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# “It Affects Me in Ways That I Don’t Even Realize”: A Preliminary Study on Black Student Responses to a University’s Enslavement History

Juan Carlos Garibay    Christian West    Christopher Mathis

*Research on American universities’ involvement in slavery has primarily been historical. We drew upon Critical Race Quantitative Inquiry, or QuantCrit, to devise a methodology to measure various ways Black college students respond to their institution’s history of slavery, and to explore factors that may relate to these responses. Data were collected from 93 students of African descent at a Southern US institution historically involved in slavery. Multiple linear regression models accounted for 35.9% of the variance in students’ emotional responses, 27.3% in behavioral responses, and 13.6% in psychological responses to the institution’s enslavement history. Statistical results show the relevance of background characteristics and contemporary racialized experiences in predicting student responses. Based on the findings of this exploratory study, we recommend that as leaders of institutions with histories of slavery consider ways to address their respective histories through higher education reparations, that they consider the impact of this violent history on contemporary Black students. Next steps to expand the study and further explore the impact of university histories of slavery are proposed.*

Slavery played a critical role in the development, survival, and success of many American universities established in the colonial era.

Many university founders, benefactors, early students, and faculty members at these institutions built their wealth on the slaving economy, owned enslaved persons, and brought them to university settings (Wilder, 2013). Several institutions owned or rented enslaved laborers for the daily operations of the institution and in the construction of their early buildings and grounds (Harris, Campbell, & Brophy, 2019; Wilder, 2013). While this history has often been unacknowledged or intentionally silenced, personnel in a consortium of universities called Universities Studying Slavery (USS) are now beginning to explore and interpret this history to tell the full story of their respective institutions. While this work is undoubtedly important, such research largely remains historical.

A number of scholars have examined Black\* student experiences on historically white campuses. Scholars have found that Black students often confront racially hostile environments as part of their everyday college experiences by way of racially motivated hate crimes and bias incidents (Harper & Hurtado, 2007), racially themed parties (G. A. Garcia, Johnston, Garibay, Herrera, & Giraldo, 2011), negative stereotypes about their intellect (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001), racial microaggressions

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\* We conceptualize Black students as students with African descent, which includes African Americans, Africans, Afro-Caribbeans, AfroLatinxs, Afro-Indigenous people, Afro-Asians, and those with multiracial identities that include any of these. Dumas (2016) explained that Black is “understood as a self-determined name of a racialized social group that shares a specific set of histories, cultural processes, and imagined and performed kinships” (pp. 12-13).

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(Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000), and racial battle fatigue (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007; Smith, Yosso, & Solórzano, 2006), among many others. Studies on Black students on historically white campuses have shown that Black students in racially hostile environments experience feelings of alienation and isolation, sensed hostility, dissatisfaction, disengagement and lack of integration (Harper & Hurtado, 2007). While these more contemporary manifestations of a negative campus racial climate have been examined in the literature, much remains unknown about how students experience an institution's historical legacy of exclusion, which campus racial climate frameworks identify as an important dimension of the campus climate. Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, and Arellano (2012) noted that in only a few empirical studies have researchers actually examined the historical legacies of exclusion, while researchers have yet to explore whether, and if so how, a university's historical involvement in slavery may affect current Black students attending the institution.

To address this gap, we set out to elucidate whether an institution's racist violent history of slavery may affect contemporary Black student experiences. In particular, we sought to explore the types of psychological, emotional, and behavioral responses Black undergraduate students experienced with respect to their institution's historical involvement in slavery, and the background characteristics and college experiences that predict those responses. The focus on these types of responses follows Smith's (2004) racial battle fatigue framework in which psychological (e.g., anger, disappointment, resentment), physiological (e.g., headaches, pounding heart, high blood pressure), and behavioral (e.g., social withdrawal, stereotype threat, poor school performance) stress responses inform the implications of contemporary experiences with racism for Black

students. Our focus on responses also connects to works by Pierce (1995) and Carroll (1998) who link individual responses to stress, time, and energy spent navigating hostile racial environments. In the following sections, we describe the literature that informed our Survey of Black Student Experiences at Universities With Historical Relationships to Slavery (SBSE). We then outline the methodology behind the instrument we designed. Finally, we summarize the results from a sample at a Southern research university with a history of slavery to demonstrate the importance of this work and understand opportunities for additional research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In designing the SBSE, we brought together scholarship focused on Black students' experiences with the campus racial climate, literature on visiting sites of enslavement and massive trauma, and anti-Blackness and Black life in the "afterlife of slavery" (Hartman, 2007).

### Campus Racial Climate and the Historical Legacy of Exclusion

In their seminal article on campus racial climate, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, and Allen (1998) theorized and established the link between an institution's historical legacy of exclusion and its current campus climate. According to Hurtado et al. (1998), "The historical vestiges of segregated schools and colleges continue to affect the climate for racial/ethnic diversity on college campuses" (p. 283). In this and subsequent revisions to the campus climate model (i.e., Hurtado et al., 2012; Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005), an institution's historical legacy of exclusion largely focuses on the role universities played in segregation and limiting access for Students of Color. In their study of Black alumni who had attended a Southern research university

with a history of segregation as graduate students, Johnson-Bailey, Valentine, Cervero, and Bowles (2009) demonstrated that despite having desegregated in the 1960s, Black graduate students experienced isolation, various forms of discrimination, forced representation, and stereotyping as routine parts of their graduate life across five decades (1962–2003) at this institution. This study provides an important understanding of how racism continued to manifest over the course of this institution's history despite desegregation; however, less is known about how students experience the specific historical context of the university. Furthermore, unexamined in past climate studies and campus climate models are how slavery played a role in the development and success of many universities in the colonial era and how these universities as former sites of enslavement may impact contemporary students.

