Preserving historic buildings can have many purposes, including honoring proud moments in our history as well as acknowledging and redressing shameful ones. The preservation of Antebellum buildings, buildings with an architectural style from the pre-Civil War era that often features symmetrical brick or white-washed façades and columns in a Greek revival style, has been as especially fraught issue. In the present work, we contribute to this conversation by examining the psychological costs of preserving Antebellum buildings such as restored or preserved Plantations. In two studies (Ns=166 and 165, respectively), Black participants rated Antebellum but not New American architecture more negatively than White participants. They reported liking Antebellum architecture less and feeling less welcome in it. Further, Black (but not White) participants spontaneously mentioned racism/slavery when viewing Antebellum architecture. Interestingly, this pattern was also found for modern-built Antebellum architecture. This suggests it is not Antebellum buildings per se but Antebellum architecture and the ideologies it evokes that may be problematic. Next, we examined potential moderators of this effect. In Study 3, Black participants (N=81) read about an Antebellum museum with one of two missions, one devoted to reconstructing the museum for historical accuracy, common to historical museums, and the other to addressing and informing visitors about the era’s slavery. Participants also saw pictures of either a predominantly White or Black Board of Visitors. We found that only in the addressing slavery condition with a predominantly Black board did these Black participants report liking and feeling welcome in the museum. Importantly, they felt that museum would have more influence from and be more empowering for the Black community. The present findings have implications for interventions aimed at increasing Black Americans’ engagement with and sense of ownership in public spaces associated with Antebellum architecture. They suggest that reclaiming—and not only redeeming—spaces with such histories is important.

Antebellum homes and plantations are a part of the landscape in the American South. To many, these buildings symbolize—and even celebrate—racism and oppression. These spaces were financed by slavery, and many were sites of untold cruelty, violence, and exploitation (Adamkiewicz, 2016; Hargrove, 2009). To others, who are not thinking of these dangers and hardships, these buildings have historical significance and provide an important window into the “Old South.” They also have economic value. Plantation homes have become common travel destinations and wedding venues (Adamkiewicz, 2016; Hargrove, 2009; see also Cohen, 2019). Not surprisingly, given these divergent perceptions, the preservation of Antebellum homes and plantations is fraught. There is debate about whether we should preserve these buildings, at what cost, and what they should be used for. Importantly, if they are preserved, debates linger on how we should think about and talk about their connection to slavery.

To explore these important questions, we first discuss the discourse around this debate. Next, we consider whether and why Black and White Americans’ perceptions of Antebellum architecture might diverge. We consider a potential psychological harm of Antebellum architecture for Black people. Specifically, we ask whether Antebellum architecture—and its association with slavery—serves as a cue of belonging, leaving Black Americans feeling uncomfortable and out of place in these spaces.
The Debate over Antebellum Buildings and Monuments

Efforts to preserve Antebellum and Civil War period buildings and monuments have led to debates, protests, and counter-protests (Allais et al., 2018; Steinhauer, 2015). Opinions on what to do with Antebellum buildings and monuments range from burning down historical plantations and buildings (Young, 2019) to removing statues and markers (Broadwater, 2017; Durkin, 2018) to renaming them (Mattingly, 2018) to providing reparations for descendants of enslaved people (Hassan, 2019) to adding markers clarifying the nature of such buildings and monuments (Dimeo, 2017; cf., Allais et al., 2018; Upton, 2015) to replacing old monuments and markers with monuments that honor or people who were enslaved or descended from enslaved people (Deppen, 2018; Finley, 2019; cf., Upton, 2015). This debate has also found its way into academia. A Nature staff editorial made news worldwide for promoting the preservation of these buildings and monuments (Nature Editorial Staff, 2017). The Nature staff has since qualified and clarified its position (Campbell, 2017). Still, numerous experts published critiques of the Nature staff’s position (e.g., Washington, 2017). Clearly, this is a timely and contentious debate, both in communities and within institutions.

This debate is all the more complicated when considering the values that preserving Antebellum buildings and monuments can convey (Upton, 2015; Williams, 2020). Choosing to preserve Antebellum buildings and monuments as opposed to buildings and monuments from other eras can be seen as valuation and even approval of that era and its mores. That is because decision-makers often lack the resources to preserve all buildings, so money going toward one building project necessarily means another project going unfunded. For instance, the Weeksville Heritage Center, a historic building from one of the first free Black communities, nearly had to close when its initial requests for state funding were denied, even though state funds were used to restore numerous Revolutionary and Antebellum period buildings (Splvack, 2019). The prioritization of other Revolutionary and Antebellum era buildings and not the Weeksville Heritage Center revealed clear and real priorities. Indeed, much architectural research has shown that Black and African American communities are the primary advocates for preserving these spaces (Roberts, 2019; Wilson, 2015). National efforts to preserve Black spaces are often referred to as ‘grassroots’ operations (Roberts, 2019), suggesting that rather than being a regional problem, the deprioritization of Black spaces by funding agencies is a widespread problem. To many, it conveys the relative devaluing of historic Black communities.

