Literature has the power of relevance, especially in plays. Plays are literary works that have the capacity to be birthed to life. The prominence of the power of relevance frames the essence of plays. It weaves itself deep into the hearts of the audience and stirs a sense of connectedness between the audience and the play. In return, the play seems to take on a new significance to audience. The play holds a relevance that only each audience member can describe. In *The Whipping Man* by Matthew Lopez, Lopez uses the power of relevance to portray different cultural and historical perspectives.

The theme of the aftermath of war within the play relates to present day. In *The Whipping Man*, war seems to leave a shattered trail of brokenness in the DeLeon household. Culturally, war has glaring effects on people. According to an article by H.A. Goodman in the Huffington Post published on September 17, 2014, there have been 4,486 American soldier casualties in Iraq. That does not include the 2,345 men and women who fought and died in Afghanistan. The projected cost of the war racks up to roughly $6 trillion (Goodman, “4,486 American”). Americans are living through the aftermath of war. Men and women constantly worry for their loved ones fighting for America. They fear whether their wives or husbands will return unscathed mentally and physically. The stories of American soldiers returning with post-traumatic stress run rampant. The aftermath of war left it scars on Caleb in *The Whipping Man*, as well. Physically, he lost his leg. His short stichomythic, fragmented lines can be analyzed as an inner brokenness, mentally. It can resemble an after effect of war. He even loses his Jewish religion while away at war. Caleb’s physical, mental, and religious losses have been seen in many different men and women who have served overseas in wars.
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The Whipping Man enlightens the audience on racial tensions, also. The racial tensions are seen flagrantly in the relationships between master and slave. Race is blatantly present in the scene in which John tells Caleb that he is going to New York. There are some underlying racial tensions behind the doubts Caleb has that John will make it there safely. Also, the terms “nigger” and “cracker” are used frequently to accentuate the racial differences between John, Simon, and Caleb. The violence that lies behind these tensions is expressed as slaves are sent to the Whipping Man if they do not behave properly. The Whipping Man even elaborates on biracial relationships. Caleb’s love for Sarah transcends racial boundaries in the play. Racial tension culturally divides people. The racial strain in The Whipping Man seems to hold historical significance that translates into today’s world.

Racial tensions plagues today’s society, too. One cannot go on Facebook, Twitter, or Yik Yak without different races trying to establish whose more superior. One cannot watch the news without seeing an African American male being gunned down in the streets by Caucasian police officers. Racial tensions existed over the holidays of 2014 on Clemson’s campus as a fraternity and sorority had a party called “Merry Cripmas”. The tensions are clearly defined on apps like Yik Yak where people can post anonymous updates. In the South, some older people still cast disapproving looks at biracial couples. The history of racial tautness still remains.

Religious identity is pertinent in both The Whipping Man and present-day society. In The Whipping Man, religion plays a major part in the DeLeon household’s actions. Even after war, they try to participate in religious traditions, such as Seder. It is quite ironic how many edible items on the Seder plate are meant to symbolize the Jews being
led out of Israel as Simon and John still remain as “slaves” behind the DeLeon doors. They even sing an old Jewish song together in honor of Seder. Simon and John seem the most impacted by religion. These characters may remind the audience of certain family members who are instinctively religious and generates hedonic value. Aforementioned, Caleb states that he does not pray anymore because of the horrible things he saw at war. In today’s Southern culture, religious identity is still a gargantuan aspect. On a nice drive, one passes a Church on almost every street corner. Some of the South is even known as the “Bible Belt”. According to an article by Niraj Chokshi published in the Washington Post on December 12, 2013, the South’s major religion is Christian (Chokshi, “Religion in”). So many people identify with religion, especially during hard times just like in the post-war setting of The Whipping Man.

In The Whipping Man, the characters struggle with an overbearing, looming fear of freedom. This could truly explain why Simon and John are the only ones who remain in the DeLeon household. Without the watchful eye of the DeLeon family, they could have easily left the house and started new lives for themselves. Something greater than duty kept them from leaving and it was fear. Simon is only able to leave at the end because his love for his family overpowers his fear of freedom. John and Caleb are unable to leave because their fear of freedom is greater than their love of anything outside of the house. Many people in the world today are afraid to be free. This explains the Stockholm Syndrome phenomenon. Women are afraid of fleeing for freedom in cultures that oppress them. Captives of the human trafficking are afraid of trying to break free. Their fear of freedom keeps them shackled to their masters.
The Whipping Man’s popularity can be attributed to the power of relevance it holds culturally and historically. Many members of the audience may very well be dealing with the aftermath of war and how it can negatively impact the lives of those who served. In today’s society, racial issues plagues social media and every day life. The audience is able to watch scenes that deals with racial tensions and connect them to their past experiences and life. People are able to associate their religious identity to the DeLeon household’s religious identity within the play. They may see a resemblance of the characters in The Whipping Man to memorable figures in their own lives. People see the fear of freedom in their own lives among Simon, John, and Caleb. The relevance to every day life in the play creates a sense of connectedness that resonates with the audience and propels The Whipping Man into its growing fame.