### Experiencing Historical Sites of Enslavement and Massive Trauma

How people reconcile or engage with historical evidence of massive trauma and former sites of enslavement also informed our creation of the survey instrument. Keats (2005) claimed that when standing before the historical evidence of a massive trauma, such as the Holocaust, people create a semblance of the historic event: Although they did not witness or experience the event firsthand, the imaginative reconstruction impacts people greatly. For example, in a study of 87 adolescents who participated in a memorial visit to concentration camps, participants demonstrated symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (Silverman et al., 1999). Researchers of plantations and slave castles have examined how tour guides and materials at these former sites of African enslavement either remember the enslaved or render them invisible, as well as how visitors experience those sites (Alderman, Butler, &

Hanna, 2016). Prior research has shown how former sites of enslavement are contested spaces in the construction and interpretation of slavery and Black life, and the manner in which slavery is presented impacts individuals' learning and satisfaction (Alderman et al., 2016; Carter, Butler, & Alderman, 2014).

### Anti-Blackness and Black Being in the Afterlife of Slavery

While prior research on the impact of historical legacies of exclusion and visiting historical sites of enslavement provide an important foundation, still unexamined is how attending college on a former site of enslavement may impact students, an experience that is arguably far deeper (and longer) than visiting historic sites and museums. This historical context may also play a role in Black students' experience through what Hartman (2007) described as the "afterlife of slavery," where Black people still have limited access to health and education, premature death, and skewed life chances, among other inequities. In particular, Dumas's (2016) work on anti-Blackness articulates that the afterlife of slavery is "deeply impressed upon Black flesh" (p. 14) where the historical memory of slavery weighs heavily—is *everpresent*—in Black life (Tillet, 2012). Similarly, in her book *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, Sharpe (2016) has woven together numerous examples of Black suffering and modes of Black subjection (grounded in Black people's lived experiences) that repeat across spatiotemporal boundaries. With so many "ongoing state-sanctioned legal and extralegal murders of Black people" (p. 7), Sharpe has demonstrated the proximity between anti-Black racism in the past and the present—how chattel slavery continues to shape contemporary Black being, the "afterlife of property" (p. 15).

The afterlife of slavery connects to higher education as Black people were material goods for colleges in the colonial college era, and

have continued to experience anti-Black policy making, restricted access to formal education, and epistemological violence in knowledge production across eras of US higher education history (Mustaffa, 2017). Even as the civil rights movement significantly expanded Black enrollment in historically white institutions, higher education institutions continued to reproduce notions of white supremacy and Black inferiority in masked ways (Kendi, 2012). As a result of these hostile racial climates, Black students protested, rallied, and demanded institutions to recognize their educational needs and humanity with improvements to their experiences on campus, including, but not limited to, the creation of Black studies, the recruiting of more Black students and faculty, Black cultural programming, and Black residential houses (Mustaffa, 2017; Rojas, 2010). Yet, Black students in higher education today make similar demands (Morgan & Davis, 2019). Akin to Black students throughout history, contemporary Black students are continuously justifying their educational needs, humanity, and presence at predominantly white institutions, with their college experience on these campuses being riddled with significant measures of racial stress (Karkouti, 2016). In designing the SBSE, we developed questions to better understand these remnants of the afterlife of slavery in higher education, specifically how Black students experience and respond to the university as a former site of enslavement along with current manifestations of anti-Black racism.

## CRITICAL RACE QUANTITATIVE INQUIRY

To design the survey, we drew upon critical race quantitative inquiry, or QuantCrit, (N. M. Garcia, López, & Vélez, 2018) to critically examine Black students' experiences with one university's history of slavery. In

the vein of QuantCrit, we considered race a social construct that historically separates and oppresses particular groups (Gillborn, Warmington, & Demack, 2018). With our survey instrument we sought to disrupt racial essentialism in higher education research (Johnston-Guerrero, 2017) through understanding cross sections within the African diaspora alongside other social characteristics (Sen & Wasow, 2016), while also interrogating racial power dynamics at the institutional level.

The tenets of QuantCrit and critical race theory (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano et al., 2000) guided our design of the SBSE instrument in the following ways. First, our work centers the egregious form of racism that is historically embedded on the campus and that affects Black students (centrality of race/racism). Second, we sought to challenge the dominant ideologies that the legacy of slavery does not impact the experiences of Black students today and that universities were the bastions of a liberal society (challenge to dominant ideology). Third, our goal was to illuminate these specific experiences with the historical dimension of the campus to address these long legacies of injustice through university reparations (commitment to social justice). Fourth, we recognize the importance of legitimizing the personal experiences and histories of minoritized people when attempting to understand racial subordination in education (centrality of experiential knowledge). In our study, experiential knowledge stems from the lived experiences of Black student participants and those of the researchers who through their collective experiences and understanding of racial issues through first-hand experience designed a survey with the intention of better illuminating the lived experiences of Black students at a university with a history of slavery. Fifth, we drew upon scholarship from history, psychology, geography, Black

studies, and education to empirically ground our discussion of the historical legacies of slavery in higher education and individual experiences with former sites of enslavement (the interdisciplinary perspective). Sixth, we included the tenet of hegemony of whiteness (Cabrera, 2018) to contextualize how white supremacy is embedded in the university's history and contemporary dynamics, and, in turn, impacts students' lives.

