

The Freedom Plaza Story: One Campus Community's Desire to Embrace Hope and Inclusive Excellence to help Reweave the Social Fabric

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Abstract

Belmont University, a mid-sized, Christ-centered, student-focused institution in Nashville, Tennessee, is located on a former estate that relied on the labor of enslaved individuals for maintenance. In response to the numerous and publicized killings of African Americans in 2020, the university dedicated an area around its iconic fountain to the memory of the enslaved individuals. This location, known as Freedom Plaza, features a fountain inscribed with the names of the known and unknown enslaved individuals. This cross-sectional study investigates awareness and perceptions of Freedom Plaza, a memorial on the campus of Belmont University in Nashville, TN that honors the enslaved individuals who worked on the property before it became a university. The study also examines the impact of Freedom Plaza on the Belmont community and their perception of the impact that enslaved persons had on the university. The results of the survey indicate that the creation of Freedom Plaza was viewed as a worthwhile and long overdue effort towards addressing injustices and promoting positive change. These findings may be applicable to other institutions seeking to address similar issues.

Keywords: Higher Education, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Monuments, Slavery

Introduction

Although the recent increase in conversations on racial malfeasance may suggest it, feelings of injustice and inequity are not new to people living in the United States (Bowdler, J. & Harris, 2022). Each step towards progress we see today was not made without difficulty and perseverance, and on May 25, 2020, our country was served another sobering reminder that there remains much work to be done. The highly viewed and tragic murder of George Floyd sparked tremendous feelings of both injustice and despair for many (Altman, 2020); a despair that ultimately led to heightened discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Belmont University, a private, Christ-centered university in Nashville, TN (FREEDOM PLAZA, 2021). To begin the process of healing, inequity and injustices that exist must be acknowledged (Bowdler, J. & Harris, 2022) The work done with the Belmont University's Freedom Plaza Memorial is merely one way that the university has chosen to address the issue and reweave the metaphorical social fabric.

The Freedom Plaza at Belmont University is a monument that remembers the enslaved individuals who once worked on the land where the university now stands. It serves as a reminder of the history of the property and the events that led to its creation, as well as a way to engage with this history moving forward (Hefner, 2021). While the creation of the Freedom Plaza is a significant step towards acknowledging and addressing past injustices, the university recognizes that a single monument cannot erase years of injustice and inequality. As part of President L. Gregory Jones' strategic plan, the university is committed to embracing hope and inclusive excellence in order to help reweave the social fabric (OUR STRATEGIC PATH TO 2030, 2023) The message of the Freedom Plaza is meant to be shared and amplified in order to inspire positive change in the world.

A survey was conducted to assess the impact of the Freedom Plaza Memorial on Belmont University's faculty, staff, students, and the wider community of non-Belmont educators. The results of the survey identified the emotional and tangible impact of the Freedom Plaza story and encourages the creation of similar projects. Through understanding the challenges and successes of acknowledging and addressing injustices and raising awareness about the Freedom Plaza story to those who may not yet be familiar with it, we hope to inspire more people to join in the ongoing effort towards justice, equality and feelings of belonging.

Literature Review/ Conceptual Framing

As the conversation about race and inequality in the United States has grown, so too has the movement to examine and address the ways in which universities and colleges have benefited from slavery (Smith, S. & Ellis, 2017). In 2003, Brown University launched an investigation into its own history with slavery and published the Slavery and Justice Report in 2006, which detailed the university's connection to slavery and its response to this history. A second edition of the report, which included an interactive component, was released in 2021 (Allen, B. A., Armstrong, P., Azfar, F., 2006). Similarly, the University of Virginia published a report in 2018 titled Slavery and the University, which explored the institution's history with slavery through a multi-year research process led by the President's Commission on Slavery and the University (Martin, M. L., Faulkner, M., & Daacke, K., 2018). Georgetown University has also been working to address its ties to slavery, including researching and sharing the history of slavery at the institution, reaching out to descendants of enslaved individuals, dedicating buildings on campus to honor enslaved individuals whose sale profited the university, and creating a Department of African American Studies in 2016 (Collins, D., Aruleba, A., Carnes, M., Chatelain, M., & Fecadu, C., 2015).

