

Has the concept of honor become too difficult to understand?

by Robert Wilson

With the morning mist still on the Hudson River, and the sun just kissing the cliff tops of the New Jersey Palisade, Aaron Burr, Vice President of the United States shot and killed former Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Political opponents for years, the duellists faced each other after Burr sent these words to Hamilton: "Political opposition can

never absolve gentlemen from the necessity of a rigid adherence to the laws of honor."

Once upon a time people were motivated by honor. Acquiring it, maintaining it, defending it. Bitter duels were fought in its name. I don't hear much talk about honor anymore.

Could it be the concept of honor is too difficult to understand? Is it truly ineffable – im-

possible to define – to the point that no one really knows what it means? As a virtue, it has certainly taken a beating when some cultures identify the murder of family members as an "honor killing," and when criminals such as the Mafia call themselves "men of honor."

I looked it up in the Webster Dictionary and found the words "reputation" and "integrity." But, honor seems to be more than

that. It is similar to the definition of character which is: "what you do when no one is watching." Again, it must be more than that. So, I researched what some historical figures said about it. Most of them described honor by what it is not.

Thomas Jefferson said, "Nobody can acquire honor by doing what is wrong." OK, we'll assume he means you must do what is right or good. The prob-

lem may be that by today's standards those are up for debate.

The ancient Greek playwright, Sophocles, also tells us what not to do, but at the same time defines what is wrong: "Rather fail with honor than succeed by fraud."

Which reminds me of my favorite quote from *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini: "There

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