

Dueling Logic



*In 1838, former South Carolina Governor John Lyde Wilson published *The Code of Honor; or, Rules for the Government of Principals and Seconds in Duelling*.*

Assume you are a widely respected lawyer and landed gentleman in Charleston, South Carolina in 1838, and you are determined to follow the Code of Honor as Wilson described it.

1. To your face, a store-clerk--rather than asking you when he might expect payment for an overdue bill--says that he doubts you have ever intended to pay it. What should your response be?
 - Take out a pistol and threaten to shoot him, unless he immediately apologizes.
 - Ignore the insult as unworthy of notice and take your business elsewhere.
 - Later that day, have your Second ask him for an explanation. If the response conveyed to you is not satisfactory, challenge the clerk to a duel.
 - Immediately beat the clerk with a cane or a horsewhip for his insolence, or have your servant do it.
2. During an evening at a tavern with your long-time acquaintances, the political discussion becomes heated and one of the party intimates strongly but vaguely that the local opposition party leadership (of which you are a member) clings to power because of its willingness to offer bribes. What should you do about it?
 - Nothing at the time and nothing in front of other people. Avoid mentioning it then, but send a respectful letter through a Second to the other person shortly thereafter, asking for an explanation of his actions or words.
 - Call the attention of other witnesses to the insult just after it happens. Leave the scene immediately and send a written challenge to a duel to the person who insulted you.
 - Confront the other person immediately, explaining that he has impugned your honor. Slap his face with a glove or your hand, and tell him that your Second will deliver a demand to him for a duel to settle the matter.
3. You have been sent a note asking for an explanation of your words or actions, but you refuse to respond satisfactorily and repeatedly ignore the challenger's request for an explanation or his later challenge to a duel. What is likely to happen next?
 - You and your friends have a good chuckle over it all and get back to your work, knowing that dueling is unlawful.

- You send the challenger's note to the local police requesting a judge to issue an injunction against the challenger to stay away from you.
 - The challenger posts a notice in a public place, naming you as a coward who is unwilling to defend his honor. As a consequence, your friends shun you, your business fails, and any political aspirations you may have had are now finished. Your family is shamed by their loss of honor.
4. You have sent a note, asking for explanation for someone's words that have offended your honor. In a note of reply, the person explains that he was intoxicated when he said what you found offensive. Is that the end of the matter?
- Yes. Gentlemen may not have been excused by the law from criminal actions that they perpetrated when drunk, but the point of honor with other gentlemen was satisfied when the offender stated that he had been intoxicated.
 - No. In order to satisfy your honor, the offender was obliged, not only to state in reply to you that he was intoxicated, but also to disavow explicitly the insulting words.
5. Someone strikes you, but then soon apologizes. Is that all that honor demands?
- Yes. A heartfelt apology, publicly offered, is to be accepted in a spirit of Christian forgiveness. The honor of both parties is preserved.
 - No, that is not enough. Words alone cannot satisfy for a blow offered first.
6. Apart from the Principals and their Seconds, who should be present on the ground during a duel?
- The duelers' families.
 - Members of the local constabulary.
 - The duelers' ministers or priests.
 - Surgeons and their assistants.
 - The general public.
7. If you are the Principal in a duel and you come onto the ground but then refuse to fight or to continue the fight when required--or you leave the site altogether--what should your Second do?
- Step in and take your place in the duel to uphold your honor.
 - Try to determine from you the reasons for your actions, explain them to the other Principal and Second, and negotiate the best settlement possible.
 - Ask for mercy from the other Principal on your behalf.
 - Say to the other Second: "I have come upon the ground with a coward. I tender you my apology for an ignorance of his character." Then tell him and the other Principal that they may publicly post your name as a coward.

8. As Principal, you appear with your Second at the appointed time and place for the duel. The other Principal also appears with his Second and offers you an apology for his insult. Is your honor satisfied?

- Yes. The whole point is the reconciliation of disputes.
- No. At this point the dispute cannot be settled with a mere apology, for the other Principal has placed you in a trying situation far beyond the initial insult. The duel must proceed.

9. Is honor satisfied if one or both of the Principals "delopes"--that is, deliberately fires into the air or into the ground to avoid harming each other, or to show their magnanimity?

- Yes. It is sufficient, and in many cases, laudable.
- No. This is not admissible.

10. After an exchange of shots and neither one of the Principals is hit, can the duel be ended with honor served?

- No, never. The Principals must reload and continue firing until one of them is hit.
- Yes, always. The exchange of shots proves each Principal's willingness to defend his honor.
- Yes, sometimes, depending on whether the Challenger feels that his honor has been satisfied.

Sources:

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