Like the aforementioned institutions, Belmont increased its effort to address its own historical ties to the institution of slavery. In response to the murder of George Floyd in July 2020 and the resulting discussions about race and equality, Belmont University held listening sessions and demonstrations to promote inclusivity on campus and increase knowledge about the history of the property. The university wished to demonstrate its commitment to creating a culture of inclusivity and belonging, while acknowledging that its past ties to slavery were a crucial part of this effort.

Belmont University was founded in 1890, when the Belmont Estate in Nashville, Tennessee was purchased by two women from Philadelphia and transformed into Belmont College. The estate had previously been owned by Adelia Hayes Franklin Acklen and Joseph Acklen; and was home to enslaved individuals. Although the property was not utilized as a plantation, the maintenance of the estate still relied on the labor of enslaved individuals. Records from the slave census of 1850 and 1860 reveal that 13 and 32 slaves, respectively, worked on the Belmont Estate. Records also show that after the Civil War, several individuals remained on the estate and worked as paid servants (Belmont Mansion. The Slave Census or Slave Schedules, n.d.). Little is known about the lives of the enslaved individuals that worked on the Belmont Estate but an ongoing effort to collect accounts from their lives is being undertaken by the Belmont Mansion Association. In 1991, Belmont College received accreditation and became Belmont University (Belmont History, n.d.).

To acknowledge the estate's historical ties to slavery, the University's Faculty Senate decided to create a physical memorial on campus, which was dedicated on January 18, 2021. The Belmont Mansion, the Acklen family's summer home built in 1860, still stands on the estate and is used by the university as a National House Museum that hosts historical tours throughout the week. This led to the question of whether there was any physical space on campus dedicated to the memory of the enslaved individuals who worked the land and maintained the estate. Constructing Freedom Plaza was seen as an important way to bring balance to the narrative of the Belmont Estate and recognize the stories of the enslaved individuals who worked there.

Memorial spaces serve as narrative agents, preserving and sharing the stories of the past (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). The Faculty Senate believed that creating Freedom Plaza was an appropriate way to transform the campus and bring attention to the history of the estate and the people who labored on it against their will. This was seen as a way to honor and acknowledge the legacy of the estate and the individuals who played a significant role in its history. A physical memorial to the enslaved individuals of the Belmont Estate would highlight the history of the land, celebrate the lives of the enslaved, and educate the public about their story. Freedom Plaza was designed with these goals in mind. It features a large fountain with the inscriptions of the names of the enslaved individuals known to have worked on the estate, a plaque with a short history of the land's connection to slavery, and an inscription with lyrics from the "Oh Freedom" spiritual, an African American freedom song from the post-Civil War era. The plaza was dedicated with a performance of the song by Dr. Jeffery Ames, Professor of Music, and Director of Choral Activities at Belmont University. In addition to the physical monument, the university implemented several policy changes to demonstrate its commitment to hope, unity and belonging on campus, including revising the faculty hiring process, faculty review process, and student organization annual reporting.

Since the dedication of Freedom Plaza over a year ago, the study authors have sought to measure the awareness and impact of the memorial space on Belmont University faculty, staff, students, and the larger community.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

Memorials can be thought of as physical manifestations of memories. According to the art of memory framework, memorials are representational images of a specific event in a specific place that serve to remind observers of that event (Yilmaz, 2010). Architectural memorialization transforms mental representations into physical form. By transforming physical spaces, memorials allow memories to manifest in a physical way and for the histories of a particular place to be ingrained into the landscape (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). Memorials transform space into a place associated with human social relations and give meaning to the surrounding area. They can exist in spaces with complex identities and reflect the dynamic culture of the surrounding area (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). Memorials support a specific narrative and transform spaces into places that can be identified by the experiences and stories they depict.