## POSITIONALITY

In line with N. M. Garcia et al. (2018) we provide information about the positionality of ourselves as the research team to ground our social positions, values, and epistemologies. Each member of the research team has ancestors who were subjected to systems of unfree labor. Our experiences, family histories, social identities, and epistemologies informed our lenses for approaching this study and interpreting the findings.

Garibay identifies as a Chicano from a working-class Mexican family who immigrated from Las Zarquillas, Michoacán. The Hacienda de Guaracha, whose owners utilized enslaved African labor and terrorized peons, once subjected members of this small town, including his ancestors, to peonage. Family oral histories taught him about the Spanish colonial system of haciendas, slavery, and peonage in Michoacán, and his great-grandfather's involvement in the community's resistance against the Guaracha hacendados (landowners). This resistance led to the intervention of then-Governor Lázaro Cárdenas in 1931, who endowed the land to the Las Zarquillas inhabitants (Ginzberg, 1999). It became one of Cárdenas's early models of hacienda fracturing through ejido formation before becoming president of Mexico and dismantling the oppressive hacienda system through national agrarian reform. Garibay

grew up in a predominantly Latinx, segregated neighborhood of Los Angeles, which has historical ties to the American Civil War. He learned about the history of American slavery and historical spaces tied to US slavery early in life as his neighborhood served as the military headquarters for the Union Army in Southern California. Growing up in this community and attending underresourced public schools with parents and grandparents who experienced anti-Mexican immigrant attitudes taught him the multiple ways racism manifests in society.

West identifies as a multiracial Afro-Latino and also holds membership with the Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland. His paternal grandparents are of African descent and are immigrants from Brazil and Haiti, while his maternal fourth great-grandfather was born on a plantation still standing in Spotsylvania, Virginia, to the plantation owner and his enslaved laborer. This same grandfather helped found Freedman's Village, a post-emancipation independent town of newly freed Blacks in the area of what is now Arlington National Cemetery. West approaches this work acknowledging the enslaved labor throughout the world, including the Caribbean and Latin America, and sees the African diaspora in America as inextricably linked because of the transatlantic slave economy. He learned about the history of slavery in the Americas through family oral histories and by attending Black-majority public schools in Washington, DC.

Mathis identifies as a Black American whose family has explicit ancestral ties to enslaved people in South Carolina. In fact, his great-grandfather was born shortly after slavery in the height of the Jim Crow South, but later taught himself how to both read and write, and subsequently attended a HBCU, now known as Oakwood University. Mathis spent a considerable amount of time in his family's hometown of Johnston, SC on about 130 acres, the same land his great-grandfather

purchased from white plantation owners. He learned about the history of American slavery and historical spaces through his family reunions and historical artifacts (e.g., newspapers, letters, court filings). Growing up in the same space that his great-grandfather toiled, worked, bought, and died taught him both the consequential factors of racism and the will of Black Americans to succeed in racialized spaces.

## METHOD

Two research questions guided data collection and analyses: (a) What types of responses do Black students have with respect to one institution's slavery history? (b) What background characteristics and college experiences predict Black students' responses to one institution's historical involvement in the enslavement of Black people?

### Concurrent Triangulation Design

Given the dearth of research on Black student responses to a university's history of slavery, we included in the SBSE an open-ended question specifically focused on students' experiences attending a university with a history of slavery. To enhance data quality, to provide a more holistic perspective of the observed patterns, and to strengthen the credibility of research findings we used both the quantitative and qualitative data from the SBSE and utilized a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, 2009; Greene, 2007). The purpose for mixing was triangulation, to obtain complementary qualitative and quantitative data on students' experiences with respect to a university's enslaving history and to seek convergence, corroboration, and correspondence of results from different methods (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). The overall purpose of this study was to explore and develop quantitative measures of various ways an institution's history

of slavery may impact Black students. Thus, the quantitative data collection and analysis were given greater emphasis. Conversely, the open-ended responses on the survey were primarily used for complementary and corroborative purposes and offer a more nuanced insight of the phenomena for this study and future projects.

### Data Source and Sample

Students of African descent enrolled at a public, Research I university in the South with documented evidence of having a relationship with slavery completed an online survey to explore relationships and establish a proof of concept. In Spring 2018, we obtained IRB approval to collect data. The online survey was administered through Qualtrics between October 2018 and January 2019 to students through several avenues: (a) a Black student organization's listserv, (b) posts on a newsletter from an office dedicated to Black student affairs, (c) direct emails to students collected from a course known to have a large number of Black students enrolled, and (d) direct emails to a random sample of students in a Black student organization.

We designed the survey to capture the various ways this important history may relate to students' college choice, sense of belonging, engagement, learning, health factors, and other educational experiences. Questions on the survey focused on students' background characteristics and experiences, the college choice process, emotional, psychological, and behavioral responses to attending college at an institution with a historical relationship to slavery, perceptions of and interactions with faculty and white students, experiences with racial microaggressions, sense of belonging, satisfaction, and perceptions of the institution. Two open-ended questions were also included that focused on how the university's involvement with slavery impacted stu-

dents' college choice and college experiences. The extant literature base on Black student experiences in higher education, generally and at predominantly white institutions, specifically helped to develop survey items. One education professor and one higher education administrator from the university, both with expertise in the experiences of Black students, evaluated the face validity of the survey items, while one faculty member with expertise in survey methodology assessed the suitability of the item sets for scale construction. These experts helped to provide important validity evidence for the instrument based on test content (American Educational Research Association [AERA, APA, & NCME], 2014).