Another prime example is the struggle to rebuild communities after natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina (Gafford, 2010). In 2005, Hurricane Katrina devasted New Orleans and surrounding areas. It destroyed neighborhoods and homes. Among the homes destroyed was Grass Lawn, an Antebellum mansion. Community members fundraised to rebuild Grass Lawn and faced tremendous backlash from others in the community who saw Grass Lawn as a symbol of racism. The backlash successfully stalled a bill funding its reconstruction although not for long. Ultimately, Grass Lawn was rebuilt using funds from private donors, insurance payouts, and state moneys (Burton, 2008; Phillips, 2009). Meanwhile, many homes—particularly in predominantly Black and low-income neighborhoods—and other landmarks were never rebuilt (Hamel et al., 2015; see also Brown, 2015; Williams, 2020; and Wright, 2008). Again, this reveals clear priorities, the valuation of Antebellum spaces and, in this case, the valuation of Antebellum spaces over the valuation of Black spaces (see also Bonam et al., 2016 and Williams, 2020 for more evidence for the devaluation of Black spaces).

A Focus on Architecture

Despite the debate over Antebellum architecture and monuments, little empirical research exists on the psychological impact of architectural style (cf., Coburn et al., 2020; Knoblauch, 2020; Roberts, 2019). We propose that architectural style can have significant psychological impact. Architectural styles often have clear and distinct visual features. This is certainly true of Antebellum architecture. This style often features symmetrical brick or white-washed façades and columns in a Greek revival style. In addition, architectural styles are often very closely linked to a specific era within history. This means that the connection between style and historic events are often easily drawn and readily apparent. In the case of Antebellum architecture, preserved Antebellum plantations often serve as visual backdrops for movies set in the Antebellum era (Matthews, 2015; Richard, 2015), cementing the connection between this iconic architectural style and historical period for viewers. For many, Antebellum architecture might cue thoughts of slavery and racism, which were highly intertwined with this historical era.

While many Antebellum plantations and buildings are still standing, another issue to consider is modern-day buildings that are designed and built using Antebellum architectural styles or design elements. New neighborhoods in the American South are commonly built using Antebellum architectural styles or design elements. While some might find these newer buildings beautiful and harmonious—fitting in to the landscape of the American South and its Antebellum past—others may see these houses as nostalgic for superiority, in which people long for this era and what it represented and still represents (Adamkiewicz, 2016; Allais et al., 2018; Levinson, 1996a, 2009).

The Present Work

In the present work, we consider whether Antebellum architecture holds different meanings for Black and White people in United States and what costs these different meanings could have. We draw on two lines of research. First, we draw on psychological research that suggests that Black Americans are more aware of the brutal, racist history within the United States. Work on the Marley Hypothesis by Nelson et al. (2013) has shown that Black Americans are often more knowledgeable about the history of racial oppression in the United States compared with their White counterparts (see also Bonam et al., 2019). This is especially true of Black Americans who strongly identify with their racial group, Black Americans who are more motivated and...
Race, Architecture, and Belonging: Divergent Perceptions of Antebellum Architecture

in turn more likely to pay attention to cues that might signal race-based rejection and belonging (Mendoza-Denton et al., 2008).

We also draw on psychological research that suggests that people infer whether they belong in a space based on physical cues. Work by Cheryan and colleagues (2009), for instance, has shown that Star Trek posters and soda can pyramids in computer science spaces, things that are masculine and "geeky", signal to women that they do not belong in computer science; however, replacing these items with nature posters or abstract art and water bottles can signal that they do belong (Cheryan et al., 2009). Work by Motyl and colleagues (2019), similarly, has shown that people use physical cues, such as the types of stores (e.g., chain stores vs. independent retail stores), places to gather (e.g., churches vs. bars), and modes of transportation (e.g., available parking vs. public transportation), to determine how much they like a community. Specifically, they infer the community's ideology from such cues and, in turn, they prefer communities that seem to share their own ideology (Motyl et al., 2019). Likewise, work by Schmitt and colleagues have shown that Christmas displays during the holiday season can signal to non-Christians that they do not belong in the community (Schmitt et al., 2010). To the extent that Antebellum architecture symbolizes slavery and racism more generally, it might signal to people—and Black people in particular—that they do not belong, that they are not welcome. We focus on belonging because we see belonging as an important antecedent of engagement with and sense of ownership in public spaces associated with this architecture.

Taken together, previous work suggests that Black, compared to White, Americans might be more likely to associate Antebellum architecture with slavery and racism, both because they are more likely to know the racist history of these buildings and because it is identity-relevant. If that is true, previous work also suggests that Black, compared to White, Americans will feel less welcome in Antebellum buildings. We examine this in the present work. Specifically, we formally and experimentally test these two predictions:

1. White people will perceive Antebellum architecture as relatively welcoming whereas Black people will perceive Antebellum architecture as relatively unwelcoming, and
2. these race-related differences will be related to differences in associating Antebellum architecture with slavery and racism more generally.