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of Belmont University's creation of Freedom Plaza on the university's efforts to embrace hope and inclusive excellence to help reweave the social fabric.

The objectives of this study were:

- To measure awareness of Freedom Plaza at Belmont University
- To measure the impact of the story of the enslaved people of Belmont
- To measure the perception of the impact of Freedom Plaza on the current Belmont community

Research Design

This study was conducted as part of a research presentation on the creation and impact of a monument honoring enslaved people at Belmont University. The researchers created poster presentations explaining the timeline and purpose of Freedom Plaza, which were presented during a research symposium on Friday, June 17, 2022, at Belmont University during the annual Juneteenth celebration. Juneteenth is a celebration that started in June of 1866 in the state of Texas. It celebrates the anniversary date of when African Americans first learned they had been emancipated, which was formulated in the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 (Brittanica, 2021). Belmont University's inaugural Juneteenth celebration was held to honor and highlight the history of the enslaved persons who lived, worked, and were enslaved at Belmont (Belmont Mansion. The Slave Census or Slave Schedules, n.d.).

Subjects and Setting

The subjects of this study were Belmont University faculty, staff, students, and community members who attended Belmont's 2022 Juneteenth celebration and participation in the study was voluntary. A total of 84 participants completed the survey.

The researchers also presented a second research poster related to this study at the Association of Teacher Educators conference, but no conference attendees participated in the breakout session and completed the survey. All data for this study was gathered from respondents at the Juneteenth celebration.

Instrumentation

The research poster for this study included information about the history of the land and people of Belmont from 1850 to 1865, including images of the historic Belmont mansion and living spaces where enslaved people were housed. The posters connected the injustices experienced by the enslaved people of Belmont to the injustices being experienced by Black Americans in 2020 amid racial tensions and unrest in the United States. The posters also discussed the impact of the murder of George Floyd and the actions taken by Belmont faculty, staff, and students to speak out against systemic racism and white supremacy. The process of raising funds and honoring the legacy and lives of the enslaved people through the creation of Freedom Plaza was outlined, along with images of the plaza marker and fountain dedicated to the enslaved people of Belmont. The research poster also summarized Belmont's 2030 goals for inclusivity and justice for all people around the world.

A survey was developed to measure the impact of Freedom Plaza. The inclusion criteria for the survey were ages 18-65. Participants were informed that their participation in the voluntary survey would pose minimal risks or discomforts. The survey explained that the responses would help the researchers determine the effectiveness of their storytelling and the importance of the Freedom Plaza initiative from the participants' perspectives. The survey required participants to identify their age range and whether they were affiliated with Belmont University or a member of the larger community. The survey included eight multiple choice questions and three open-ended responses. All survey responses were handwritten and collected by the researchers, who then organized and analyzed the data using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The researchers verified the input of the data after transferring said data from the paper survey to the spreadsheet. Nominal data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel, and short answer responses were analyzed using Google word cloud data sorting and an inductive assessment of individual responses to identify the most common cited terms and concepts.

Results

A total of 84 surveys were collected from Belmont's inaugural Juneteenth event. Table 1 shows the full breakdown of survey participants by their relationship to the university.

Table 1. Breakdown of survey respondents by relationship to the university	
Faculty	14.0%
Staff	44.0%
Student	30.0%
Administrator	6.0%
Community Member	1.0%
Other	5.0%

Regarding foreknowledge of Freedom Plaza, 90% of survey participants stated they had previously heard about the monument. Table 2 shows the sources through which participants initially heard about Freedom Plaza.