In total, 95 undergraduate students of African descent completed the survey, which represents about 8.8% of the total number of Black undergraduate students at the university. The sample for this study was limited to students who had complete data for the three dependent variables: emotional, psychological,

and behavioral response to the institution's slavery history. The final analytic sample for the study consisted of 93 undergraduates. In comparison to the full population of undergraduates at the institution who identify as African American / Black, our sample was significantly overrepresented by women and fourth-year students, slightly overrepresented by first-year students, and underrepresented by men, second-year, and third-year students.

About 23.0% of the sample identified as cisgender men, 75.3% identified as cisgender women, 1 student identified as genderqueer / gender nonconforming, and 1 student identified as "difference." About 87.0% of the sample was born in the US, 20.4% identified as first-generation students, and 8.7% were transfer students. In terms of class standing, 26.9% were first years, 17.2% were second years, 18.3% were third years, 35.5% were fourth years, and 2.2% were fifth-years or more. Regarding the African diaspora, 60.2% were only African American, 12.9% were

TABLE 1.  
Descriptive of Measures (N = 93)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Min	Max
Slavery History Emotional Response	-0.001	1.005	-1.361	2.226
Slavery History Behavioral Response	-0.004	1.005	-1.384	2.720
Slavery History Psychological Response	0.006	1.004	-1.139	3.005
African Only	0.129	0.337	0.000	1.000
Two or More Groups of African Descent	0.086	0.282	0.000	1.000
Black Mixed With Other Groups	0.183	0.389	0.000	1.000
Cisgender Man	0.226	0.420	0.000	1.000
First Generation	0.204	0.405	0.000	1.000
Class Standing	2.690	1.268	1.000	5.000
Transfer	0.090	0.282	0.000	1.000
Racial Microaggressions	-0.024	0.994	-1.391	2.703
Negative Interactions With White Students	0.021	1.006	-1.917	2.578
Perceptions of Institution Addressing Racial Inequity	0.059	1.057	-2.026	2.734

African only, 18.3% were Black (African American, African, Caribbean, other Black) mixed with other groups, and 8.6% identified as two or more groups of African descent (African American, African, Caribbean, and/or other Black; see Table 1).

## Variables

*Dependent Variables.* Guided by the literature on the afterlife of slavery, anti-Blackness, and the various ways Students of Color are impacted by experiences with racism (Dumas, 2016; Smith et al., 2007), the survey included 11 items that captured whether students experienced various types of responses to the violent racist historical context of the university—that is, the university’s involvement in the enslavement of Black people. Based on this literature we postulated that these 11 items could be operationalized into 3 separate factor structures: emotional response, psychological response, and behavioral response to the institution’s slavery history.

The emotional response to the institution’s slavery history factor, or slavery history emotional response for brevity, consists of 5 items: “I often feel resentment towards this institution because of its involvement with slavery”; “I often feel anger towards this institution because of its involvement with slavery”; “I often feel frustrated because of this institution’s involvement with slavery”; “I often feel helpless because of this institution’s involvement with slavery”; and “I often feel depressed because of this institution’s involvement with slavery.” The psychological response to institution’s slavery history factor, or slavery history psychological response for brevity, consists of 3 items: “I often cannot focus in class because I am thinking about this institution’s involvement with slavery”; “I often cannot focus on studying because I am thinking about this institution’s involvement with slavery”; and “I often think about this

institution’s involvement with slavery.” Finally, the behavioral response to the institution’s slavery history factor (slavery history behavioral response, for brevity) consists of 3 items: “I avoid areas on campus that remind me of this institution’s involvement with slavery”; “I don’t participate in certain activities that remind me of this institution’s involvement with slavery”; and “This institution’s involvement with slavery has had a major impact on my college experience.”

Each item in each of the 3 factors was coded on a 4-point Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*) and higher values on the 3 factors suggest a greater level of emotional response, psychological response, and behavioral response, respectively. To develop these conceptually supported factors, we used principal axis factoring with varimax rotation and calculated individual factor scores by weighting each component variable’s standardized score by its factor loading, and calculating the weighted sum. Additionally, we used reliability analyses using tests of internal consistency (i.e., Cronbach’s alphas).

*Independent Variables.* Each model included the same set of variables, which were guided by the literature on the importance of examining the diversity within the Black student population (Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Stewart, 2008, 2009; Strayhorn & Terrell, 2010), and contemporary forms of anti-Black racism (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000). The independent variables were: (a) groups of African descent (only African, multiple groups of African descent, Black mixed with other racial/ethnic groups, and only African American as the reference group), (b) gender, (c) first-generation student, (d) class standing, (e) whether the student transferred to the institution, (f) experiences with racial microaggressions, (g) negative interactions with white students, and (h) students’

perceptions of the institution addressing its racial inequity. Regarding gender, given that only 1 student identified as genderqueer / gender nonconforming and 1 student identified as difference, we could not consider genderqueer / gender nonconforming and difference as separate gender categories in the statistical models; however, we chose not to erase their specific experiences, and thus highlight their responses to the open-ended questions when reporting the gender findings from the regression models. The Cronbach alphas for the variables representing racial microaggressions ( $\alpha = .841$ ), negative interactions with white students ( $\alpha = .795$ ), and perceptions of institution addressing racial inequity ( $\alpha = .714$ ) indicate high levels of reliability, and these factors were constructed using factor analyses with varimax rotation.

## DATA ANALYSES

### Missing Data

To deal with missing data, we first utilized listwise deletion to remove all cases for which no information was available on the dependent variables. We then analyzed the extent to which missing data occurred for the remaining variables. Only two variables had data missing: perception of institution addressing its racial inequity had 3.2% of cases missing, and the racial microaggression factor had 2.2% of cases missing. For these variables, we utilized multiple imputation (MI) to impute missing values as missing data may provide a source of variation (Sinharay, Stern, & Russell, 2001) that is not accounted for when using single imputation techniques. While all imputation methods have limitations (Little & Rubin, 2002), MI is currently one of the best methods for handling missing data in studies using multivariate statistics (Allison, 2000) and provides a more precise estimate of standard errors of parameter estimates

(Little & Rubin, 2002).