Study 1

In Study 1, we manipulated architectural style and then measured participants’ sense of belonging. We randomly assigned Black and White participants to consider a house built either in the modern New American ("generic") style or Antebellum style, either built in the Antebellum era or also in modern times. We predicted that Black, but not White, participants would feel less belonging in the Antebellum condition, compared to the modern New American condition. We also explored whether the era during which the Antebellum house was built matters. Here, we tested competing predictions. It could be that Black Americans perceive Antebellum houses especially negatively when the house is from that era because it more fully symbolizes slavery. Alternatively, it could be that Black Americans perceive Antebellum houses especially negatively when the house is built in modern times, perhaps because it symbolizes contemporary racism, a deliberate choice by the builder or owner today. Finally, it could be that Black Americans perceive Antebellum architecture similarly, regardless of the era during which it was constructed, perhaps because it signals racism either way.

Study 1 Method

Participants

One hundred and ninety-eight participants completed the study online using a university participant pool sample. They received course credit for their participation. For our stopping rule, we aimed to get at least 180 participants and to stop when the semester ended. Of these participants, 32 reported being neither White nor Black and were thus eliminated from our sample. We conducted our analyses on the remaining 166 participants. These participants reported being White/Caucasian/European American (45.8%) or Black/African American/Afro Caribbean (54.2%). Of these, 28.3% were women and 71.7% were men, and 92.7% grew up in the United States. Participants predominantly grew up in the Southern Atlantic region of the United States (61.1%). Their mean age was 19.69, $SD = 1.69$. A sensitivity analysis using G*Power revealed that, given our sample size, we can detect an interaction (using the convention that eta-squared = .01 is a small effect, eta-squared = .09 is a medium effect, and > .25 is a large effect).

Procedure

Participants viewed one of three photo-description pairs for our three Architecture conditions in Qualtrics. In the Old Antebellum condition, they viewed a photo of an Antebellum-style house (see Supplemental Materials) with the following description: This "Plantation" house was built in 1842. It was built in the Neo-Classical and Greek Revival style, common in that period, before the Civil War. It is located on a large property close to the heart of town. In the Modern Antebellum condition, they viewed the same house with a change to the description to indicate a more recent construction date: This "Plantation Style" house was built in 2007. It was built in the Neo-Classical and Greek Revival style, common in the period before the Civil War. It is located on a large property close to the heart of town.

In the Modern New American condition, participants viewed a photo of a Neo-Eclectic-style house (see Supplemental Materials) with the following description: This "Neo-Eclectic" house was built in 2007. It was built with elements from numerous historic styles, including the Federal and Adam House styles, common from the 1780s to the 1830s. It is located on a large property close to the heart of town.

Next, they were asked to complete a number of questions about the house and their beliefs. After those questionnaires, they completed demographic information and were
finished with the study.

Measures

**Belonging.** Participants’ feelings of belonging with the house they saw was assessed with 5 items (see Supplemental Materials) created for this study (e.g., How comfortable would you feel visiting someone who owned this house?; α = .81). Participants responded on a 5-point scale from Not at all (1) to Extremely (5).

**Spontaneous thoughts of slavery.** Participants were asked for their open-ended impressions of the house they read about and viewed (“Please take a minute to write down what you liked and didn’t like about the house.”). These were then coded based on whether they spontaneously mentioned slavery, racism, or the racial histories of the houses.

For example, one participant described the Old Antebellum house as "Loved the columns; the white paint; the large amount of land / Didn’t like the association with slavery in the past", which was coded as mentioning slavery. One participant described the Modern Antebellum house as "I don’t really like the meaning behind the house. It is beautiful; but being modeled after a plantation house is reminiscent of slavery. Gorgeous houses; but bad things occurred [sic] in these houses", which was also coded as mentioning slavery. One participant described the Modern New American house as "I liked the clean look of the house. It seemed very inviting and warm; and like a nice little family lived inside. I personally prefer more distinctive and unique houses so I would not like to live there.", which was not coded as mentioning slavery.

**Study 1 Results and Discussion**

**Belonging.** To examine the effect of Antebellum architecture on participants’ feelings of belonging, we conducted a 3 (condition: Old Antebellum, Modern Antebellum, Modern New American) x 2 (participant race: Black, White) ANOVA on our belonging composite. Results revealed a significant main effect of participant race, $F(1, 160) = 30.53, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .15, 95\% CI [.07, .25]$, such that Black, compared to White, participants reported less belonging. Contrary to prediction, results did not reveal a main effect of condition, $F(2, 160) = 2.23, p = .111, \eta^2 = .02, 95\% CI [.00, .08]$, nor an interaction, $F(2, 160) = 1.59, p = .207, \eta^2 = .02, 95\% CI [.00, .06]$, although the pattern of means was in the predicted direction. See Figure 1 (a). And indeed, exploratory analyses using Tukey’s Studentized Range Test (“Tukey”) to determine which differences were significant and which controls for Type 1 experiment-wise error rates, revealed that Black participants did not feel less belonging in the Modern New American condition but did feel less belonging in the Antebellum conditions.