Table 2. Breakdown of how survey respondents initially heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza	
From a student attending Belmont University	4.8%
From a faculty member who works at Belmont University	28.6%
From a staff member who works at Belmont University	25.0%
From someone who lives in the Belmont area	0.0%
From Belmont's eNews Letter or other online source	25.0%
I do not recall	6.0%
No answer	9.5%
Other	1.2%

Out of all survey participants, 79% responded that they felt positive when they heard about Freedom Plaza versus 1% who stated they felt negatively. Similarly, for those who saw Freedom Plaza, 69% responded that they felt positive when they saw the monument versus 1% who said they felt negatively. A breakdown of survey respondents' initial feelings to hearing about or seeing Freedom Plaza can be found on Tables 3 and 4, respectively. Across all cohorts, the majority of respondents stated they felt positive when they initially saw or heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza.

Table 3. How survey respondents felt when they heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza	
I had a positive feeling when I initially heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	78.6%
I had a negative feeling when I initially heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	1.2%
I had a neutral feeling when I initially heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	8.3%
I had no feeling, positive or negative, when I initially heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	2.4%
I don't recall what I felt when I initially heard about Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	2.4%
No answer	7.1%

Table 4. How survey respondents felt when they initially saw Belmont University's Freedom Plaza	
I had a positive feeling when I initially saw Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	69.0%
I had a negative feeling when I initially saw Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	1.2%
I had a neutral feeling when I initially saw Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	13.1%
I had no feeling, positive or negative, when I initially saw Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	3.6%
I don't recall what I felt when I initially saw Belmont's Freedom Plaza.	0.0%
No answer	13.1%

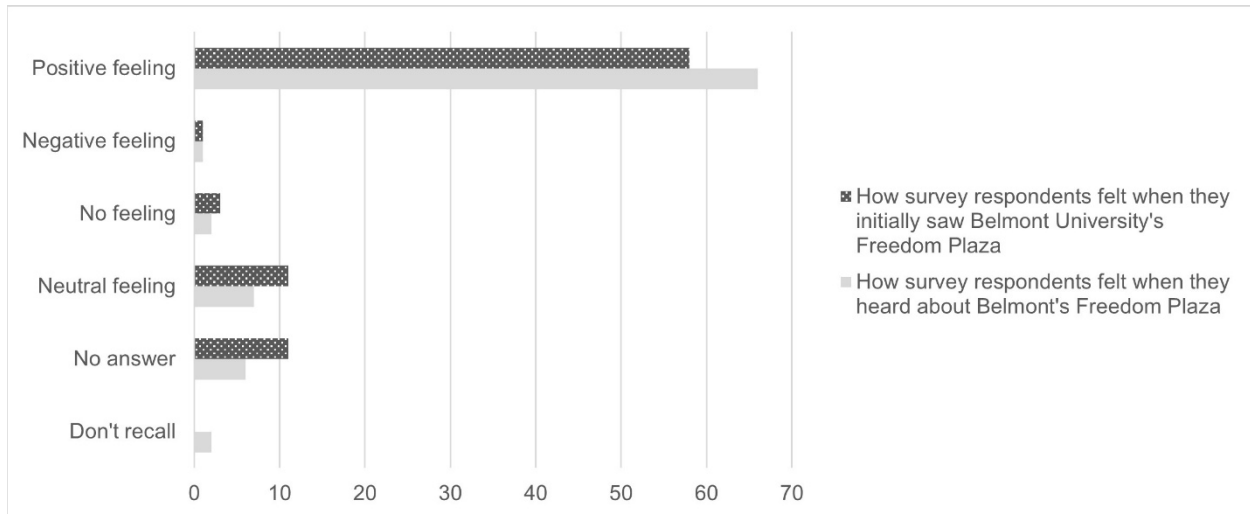


Figure 1.

There were 72 participants (86%) who answered in the affirmative as to whether they believed the resources Belmont invested in the creation of Freedom Plaza were a good investment and only 1 participant who answered no. The most frequently occurring reason for this response was related to the historical importance of the monument, with the terms "past" or "history" appearing in 23 different short answer responses. Acknowledgement of the estate's relationship to slavery or the enslaved also appeared in multiple responses, with the terms "slave," "slavery," "enslaved," and "people" (when referring to the enslaved) appearing in 13 different responses. Table 5 shows a selection of short answer responses detailing why participants either felt the monument was a good investment or not.