### Quantitative Analyses

First, we conducted descriptive statistics to better understand the sample obtained and examine the distributions of the independent and dependent variables of interest, including the individual items that comprised the dependent variables of interest. Second, we conducted factor analyses to identify the factors used in the analyses. Third, Pearson product-moment correlations were examined between the dependent variables and factors in the multiple regression model (i.e., racial microaggressions, negative interactions with white students, and perception of the institution addressing its racial inequity). This allowed us to examine the relationship between the dependent variables of interest and other types of racialized experiences that do not focus on the institution's history of slavery to assess discriminant validity. Lastly, we conducted multivariate ordinary least squares regression models to better understand the college experiences and student characteristics that may uniquely contribute to emotional, psychological, and behavioral responses to an institution's history with slavery.

### Qualitative Analyses

To capture more in-depth and nuanced information on students' experiences with the institution's history of slavery, the SBSE included the open-ended question: "Please further describe your experience attending [the institution], a university that was historically involved in slavery." Fifty-five students in the sample (59%) responded to this open-ended question.

We used framework analysis for the qualitative aspect of the survey (Krueger, 1994; Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). The five interconnected stages of this analytical process included: familiarization, identifying a thematic

framework, indexing, charting, and mapping and interpretation. In familiarization, we reviewed the responses before breaking them into parts. In identifying a thematic framework, we recorded phrases, ideas, or concepts arising from the text, including the initial development of categories. In indexing, we highlighted and sorted out quotes, with comparisons being made within and between cases. In charting, we lifted quotes from the data and rearranged them under themes for data reduction. The final stage, mapping and interpreting, involved making sense of the individual quotes, relationships between quotes, and links between the data as a whole. In this final stage, we focused on the seven criteria established by Krueger (1994) for interpreting coded data: words, context, internal consistency, frequency and extensiveness of comments, specificity of comments, intensity of comments, and big ideas.

The racial battle fatigue framework (Smith et al., 2007) guided the coding and categorization of the open-ended responses, which helped identify different types of student responses to the university's slavery history. Smith et al. (2007) outline several responses to racial microaggressions, including physiological (e.g., elevated heartbeat, extreme fatigue), psychological, and behavioral responses; in our coding, however, we focused on student responses to the university's historical context of slavery. Through this coding process, we identified 8 psychological responses, 9 behavioral responses, and 26 emotional responses, the latter of which is not included in racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2007).

## LIMITATIONS

This study is limited in several ways. First, this study has a relatively small sample size collected from 1 institution with a history of slavery. Second, given the exploratory nature of the study, we utilized different sampling

strategies to assess which sampling strategy resulted in higher response rates. While utilizing multiple sampling methods helped to determine the most successful sampling strategy for future data collection, it resulted in sampling bias; thus, generalizations beyond the study's sample must be made with caution. Third, the cross-sectional nature of the data is a limitation as it is impossible to determine causality from evaluating data on college experiences and student responses to attending a university with a history of slavery at one time point. Finally, given the small sample size, we were restricted in the number of variables we were able to utilize in the statistical models. While we accounted for an important set of variables informed by the current literature and pertinent theoretical perspectives, potential important confounding variables may not be accounted for. Notwithstanding these limitations, this exploratory study contributes to our understanding of the importance of racist historical contexts of universities on Black undergraduate student experiences.

## RESULTS

### Student Responses to a University's History of Slavery

We examined students' level of agreement to the survey items focused on their experiences with the university's history of slavery. Table 2 shows the percentages of students who agreed or strongly agreed with these items focused on their experiences with the university's slavery history. These items comprise the dependent variables of interest in the study (emotional, psychological, and behavioral responses).

Results indicate that 58.1% reported that they "often think about [the] institution's involvement with slavery," 48.4% "often feel frustrated because of [the] institution's involvement with slavery," 46.3% "often feel resentment towards [the] institution because of

its involvement with slavery”, and 40.9% “often feel anger towards [the] institution because of its involvement with slavery”. Additionally, 39.8% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the institution’s involvement with slavery has had a major impact on their college experience, while 35.5% didn’t participate in certain activities that remind them of the institution’s involvement with slavery. On the lower end, 18.3% of respondents avoided areas on campus that remind them of the institution’s slavery involvement, 17.2% “often feel helpless because of [the] institution’s involvement with slavery,” 13% “often feel depressed because of this institution’s involvement with slavery,” 9.7% “often cannot focus on studying because [they are] thinking about [the] institution’s involvement with slavery,” and 7.6% “often cannot focus in class because [they are] thinking about this institution’s involvement with slavery.”