**Spontaneous thoughts of slavery.** To explore the effect of architecture condition on spontaneous thoughts of slavery when viewing the architecture, we conducted a similar analysis. Results revealed a main effect of race, $F(1, 160) = 14.39, p = .0002, \eta^2 = .07, 95\% CI [.01, .16]$, a main effect of condition, $F(2, 160) = 9.46, p = .0001, \eta^2 = .09, 95\% CI [02, .18]$, and their interaction, $F(2, 160) = 3.42, p = .036, \eta^2 = .05, 95\% CI [.00, .10]$. See Figure 2 (a). Tukey tests revealed that, compared with White participants, Black participants were more likely to spontaneously think about and mention racism and slavery in the Antebellum conditions.

**Mediation.** Here, we present mediation. Specifically, we consider whether spontaneous thoughts of slavery mediated the differences between Black and White participants’ belonging. Because the moderator is a dichotomous variable, we used the approach outlined by Baron & Kenny (1986). Recall that condition predicted belonging (our outcome variable) and spontaneous thoughts of slavery (our presumed mediator). We first tested whether spontaneous thoughts of slavery predict belonging. It did, $F(1, 164) = 56.43, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .09, 95\% CI [.02, .18]$, such that thoughts of slavery and racism were associated with less belonging. Next, we conducted the 2 x 3 ANOVA on belonging as a function of condition and race once again but, this time, with spontaneous thoughts of slavery included in the model. In this analysis, race continued to be significant predictor, $F(1, 159) = 19.24, p < .0001$, thoughts of slavery and racism continued to be a predictor albeit a marginally significant one, $F(1, 159) = 5.38, p = .068$, but condition did not, $F(1, 159) = 2.02, p = .156$. In addition, the interaction remained non-significant, $F(1, 159) = 1.53, p = .220$.

Taken together, Study 1 provides evidence that Black people associate Antebellum architecture with slavery and racism. Black participants spontaneously thought of and mentioned slavery and racism when asked to write about the Antebellum houses. These associations are potentially meaningful given that they predicted belonging. Although these results are broadly consistent with our predictions, the predicted interaction between race and condition on belonging was not significant. We thus conducted Study 2 to see if differences we documented in Study 1 were replicable.

**Study 2**

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate Study 1. Study 2 differed from Study 1 in two important ways. First, we replicated Study 1 with a different university sample and, perhaps notably, one not in the American South. Second, we replicated Study 1 but with a different set of stimuli. Study 2, then, allowed us to ensure that Study 1 findings were not the result of any idiosyncratic features of Study 1 stimuli.

**Study 2 Method**

**Participants**

Two hundred and eleven participants from a university participant pool completed the study online and received course credit for participating. For our stopping rule, we

---

1 Here, we present results from an ANOVA. This is our preferred model. Because of the low counts and zeros in the New American condition, we violate assumptions of logistic regressions and the validity of that model fit is questionable.
aimed to get at least 180 participants and to stop when the semester ended. Of these participants, 46 reported not being White or Black and were thus eliminated from our sample. We conducted our analyses on the remaining 165 participants. They reported being White/Caucasian/European American (53.9%) or Black/African American (46.1%). In addition, 59.4% were women and 40.6% were men, and 90.9% were US-born. They predominantly grew up in the Midwestern part of the United States (76.4%). Participants’ mean age was 19.32, SD = 1.35. A sensitivity analysis using G*Power revealed that, given our sample size, we can detect an interaction as small as $f = .31$, which is equivalent to eta-squared = .09. In other words, we can detect a medium-sized interaction.

Procedure & Materials

Participants went through the same procedure as in Study 1. The alpha for the Belonging composite in this study was $\alpha = .86$. The Antebellum and Modern New American house images were changed to ensure that the results from Study 1 were not related to the specific stimuli used (see Supplemental Materials for Study 2 images).

Study 2 Results and Discussion

In Study 2, we replicated our Study 1 analyses, using the same analytic strategy.

Belonging. To examine the effect of architecture on belonging, we again conducted a 3 (condition: Old Antebellum, Modern Antebellum, Modern New American) x 2 (participant race: Black, White) ANOVA on our belonging composite. This analysis revealed a significant main effect of condition, $F (2, 159) = 27.37, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .21$, 95% CI [.11, .31], and a significant main effect of race, $F (1, 159) = 19.31, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .08$, 95% CI [.02, .17]. These main effects were qualified by a significant interaction, $F (2, 159) = 3.52, p = .032, \eta^2 = .03$, 95% CI [0, .09]. See Figure 1 (b). Of note, the pattern of means is quite similar to those of Study 1, and Tukey tests confirmed this. Tukey tests revealed that Black participants did not feel less belonging in the Modern New American condition but did feel less belonging in the Antebellum conditions.

Spontaneous thoughts of slavery. Similar to Study 1, analyses revealed a significant main effect of condition, $F (2, 157) = 5.02, p = .008, \eta^2 = .05$, 95% CI [.005, .13], a significant main effect of race, $F (1, 157) = 14.73, p = .0002, \eta^2 = .08$, 95% CI [.02, .17], and a significant interaction, $F (2, 157) = 3.52, p = .032, \eta^2 = .04$, 95% CI [.11, .10]. See Figure 2 (b). Tukey tests again revealed that, compared with White participants, Black participants were more likely to mention slavery and racism in the Antebellum conditions.

