its practice as it has been portrayed in old fashioned spaghetti western films; dueling as a fantastic display of masculinity and righteousness. In reality though, its use re-enforced the use of violence as a tool to combat perceived threats to manhood, and its function outside the law applied only to men of a certain status.

## Notes

1 Cecilia Morgan. "‘In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour’: Duelling in Upper Canada." *The Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (1995): 529-562. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

2 Cecilia Morgan. "‘*In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour*’ The Canadian Historical Review.

3 Ibid.

4 Bown, Stephen R. 1999. "Pistols at Six O'clock." *Beaver* 79, no. 4: 22. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost.

## References

Cecilia Morgan. "In Search of the Phantom Misnamed Honour': Duelling in Upper Canada." *The Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 4 (1995): 529-562. <https://muse.jhu.edu/> (accessed November 9, 2016).

Bown, Stephen R. 1999. "Pistols at Six O'clock." *Beaver* 79, no. 4: 22. *America: History & Life*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 9, 2016).