### Factor Analysis and Open-Ended Responses

Table 3 presents the factors, factor loadings, and reliability coefficients for all composite variables described in the Appendix, which shows the full list of variables used in the multivariate regression models and their coding schemes. We computed internal consistency estimates on each factor and the respective Cronbach’s alphas for the slavery history emotional response factor, slavery history psychological response factor, and slavery history behavioral response factor were .906, .743, and .733 (see Table 3). These analyses provided important validity evidence based on internal structure (AERA, APA, & NCME, 2014)

Students’ responses to the open-ended question on the survey asking them to “further describe your experience attending [this

TABLE 2.  
Percent Agree for Responses to Campus Slavery History

Variable	Agree and Strongly Agree (%)
I often feel resentment towards this institution because of its involvement with slavery	46.3
I often feel anger towards this institution because of its involvement with slavery	40.9
I often feel frustrated because of this institution’s involvement with slavery	48.4
I often feel helpless because of this institution’s involvement with slavery	17.2
I often feel depressed because of this institution’s involvement with slavery	13.0
I often cannot focus in class because I am thinking about this institution’s involvement with slavery	7.6
I often cannot focus on studying because I am thinking about this institution’s involvement with slavery	9.7
I often think about this institution’s involvement with slavery	58.1
I avoid areas on campus that remind me of this institution’s involvement with slavery	18.3
I don’t participate in certain activities that remind me of this institution’s involvement with slavery	35.5
This institution’s involvement with slavery has had a major impact on my college experience	39.8

TABLE 3.  
Factor Loadings and Reliability Coefficients

Factor	Items	$\alpha$	Loading
<i>Slavery History Emotional Response</i>		.906	
	I often feel resentment towards this institution because of its involvement with slavery		.903
	I often feel anger towards this institution because of its involvement with slavery		.901
	I often feel frustrated because of this institution's involvement with slavery		.849
	I often feel helpless because of this institution's involvement with slavery		.821
	I often feel depressed because of this institution's involvement with slavery		.799
<i>Slavery History Behavioral Response</i>		.733	
	I avoid areas on campus that remind me of this institution's involvement with slavery		.876
	I don't participate in certain activities that remind me of this institution's involvement with slavery		.82
	This institution's involvement with slavery has had a major impact on my college experience		.741
<i>Slavery History Psychological Response</i>		.743	
	I often cannot focus in class because I am thinking about this institution's involvement with slavery		.942
	I often cannot focus on studying because I am thinking about this institution's involvement with slavery		.939
	I often think about this institution's involvement with slavery		.625
<i>Racial Microaggressions</i>		.841	
	Nonverbal slights related to my race/ethnicity		.841
	Poorer service because of my race/ethnicity		.812
	Perceived to be less intelligent because of my race/ethnicity		.806
	Perceived to be dishonest because of my race/ethnicity		.795
	Verbal insults related to my race/ethnicity		.659
<i>Negative Interactions With White Students</i>		.795	
	Felt insulted or threatened because of my race/ethnicity		.841
	Had guarded, cautious interactions		.816
	Had tense, somewhat hostile interactions		.799
	Felt ignored or invisible because of my race/ethnicity		.710
<i>Perceptions of Institution Addressing Its Racial Inequity</i>		.714	
	I feel confident in this institution's leadership's response to its involvement with slavery		.822
	This institution is committed to developing an environment that is conducive to the success of Students of Color		.809
	This institution's leadership's response to bias incidents has made me feel at ease		.763

institution], a university that was historically involved in slavery” were examined to corroborate the preliminary statistical findings. These findings also showed how the university’s racist violent history of slavery impacted them psychologically, emotionally, and behaviorally. Several students expressed that the university’s history of slavery had what could be described as a psychological impact: “I often feel like it effects [*sic*] me in ways that I don’t even realize,” and “I could be in class or walking around [campus] and it’s always in the back of my mind.” These statements provide insight into the deep impact the university’s history of slavery had on these two students’ psyches. Another participant stated: “I have always felt out of place, isolated, and othered.”

Other participants expressed the emotional toll of attending a university with a history of slavery in their responses. One participant stated: “I felt very out of place at first and cried a lot. I saw friend groups that I felt like I could not find, and being surrounded by a lot of white people made it harder. I don’t relate to their culture much.” This response indicates how the historical context and current pervasiveness of anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016) on campus impacted this student’s sense of belonging and emotional state. Another student indicated: “It’s been an emotional rollercoaster filled with many high moments, but many low ones too.”

Some participants described actions they took in relation to the university’s history of slavery and their experiences at the university. One student said:

Sometimes it feels as though I am a guest at my own university. . . . I’ve grown more conscious of this feeling as the years have gone by and have made it a point to continuously stand up for myself and make myself at home, even in spaces where I am not welcome.

Another student described taking action both within the classroom and through her job on campus:

I, in my role as a guide and in my classes, have made it my mission to make these parts of my experience as a Woman of Color at the university extremely blatant; however, that does not erase the situations of physical, academic, and theoretical exclusion I have faced, both in the classroom and in social activities.

The qualitative portion of the study allowed us to have a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the psychological, emotional, and behavioral responses Black students experienced in relation to the university’s history of slavery. With respect to students’ behavioral responses, the qualitative data demonstrates additional ways students respond to this historical context. While the statistical factor of behavioral response largely focuses on what may be described as a “disengagement” type of response connected to the racial power of the historical context, the open-ended responses show that an additional behavioral response is warranted—that of resistance—as students demonstrated resisting against both the current anti-Black racist environment and the white dominant historical narrative of the institution in various campus spaces.

## Correlation Analyses

Pearson product-moment correlations between the dependent variables and factors in the multiple regression model are presented in Table 4. Notably, the slavery history response factors correlated relatively weaker with the racial microaggressions factor, negative interactions with white students factor, and perception of the institution addressing its racial inequity with the correlation coefficients ranging between  $-.166$  and  $.555$ , than they did with each other. In other words, the slavery history response factors correlated less strongly

TABLE 4.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients Between Various Responses to a University's Slavery History and Factors in Regression Model

Measure	SHER	SHBR	SHPR	RM	NIWS	PIARI
Slavery History Emotional Response (SHER)	—					
Slavery History Behavioral Response (SHBR)	.744***	—				
Slavery History Psych Response (SHPR)	.692***	.675***	—			
Racial Microaggression (RM)	.464***	.498***	.399***	—		
Negative Interactions With White Students (NIWS)	.555***	.408***	.310**	.654***	—	
Perception of Institution Addressing Its Racial Inequity (PIARI)	-.425***	-.337**	-.166	-.531***	-.517***	—

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .005$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

with measures of other types of racialized experiences (e.g., racial microaggressions, negative experiences with white students) or perceptions (e.g., perceptions of the institution addressing its racial inequity), which provides preliminary evidence of the slavery history response factors' discriminant validity.