Mediation. As in Study 1, results suggest that Antebellum architecture led Black, but not White, participants to spontaneously think of slavery. It also led Black, but not White, participants to feel less belonging. Here, we again tested whether spontaneous thoughts of slavery mediated the effect of condition on belonging. First, we tested whether spontaneous thoughts of slavery predict belonging. A linear regression analysis suggests it did, $B = -1.14, t (1, 161) = -4.96, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .13$, 95% CI [.05, .23]. Next, we conduct the 2 x 3 ANOVA on belonging as a function of condition and race once again but, again, with spontaneous
thoughts of slavery included in the model. This analysis reveals main effects of condition, \( F(2, 156) = 18.84, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .16, 95\% CI [.06, .25] \), race, \( F(1, 156) = 11.21, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .05, 95\% CI [.004, .23] \), and spontaneous thoughts of slavery, \( F(1, 156) = 32.11, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .13, 95\% CI [.05, .23] \), but now the interaction between condition and race is only marginal, \( F(2, 156) = 2.49, p = .086, \eta^2 = .02, 95\% CI [0, .07] \). This is consistent with the notion that the effects of both condition and participant race on feelings of belonging were partly mediated by spontaneous thoughts of slavery.

Study 2 findings broadly replicated Study 1 findings. Like Study 1 participants, Black participants were more likely to associate Antebellum architecture—regardless of when it was built—with slavery and racism. And these associations were related to belonging. Indeed, in Study 2, Black participants reported less belonging in the Antebellum conditions relative to their White peers. In sum, Black participants were well-aware of the association between architectural period and style, and slavery, and this association had consequences for their belonging. White participants did not mention this association, perhaps because they were not aware of it, perhaps because it did not come up for them, and/or because it was not relevant for them and their sense of belonging. Whatever the case, Antebellum architecture had divergent effects on our Black and White participants, and detrimental effects for our Black participants.

Study 3

Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 suggest that Antebellum architecture is perceived differently by Black and White Americans; for Black Americans, these buildings are a reminder of slavery and racism and can make them feel unwelcome. One question, then, is how to improve Black people’s psychological experience of these spaces. In the American South, and even outside of it, Antebellum buildings remain and will continue to remain, if the Grass Lawn example in the introduction is any indication. And indeed, there are many practical and historical reasons not to destroy Antebellum buildings. Study 3, thus, explored ways to minimize the psychological cost of Antebellum architecture. Specifically, we examined whether redeeming and reclaiming Antebellum spaces would improve Black participants’ reactions to these buildings. By redeeming, we mean addressing the racist history of Antebellum architecture with an eye toward redressing past wrongs. Redeeming often involves making meaning out of historic conflicts or tragedies and transforming one’s experience and understanding of them (Rotella et al., 2015). By reclaiming, we mean adding Black agency over such changes; that is, we mean that improvements to these spaces must be under Black control and empowerment. Research into the needs-based model of reconciliation finds that empowerment is a critical factor needed for repairing intergroup relations after such abuses (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015).

We thus randomly assigned participants to one of three conditions, a control condition, a redemption condition, and a reclaiming condition. We measured belonging as in Studies 1 and 2. In addition, we measured participants’ perceptions of “Black empowerment”, how much power and influence they think the Black community had over decisions about these spaces.

Study 3 Method

Participants

Eighty-three Black American participants completed the study online for course credit through a university participant pool. They were eligible for the study if they selected that they identified as being Black/African American in the prescreening. For our stopping rule, we aimed to get at least 90 participants and to stop when the semester ended. Because of the time taken to gather these participants, we did not meet our full goal for participant numbers. Participants reported being Black/African American (80.7%) or Biracial including Black/African American (19.3%). Participants reported growing up in the United States (96.4%), including the Southern Atlantic region (45.4%), the Midwest region (30.1%), the Middle Atlantic region (13.5%), and Other regions (13.2%). They reported identifying as women (66.3%), men (31.3%), genderqueer (1.2%), and not knowing their gender identity (1.2%). Their mean age was 19.02, \( SD = .91 \). A sensitivity analysis using G*Power revealed that, given our sample size, we can detect a main effect of condition as small as \( f = .35 \), which is equivalent to eta-squared = .11. In other words, we can detect a medium-sized interaction.

Procedure

Participants viewed one of three photo-description pairs, each describing a restored Antebellum museum, its Board of Visitors, and its mission and new program in support of that museum in Qualtrics (see images and full text in Supplemental Materials). In the Control condition, participants saw a picture of an all-White Board of Directors from a Historical Preservation Society. They also saw a picture of an Antebellum museum along with a description that included, "The Linmore Plantation was a central feature for life around Linmore, Virginia in the mid-1800s. Originally built in 1842, ... it was the home of William Linmore and his family, as well as the slaves who worked on the property...the Linmore Plantation has been carefully restored to be authentic to its original appearance and has been furnished entirely with period antiques.” In addition, to address the museum’s current mission and a new program they were implementing, the description added "Further, the Linmore Historical Preservation Society has shown a dedication to historical accuracy...In developing materials for a new generation of museum-goers, the Linmore Historical Preservation Society has highlighted artifacts that allow visitors to explore the Southern agrarian way of life. The goal with this new program is to give visitors an authentic view of the daily work and life of people from this era of American history." This type of mission is extremely common among historical museums around the United States, which often downplay negative or controversial aspects of different historic periods. For example, Pamplin Historical Park’s opening greeting (2020) notes that, "we strive to provide an authentic experience of America’s Civil War heritage". Further press on an ongoing program at Pamplin Park notes that teens can visit overnight and "Live the life of a Civil War Soldier", with lessons focusing on historical analysis.
Civil War, but slavery is not mentioned during this program (Heller, 2016).