Table 5. Selection of short answer responses regarding why respondents felt Freedom Plaza was a good investment or not	
Good investment	I think it's important for institutions to recognize their history even when that history is not positive
Good investment	The plaque wording is powerful, and the names of the enslaved people entitled in the fountain even more so. I think about those individuals every time I walk by the fountain.
Good investment	I learned about freedom plaza when it was in the conceptual phase, and I believe I felt it was an important step for Belmont to publicly recognize the slaves who were involved in the hard labor to develop this property (the estate). When I saw the Freedom Plaza I was moved to tears and felt grateful that our colleagues created a tangible way to tell this important story.
Not a good investment	I believe more visual descriptions of the purpose and meaning of Freedom Plaza would benefit the student body
No response	I questioned why Belmont felt the need to create a fountain or dedicate a plaza called "Freedom" on a PWI campus that was formally a plantation. Seems like another not fully thought-out attempt to fix something that goes deeper than putting a fountain in the memory of these impacted.

When asked if they felt empowered to initiate a similar project on their own campus, 43% of the survey participants responded in the affirmative, 20% responded no, and 35% did not provide an answer. There were no clear patterns among the short answer responses, with no term being repeated more than 10 times. Table 6 shows a selection of short answer responses detailing why participants did or did not feel empowered to start a similar project.

Table 6. Selection of short answer responses regarding why respondents did or did not feel empowered to start a similar project	
Do not feel empowered	It is not something I am super passionate about. I believe it is important just not at the top of my list
Do not feel empowered	I'm not sure. As a white male, I'm not sure how receptive people of color, would be to my project idea. However, I'm completely invested in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and support all efforts
Do feel empowered	It shows dedication to honoring our histories while still moving forward. Most individuals have some form of that in their personal history
Do feel empowered	This story had so much power and shows what can happen when people come together to bring light to these things.

Discussion

The Impact of Monuments on Cultural Memory

Memorials shape cultural memory and can function as places for individuals, communities, and even provide healing as various cultures wrestle with toxic history that continues to influence daily injustices (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). Instead of being merely a landscape of toxic memory of the United States' South, the Freedom Plaza was designed to explore alternative modes of remembering the past and could potentially speak to the awareness and commitment of creating spaces for racial reckoning (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019).

Based on evidence from the study, the Freedom Plaza Memorial matters because it represents a way to confront historic injustices and inequalities that have been felt by ethnic groups and various cultures on the college campus for years. By understanding the impact of memorials on campus, people of different backgrounds can not only learn to work together but can shift from being culturally aware to cultural humility, which is a commitment to a lifelong process of social interactions and reflection, despite the toxic and racially damaging history (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019).

Memorial spaces are physical representations of past events that are placed in public areas to help keep these events alive in the public's memory (Attwa, Y., Refaat, M., & Kandil, 2021) According to a survey conducted by the New York City Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers, respondents believed that the primary role of monuments in public spaces is for historical understanding, followed by celebration of an achievement and educational purposes (Final Report. Qualitative Analysis of Public Surveys for the Mayoral Advisory Commission on City Art, Monuments, and Markers, 2017). This study found similar results when examining patterns among responses to the question of whether Freedom Plaza was a good investment. Many participants cited the historical significance of the monument and its role in acknowledging and remembering the past as important factors in their assessment of its value.

Cultural Humility versus Cultural Competence

"Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection and discovery that is meant to build honest and trustworthy relationships" (Yeager, K.A., & Bauer-Wu, 2013, p. 2). This concept, originally introduced by healthcare professionals Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-Garcia in 1998, is defined as a way of being that involves an ongoing process of reflection and deepening one's understanding of cultural differences in order to improve how vulnerable populations are treated, educated, and researched. Cultural humility involves a commitment to collaborating with others, respecting experiences and perspectives, addressing power imbalances and biases, and fostering authentic relationships (Danso, 2017).