### Regression Analyses

Table 5 presents the results of the regression models predicting slavery history emotional, behavioral, and psychological responses. The full models accounted for 35.9% of the variance in slavery history emotional response, 13.6% of the variance in slavery history psychological response, and 27.3% of the variance in slavery history behavioral response. No single variable was statistically significant across all three models.

Students who identified as only African ( $b = -.513, p < .10$ ) or who were from two or more groups of African descent ( $b = -.734, p < .05$ ) reported lower behavioral responses than students who identified as only African American. Additionally, having greater experiences of racial microaggressions predicted

greater behavioral responses ( $b = .379, p < .01$ ) and psychological responses ( $b = .377, p < .01$ ) to the institution's slavery history. Having experienced more negative interactions with white students also predicted greater emotional responses to the institution's history of slavery ( $b = .407, p < .01$ ). Lastly, students who identified as cisgender men reported lower emotional responses ( $b = -.569, p < .05$ ) and behavioral responses to the institution's slavery history ( $b = -.464, p < .10$ ).

As noted previously, 1 student identified as genderqueer / gender nonconforming and 1 student identified as difference. While we were not able to account for these students' identities in the statistical models, we chose to examine their open-ended responses to ensure their perspectives were represented in the analysis, though we did not include their specific identities when including their quotes to maintain confidentiality. One of these students expressed the importance of their multitude of identities and, in particular, "multitude of oppressions" to their lived experience on campus: "I am impacted by gender issues and homophobia at [this

institution] and society in general. So I may not feel the racial tension as much, because I'm distracted by a multitude of oppressions at once, and it all blends together for me." The other student seemed to suggest that focusing too much or attaching oneself too much to the past or one's identity can stagnate people of African descent. Still in this students' response is the feeling that the university's history of slavery continues to "haunt":

We need not be hung up on the past and move on into the future. Set free what lives in [this university's] involvement with slavery, act on those feelings that continue to haunt and move onward. . . . I think to some degree we attach the trauma of past violence to our identities. That's fine, it's a way of coping. But then we must move on from our past identities into

something new and different. We should not be attached to our identities, we should constantly overcome them. . . . Instead we should triumph over the stagnation of identity and become who we were in the expression of our power, way of being, our becoming. The past does not define us: it is merely the precondition that is left behind.

This student's response further connects to Sharpe's (2016) book, which acknowledges Black trauma while making conceptual space to imagine Black life outside oppressive regimes of the state. The student seems to strive for a Black identity that moves towards "who [Black people] *were*" prior to chattel slavery and its aftermath into "something new and different." This student's quote serves as a further implication that provides a nuanced perspective informing future

TABLE 5.

Multivariate Regression Models Predicting Slavery History Emotional, Behavioral, and Psychological Responses

Variables	Slavery History Emotional Response		Slavery History Behavioral Response		Slavery History Psychological Response	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
African Only	-.327	.274	-.513	.291*	-.312	.318
Two or More Groups of African Descent	-.498	.323	-.734	.344**	-.382	.375
Black Mixed With Other Groups	-.176	.236	-.124	.251	-.274	.274
Cisgender Man	-.569	.223**	-.464	.237*	-.408	.259
First Generation	-.066	.23	-.043	.244	-.112	.266
Class Standing	-.045	.075	.029	.079	.026	.087
Transfer	-.404	.332	-.316	.353	-.423	.385
Racial Microaggressions	.125	.121	.379	.128***	.377	.140***
Negative Interactions With White Students	.407	.123***	.135	.13	.115	.142
Perceptions of Institution Addressing Racial Inequity	-.046	.114	.029	.117	.196	.127
Constant	.410	.237*	.216	.252	.206	.275
adj <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.359		.273		.136	

\**p* < .10. \*\**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .01.

qualitative data collection on this important topic to further explore how attending college with this historical context relates to identity development and motivation.

## DISCUSSION

This study was exploratory in nature, used to establish a proof of concept of the underlying relationships and to examine the psychometric properties of measures related to Black student responses to one university's history of slavery. Utilizing QuantCrit (N. M. Garcia et al., 2018), we designed a survey that would help capture within-group variation among Black undergraduates and interrogate institutional racial power dynamics to help prevent racial essentialism (Johnston-Guerrero, 2017) and advance quantitative approaches for racial justice aims. Overall, the findings reveal that the historical legacy of slavery does play an important role in current Black students' experiences on one campus, as many Black students show psychological, behavioral, and emotional responses to a university's history of slavery. These findings connect to anti-Blackness, which, grounded on Tillet's (2012) work, describes the "heaviness of the historical memory, the everpresence of slavery in Black life (Dumas, 2016, p. 14)." Furthermore, results of the study provide important insights on Black being on a campus that once supported slavery and parallel recent theorizing on Black being in diaspora in the afterlife of slavery (Sharpe, 2016).