In the Redemption Only condition, participants again saw the same picture of the White Board of Directors and the same initial description of the museum, but the final part about the current mission and new program were changed to describe "Further, the Linmore Historical Preservation Society has shown a dedication to addressing the plantation’s more controversial history...In developing materials for a new generation of museum-goers, the Linmore Historical Preservation Society has used this tragedy as an opportunity to teach visitors about the extent of the slave trade in America as well to illustrate the realities of daily life as a slave on the plantation. The goal with this new program is to change how visitors view their national identity and the history of this country." Importantly, this version of the mission directly addresses and acknowledges slavery during the Antebellum era and states that they want to incorporate this admission into visitors’ national identity. This is similar to some of the few Antebellum museums in the country that directly address slavery. For example, the McLeod Plantation Historical Site description says that they focus on the people from this era that were "nearly erased from history" and "All of their stories – black and white, enslaved and free – are given their due". Similarly, descriptions of the Whitney Plantation (2020) say that they are "the only plantation museum...with an exclusive focus on the lives on enslaved people".

In the Redemption+Reclamation condition, participants viewed a picture of a mostly Black Board of Directors that was also described as being from the African American Historical Preservation Society. After that, participants saw the same description of the museum and its current mission and program as in the Redemption Only condition. However, because of the Black Board of Directors, this condition implied that these changes were driven by the local African American community, including local descendants of enslaved people, meaning it included elements of redemption as well as a reclamation by those directly affected by slavery.

Participants were then asked to complete questions about the Linmore Plantation Museum, its Board of Visitors, the surrounding community, and lastly, their demographic information.

Measures

Belonging. Participants’ feelings of belonging with the museum was assessed with 3 items (see Supplemental Materials) adapted from Study 1 to relate to the museum context (e.g., How comfortable would you feel visiting this museum?; \( \alpha = .861 \)). Participants again responded on a 5-point scale from Not at all (1) to Extremely (5).

Spontaneous thoughts of slavery. Participants were asked for their open-ended impressions of the museum ("Please take a minute to write down what you like and don’t like about the museum.") to confirm as a manipulation check that participants had read and understood the mission of the museum. Because all conditions directly mentioned slavery, these were not coded as in Studies 1 and 2. For example, one participant who read about the Control condition said, “The short blurb only discussed that it is about the “Neo-Classical” heritage of the plantation; and nothing about the plight of slaves.”. One participant who read about the Redemption Only condition said, “I like that the museum invites people to learn about the our countries history but it appeared that all the board members of this museum were white; which I didn’t like because it limits perspective.” One participant who read about the Redemption+Reclamation condition said, “I liked that the museum executive board includes African Americans; which shows that they’re preserving their history and taking charge.”

Although these were not coded as in the previous studies, participants were asked about their impressions of the Board of Visitors and the African American community instead.

Trust in the Board. Participants were asked for their impressions of the Board of Visitors they read about, specifically how genuine and how capable they seemed in addressing slavery ("Do you think the people who own and operate this museum are genuinely interested in addressing issues related to slavery, racism, and race more generally?"; "Do you think the people who own and operate this museum are capable of addressing issues related to slavery, racism, and race more generally through the museum’s work?") on the same scale as above. These were averaged into a composite for our analyses to assess participants’ impressions of the Board of Visitors, \( \alpha = .80 \).

Empowerment of the African American community. Lastly, participants were asked two questions about how much influence and empowerment Linmore’s African American community experienced related to the new museum missions (“How much influence do you think African Americans in the community had on the development and implementation of the new program described above?”; "How empowered do you think African Americans in the community felt during the development and implementation of the new program described above?") on the same scale as above. These were also averaged into a composite for our analyses to assess participants’ impressions of the local African American community, \( \alpha = .88 \).

Study 3 Results and Discussion

Belonging. To examine the effect of condition on belonging, we conducted a one-way ANOVA with condition as our independent variable (condition: Control, Redemption Only, Redemption+Reclamation) and the belonging composite as our dependent variable. This analysis revealed a main effect of condition, \( F(2,80) = 21.953, p < .001, \eta^2 = .354 \). See Figure 3. Post-hoc Tukey tests found that participants who saw the Redemption+Reclamation condition reported significantly more belonging with this version of the Antebellum museum (\( M = 3.769, SD = .965 \)) than in the Control (\( M = 2.077, SD = .890 \)) and Redemption Only (\( M = 2.591, SD = .976 \)) conditions, which did not differ significantly from one another. The Redemption+Reclamation condition was the only condition that included aspects of both redemption through addressing slavery directly and using the era to raise awareness among museum visitors and reclaiming of these spaces by local African American community, as seen by the predominantly Black board of...
visitors.