Cultural humility is similar to other concepts such as cultural competence and reflexivity, which are often used interchangeably in literature (Danso, 2017). However, there are differences between them (Danso, 2016). The National Education Association (NEA) defines cultural competence as the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than one's own, and it involves interpersonal awareness, cultural knowledge, and a skill set that together promote effective cross-cultural teaching (NEA, 2023). Although cultural competence has received wide acceptance and is positively reviewed in academia, it has been criticized for the tendency to be tokenistic, treating culture as a neutral phenomenon and lacking power analysis (Garrahan, A. M., & Rozas, 2013). Because educators and others often lack the skills and awareness to fully promote the concept of cultural competence, researchers have called for the replacement of cultural competence with cultural humility (Tervalon, M., & Murray-Garcia, 1998).

For many years, healthcare and educational institutions have provided cultural competence training to expose providers to various cultures and expand their knowledge of different beliefs and value systems (Fisher-Borne, M., Montana Cain, J., & Martin, 2015). These trainings have been intended to decrease health disparities, improve the quality of care, decrease educational achievement gaps, and improve educational outcomes (Fisher-Borne, M., Montana Cain, J., & Martin, 2015). While these efforts are commendable, research has shown that they have had limited influence on decreasing disparities, changing negative stereotypes, decreasing racist ideas, and behaviors (Fisher-Borne, M., Montana Cain, J., & Martin, 2015). Cultural competence training alone does not recognize the multi-dimensional nature of a person's beliefs, personal values, and behaviors (Yeager, K.A., & Bauer-Wu, 2013).

Because being culturally competent is not sufficient to address these issues, researchers have encouraged the adoption of cultural humility and its three tenets: lifelong learning and self-reflection; mitigating power imbalances; and institutional accountability (Yeager, K.A., & Bauer-Wu, 2013).

Under the new leadership of Dr. Greg Jones, Belmont University has made a commitment to lifelong learning and reflection, which is outlined in one of its five strategic pathways: embracing hope and inclusive excellence and help to reweave the social fabric (OUR STRATEGIC PATH TO 2030, 2023). This commitment has been demonstrated through a variety of initiatives, including ongoing listening sessions, book studies, roundtable discussions and guest lecturers (FREEDOM PLAZA, 2021).

Although Belmont University did not own enslaved persons, the Belmont Mansion as well as the land on which it was founded was built and managed by enslaved persons, implying a connection between the university and the enslavement of people (Belmont Mansion. The Slave Census or Slave Schedules, n.d.). In recognition of this history, Belmont University is committed to an ongoing process of reflection and is striving not only to be culturally competent, but also culturally humble. This commitment was demonstrated when former President Dr. Bob Fisher and the University Faculty Senate partnered with the Belmont community to create Freedom Plaza (Hefner, 2021).

Connection to Belmont's Strategic Path to 2030: Reweaving the Social Fabric

Belmont University has chosen to help reweave the social fabric through initiatives like the Freedom Plaza, which aims to acknowledge and understand the past, while also promoting cultural differences, acknowledging privilege, and valuing the perspectives and values of all people. Through listening sessions, teaching center book studies, and the implementation of Belmont's strategic path to 2030, the university continues to evolve in cultural humility; recognizing cultural competency is not enough. It is through an ongoing process of reflection, inclusivity, and hope that the university continues to address strategies to reweave the social fabric.

Moving forward, it is important to be patient, intentional, aware, reflective, and brave in our efforts to reweave the social fabric (Arao, B., & Clemens, 2013). This involves being culturally competent and culturally humble and being committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members of the Belmont community.