Additionally, we sought to introduce select background characteristics and college experience variables contributing to these different types of responses to a university's history of slavery to begin to understand within-group variation as well as environmental factors that may exacerbate student responses to the historical context of the university. Results from the regression models indeed revealed

that individual and college factors are relevant to explaining differences in psychological, behavioral, and emotional responses. Regarding background characteristics, we found initial differences between students in some diaspora categories and their behavioral response to the institution's slavery history showing the importance of examining Black student diversity and their racialized experiences. Specifically, African students and those who identified as from two or more groups of African descent had lower behavioral responses to the institution's history of slavery when compared to African American students. Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) asserted a nuanced understanding of within-group differences for college students of African descent. They found that immigrant Black students are less likely to assume negative incidents occurring on campus based on race or racism, which may help explain this finding. Their findings may also reflect first- and second-generation immigrant students' limited exposure to the legacy of racism in the US in social and family contexts.

Cisgender men were found to have significantly lower emotional and behavioral responses to the institution's slavery history compared to cisgender women, suggesting a need to better understand how multiple forms of oppression may affect Black women in their responses to an institution's history of slavery. An institution's particular history of slavery may also impact Black cisgender women and men differently in how they respond emotionally and behaviorally. Additionally, Smith, Hung, and Franklin (2011) asserted that Black men are constantly developing unique racial- and gender-based techniques for applying coping strategies, which may mitigate the level of emotional and behavioral responses seen in the data. Furthermore, the need to understand the multitude of oppressions in how Black trans\* students respond to a university's history of slavery is also revealed

in the quote by the student stating that it “all blends together for [them].”

With respect to college experiences, having negative interactions with white students and experiencing racial microaggressions were connected to particular types of responses to the institution's slavery history, which illuminates a connection between contemporary experiences of anti-Black racism, the afterlife of slavery, and how students experience the institution's historical racist and violent legacy of slavery. The psychological, behavioral, and emotional responses evident in the data should challenge institutional stakeholders to reflect on the institutionalization of Black suffering into historically white institutions, especially those with a connection to slavery (Dancy, Edwards, & Davis, 2018). Connecting these findings to anti-Blackness over time further reveals how structural racism is embedded in higher education institutions and provides a roadmap for understanding institutional power and the ways that institutional history contributes to it (Mustaffa, 2017). Thus, the results of the study indicate the need for additional research focused on university historical legacies of slavery and contemporary Black student experiences.

## IMPLICATIONS

This exploratory study has implications for policy, practice, and research. First, a growing number of universities have proposed ways to seek reconciliation; however, prior forms of higher education reparations have largely focused on addressing a university's past injustices without understanding the continual impact of this racist violent history on the present. This study provides important empirical evidence on the various ways this history plays a critical role in students' educational experiences on one campus to more comprehensively understand and better

address this history and move towards a more transformative and racially just future. Institutional leaders must better recognize the power of racist violent historical contexts and current manifestations of anti-Blackness on Black students' experiences and health. If visiting places with histories of massive trauma can have a significant impact on students' well-being (Keats, 2005), how might living and learning in such spaces over the course of 4 or more years impact students? Better understanding the developmental implications of Black being on a campus that once supported slavery necessitates additional resources to support Black student health. Our findings also show that addressing current manifestations of racism and campus racial climate may help to address the impact of the university's historical context on student experiences.

Second, the findings from this exploratory study reveal the importance of accounting for important contextual elements related to power and racial dynamics on campus in studies focused on student experiences and engagement (Dowd, Sawatzky, & Korn, 2011). Students reported not being able to focus in class, not attending certain university events, and avoiding particular areas on campus in relation to the difficulty of attending a university with this significant violent and racist history. Examining student engagement and experiences without accounting for such racial and power dynamics may drive erroneous conclusions about Black students on campuses with histories of slavery and lead to interventions that focus on the individual student rather than addressing deeper institutional structures that hinder student success. The findings from this exploratory study further highlight the importance of how survey design rooted in critical literature, frameworks (critical race theory, anti-Blackness), and QuantCrit may promote more responsible

operationalizations of racialized experiences that account for institutional deficits with respect to the inequitable treatment of minoritized students and, in turn, illuminate more accurate realities of minoritized students' educational experiences.

Finally, this exploratory study offers important implications for this ongoing work. As we continue to refine our model we will expand this study with data collected from various institutions with slavery histories in different regions of the country to better understand the effects of various institutional contexts on Black student responses. Additionally, in expanding the sample we will pay special attention to collection efforts that will allow for the examination of AfroLatinx, AfroAsian, and AfroIndigenous student experiences as well as additional social identities (e.g., SES, sexual orientation, trans\*).

Furthermore, we will expand upon the types of responses students have to an institution's history of slavery, as quotes from the open-ended question highlighting behavioral responses to the institution's slavery legacy suggest a separation of behavioral response into two categories: resistance and disengagement. Lastly, we will examine the significant findings of this study with a larger sample to verify consistency and seek to utilize longitudinal student and institutional data to better understand the effects of additional college experiences and contexts on changes in their responses during college.

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## APPENDIX. Variables and Coding Schemes

Variables	Coding
<i>Dependent Variables</i>	
Slavery History Emotional Response	Continuous
Slavery History Behavioral Response	Continuous
Slavery History Psychological Response	Continuous
<i>Independent Variables</i>	
African Only (Reference: Only African American)	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Two or More Groups of African Descent (Reference: Only African American)	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Black Mixed With Other Groups (Reference: Only African American)	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Cisgender Man	0 = No, 1 = Yes
First Generation	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Class Standing	1 = First-Year to 5 = Fifth-Year or More
Transfer	0 = No, 1 = Yes
Racial Microaggressions	Continuous
Negative Interactions With White Students	Continuous
Perceptions of Institution Addressing Racial Inequity	Continuous

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