**Trust in the Board.** To examine whether condition impacted participants’ trust in the Board of Visitors, we conducted a one-way ANOVA with condition as our independent variable (condition: Control, Redemption Only, Redemption+Reclamation) and the trust in the board composite as our dependent variable. This analysis revealed a main effect of condition, $F(2,80) = 12.567$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .239$ (see Table 1). Post-hoc Tukey analyses found that participants trusted the Redemption+Reclamation museum owners and operators significantly more than those in the Control condition and the Redemption Only condition, which did not differ from one another.

**Empowerment of the African American community.** Next, we examined participants’ impressions of the African American community’s involvement and empowerment in Linmore’s new program using a one-way ANOVA with condition as our independent variable (condition: Control, Redemption Only, Redemption+Reclamation) and the empowerment composite as our dependent variable. This analysis revealed a main effect of condition, $F(2,80) = 30.385$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .432$. See Figure 4. Post-hoc Tukey analyses found that participants trusted the Redemption+Reclamation museum owners and operators ($M = 3.712$, $SD = 1.079$) significantly more than those in the Control condition ($M = 1.789$, $SD = 0.851$) and the Redemption Only condition ($M = 2.000$, $SD = 1.008$), which did not differ from one another.

**Mediation.** Next, we explored whether impressions of the Board and the African American community’s involvement in Linmore mediated the effect of condition on belonging. We use the PROCESS macro (Model 6; Hayes, 2017). To conduct the bootstrapping analysis, we drew 10,000 random samples with replacement to estimate the size of two indirect effects—trust in the Board and empowerment of the African American community. The bootstrap analysis yielded a 95% confidence interval that included 0 (95% CI [−.002, .321]) for impressions of the Board, suggesting that trust in the Board did not mediate the effect of condition on belonging. However, the bootstrap analysis yielded a 95% confidence interval that did not include 0 (95% CI [−.014, .356]) for empowerment of the African American community, suggesting that these impressions did mediate the effect. In other words, the data are consistent with the notion that Antebellum buildings—sites of historical harms to their communities—feel unwelcoming to Black community members unless the space is used for addressing and redressing the historical harms and is in the hands of a predominantly Black Board of Directors because then patrons trust that the African American community had an influence over the museum’s mission and has been empowered by it.

These findings showed that Black participants required both elements of redemption and reclamation to feel a sense of belonging in an Antebellum museum. Specifically, the museum needed to address slavery directly and push for changing how people view the Antebellum era and its connection to our national identity while also highlighting the involvement of the African American community in order for Black participants to support it. In addition, participants felt that the predominantly Black Board of Visitors would be more genuinely interested in addressing slavery as well as be more capable of addressing these sensitive issues. Participants also agreed that, in this version of the museum, the local African American community would have had more involvement in shaping the museum’s mission and new program and that these would be more empowering for them as well. Importantly, we found evidence that these beliefs about empowerment for the local African American community mediated participants’ sense of belonging in Antebellum spaces. This illustrates the need for both aspects of redemption and reclaiming Antebellum spaces for

---

**Table 1. Study 3 Trust in the Board Data by Condition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Means</th>
<th>Standard Deviations</th>
<th>95% CI Lower Bounds</th>
<th>95% CI Upper Bounds</th>
<th>Ns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>2.539</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>2.178</td>
<td>2.899</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption Only</td>
<td>2.613</td>
<td>1.101</td>
<td>2.283</td>
<td>2.943</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redemption+Reclamation</td>
<td>3.673</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>3.312</td>
<td>4.034</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Figure 3. Reported feelings of belonging by condition for Study 3. Error bars are standard errors.**

**Figure 4. Reported empowerment by condition for Study 3. Error bars are standard errors.**
Black Americans to feel positive about these spaces. This work has important implications for addressing Antebellum spaces that are still standing in many areas of the United States and shows how many current methods for revamping these spaces and addressing past wrongdoings may be lacking one or both of these critical aspects.

**General Discussion**

The present work begins to investigate the psychological consequences of Antebellum architecture. Our findings suggest that Antebellum architecture, compared with New American architecture, is less welcoming for Black people because of its association with slavery and racism. Moreover, our initial evidence suggests that “redeeming” these spaces by highlighting their connection to slavery and racism with an eye toward redressing past harms is not enough. For these spaces to feel welcoming to Black Americans, they must also be reclaimed—Black people must have a say in how these spaces are used and reformed.

One might argue that it is not surprising for a plantation house to elicit thoughts of slavery and racism, and in turn, feel unwelcoming. In this way, perhaps the current findings are unsurprising and unremarkable. What we would point out, then, is that White participants were unaffected by the sight and description of a plantation house. To them, the house was just as welcoming as a more contemporary and more “generic” house. Perhaps that is the more surprising of the findings. Despite this, it is important to look for solutions to these disparities from a Black perspective and with sensitivity and inclusion for Black communities.

Several limitations of this work are worth mentioning. One major limitation of the present work is that all samples were convenience samples and, more specifically, college student samples. Related to this, another major limitation of the present work is that the samples were relatively small, especially our samples of Black students. Future work should directly and conceptually replicate the present work to ascertain the generalizability and robustness of the documented effects. For now, we offer the present findings as “proof of concept” that Antebellum architecture matters and that it has psychological costs to Black people specifically.

In addition, participants’ answers were to a hypothetical situation and, as such, represent their intuitions and lay theories about how they would feel in Antebellum spaces, not how they actually and currently feel in Antebellum spaces. Future studies should examine people’s in-person reactions to Antebellum architecture. That said, we should note that expectations about how one might be treated in a space are a strong predictor of experience in that space, and we trust that both Black and White participants were able to reflect and tell us how they might feel in such a space.

This future work might also consider how aesthetics, independent from or jointly with style, shape reactions to Antebellum architecture. Indeed, it would be interesting to know whether certain aesthetic elements are especially evocative of racism and slavery. This work could help current architects and designers create more equitable spaces. In addition, this could be used to highlight values of equity for students of Architecture and encourage young Black students’ interest in Architecture (Cheng et al., 2020; Goetz et al., 2020; McGuigan, 2020; Wilson, 2016).

Future work might also consider other facets of Black and White Americans’ divergent experiences in Antebellum space; specifically, experiences of nostalgia, on the one hand, and forgetting on the other. Research on collective nostalgia suggests that remembering shared events leads to increased group identification, increased behavioral intentions toward that ingroup, and increased monetary donations to ingroup goals (Wildschut et al., 2014). Thus, people who seek to preserve Antebellum architecture may also, consequently, feel a greater connection to their ingroup, presumably White Americans. The problem with a nostalgic take on Antebellum architecture is that it risks rewriting history; it romanticizes the past, and it denies or at least overlooks the violence and exploitation that produced these spaces (Allais et al., 2018; Roberts, 2019). Many writers on this topic note that one can neither accurately nor fully represent the Antebellum period without also discussing slavery (Brockell, 2019; Cohen, 2019) and the many forms of Black and African American agency, enterprise, and resistance during the time (e.g., Roberts, 2019). Other writers argue that in the end, it turns citizens and community members into accomplices in the forgetting—and erasure—of Black and other non-White history (Hargrove, 2009; Wilson, 2015). Thus, future work could examine this sense of collective nostalgia among White Americans for Antebellum architecture in particular and explore ways that it could be used to close this gap in perceiving Antebellum spaces.

Research on forgetting has made clear that forgetting and, specifically, being forgotten is linked to psychological and societal costs (Ray et al., 2019; Wilson, 2015). One of the biggest criticisms of Antebellum museums and preserving these spaces is that it seems to come at a cost of forgetting or minimizing the extreme violence and subjugation of enslaved people (Adamkiewicz, 2016) as well as the actions and contributions of Black and African Americans of the time (Roberts, 2019). Thus, for Black Americans, the costs of preserving Antebellum plantations and buildings may be tied to concerns about forgetting the conditions for enslaved people at the time. And in this context, it comes with even greater societal costs. Failing to honor and preserve the memories of enslaved people signals that their memories continue to be unimportant to those in power (Levinson, 1996b; Mazrui, 2015; Solly, 2019; Spivack, 2019; Zaniweski, 2019). It also makes redressing historical harms unlikely and unnecessary (Shnabel & Nadler, 2015). Thus, for Black Americans, Antebellum plantations and buildings may have costs, not only because they are associated with slavery and racism more generally, which can lead to decreased belonging, but because their preservation is so often accompanied by forgetting—the erasure of Black history and historical harms—and of any possibility of redressing those harms.

**Closing Remarks**

Preserving Antebellum architecture in the American South is a contentious issue. Some adamantly believe that we must restore and preserve these buildings, that they are an important part of our history. Other adamantly be-
lieve that we should not restore these buildings, that they are, at best, a romanticized version of our history and one that ignores racial exploitation, and at worst, a celebration of that exploitation and violence. The present work contributes to this debate from a psychological perspective. It shows that these buildings are welcoming to White Americans—the same as any generic building—but they are not welcoming to Black Americans. For Black Americans, these spaces call to mind slavery and racism and undermine their sense of belonging. If we think that feeling at home in our communities is central to civic engagement and well-being more generally, then we must contend with this possibility: that Antebellum architecture might be detrimental to Black community members. To make it right, our present finding suggests that Black community members must be empowered to reclaim these spaces with an eye toward addressing and redressing the inequity these buildings represent.

---

**Competing Interests**

Authors do not have any competing interests to declare.

**Supplemental Material**

Full stimuli and measures for Studies 1-3.

**Data Accessibility Statement**

We have uploaded our data, analysis scripts, and supplementary materials to OSF at: (https://osf.io/wp9rm/?view_only=20a321285ced4a2a82846a09c68cc66c)

Submitted: April 01, 2020 PST, Accepted: February 16, 2021 PST

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-4.0). View this license's legal deed at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0 and legal code at http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode for more information.
REFERENCES


Upton, D. (2015). *What can and can’t be said: Race, uplift, and monument building in the contemporary South.* Yale University Press. https://doi.org/10.12987/yale.9780300211757.001.0001


SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Supplementary material