Based on the results of the survey, it appears that the university has been somewhat effective in measuring opinions about the Freedom Plaza and the efforts to reweave the social fabric. Many participants expressed a desire to learn more about the monument and its significance, and there was a recognition that the campus community wants to be more culturally comfortable but may not know how to do so. There was also a sense among some participants that their ancestors had an impact on the creation of the community, and that they therefore belong at this predominantly white institution. Based on the data collected, there is a desire among the Belmont community to continue working towards reweaving the social fabric and creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

Memorials and monumental spaces like Freedom Plaza can create physical and mental spaces for healing and reconciliation (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). Within these spaces, various cultures can be reminded to acknowledge harmful truths of the past, while reflecting and moving towards a life-long commitment to reweave the social fabric (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). Although difficult, reweaving is a willingness to be open with a spirit of caring for humankind. It is through cultural humility that patience, intentionality, awareness, and reflection can be learned through spaces like the Freedom Plaza that promotes bravery (Arao, B., & Clemens, 2013).

Hope to Reweave the Social Fabric

According to the Aspen Institute, a weaver is someone who believes that relationships can transform our lives and communities, and ultimately help to heal the divisions within our nation (The Aspen Institute, 2022). This approach, known as weaving, involves bringing a spirit of care and openness to every interaction with others and being willing to give without expecting anything in return. The Aspen Institute suggests that weaving is not just a set of actions, but a way of life and a state of mind (The Aspen Institute, 2022).

The concept of social fabric refers to the relationships and connections we make with others, which make us all a part of the common thread of society (The Aspen Institute, 2022). By creating the Freedom Plaza, Belmont University has taken steps to strengthen this social fabric and to acknowledge and understand the past, while also promoting cultural differences, acknowledging privilege, and valuing the perspectives and values of all people (Schmitz, C. L., Stakeman, C., & Sisneros, 2011).

Belmont University continues to work towards transforming lives and leading with love as it engages in difficult conversations and holds itself accountable for its actions. It recognizes that cultural competence is not enough, and that it is also important to cultivate cultural humility.

Limitations

There were a number of limitations in the study. While Belmont University's student, staff, faculty and administrative population now number in excess of 10,000 individuals, only eighty-four participants completed the survey.

Some of the individuals who completed the survey may not have engaged in the poster presentations given during the celebration. Those participants engaged in the survey without having the supplemental knowledge and information that had been shared in advance of other participants engaging in the survey. The authors concede that the lack of recent exposure to the topic before participating in the survey may have impacted the received responses. These survey participants cannot be differentiated.

The researchers attempted to collect data from the Association of Teacher Educators conference but were not successful in collecting feedback from those attendees. However, six percent of respondents who participated in the survey did not identify as a Belmont faculty, staff, student, or administrator. This may be explained by the open nature of the Juneteenth celebration, and the fact that members of the community (performers, friends of performers, visitors) may have attended the event.

Conclusion

Enslaved people lived, worked, and labored against their will on the Belmont estate between 1850 and 1860. In 1890 Belmont College was established on this same land and would later become what is now Belmont University. The current day mansion, statutes, buildings, gazebos, and gardens on Belmont's land only reflected the status, legacy and narratives of the Acklen family until the creation of the Freedom Plaza Memorial (Belmont Mansion. History of Belmont Mansion, n.d.).

Many people were unaware of the enslaved people of Belmont. The book, *In the Shadows* by Erica Hayden and Mark Brown was published in 2018. This was the first text which outlined the names of many of those who were enslaved and worked the land on which Belmont exists (Brown, M., & Hayden, 2018). Widespread discussion about the lives and legacy of the enslaved people of Belmont began in 2020 when social unrest spread throughout the United States after the killings of several African Americans (FREEDOM PLAZA, 2021). It was during this time that Belmont University faculty, staff, and students began to raise their voices against the injustices happening all around them. A connection was made between current-day injustices and the injustices of the enslaved people who had not been acknowledged by the University. (Hefner, 2021). Similar to Brown, Georgetown, and the University of Virginia, Belmont would now more publicly explore its ties to enslaved people (Collins, D., Aruleba, A., Carnes, M., Chatelain, M., & Fecadu, C., 2015) (Martin, M. L., Faulkner, M., & Daacke, K., 2018) (Allen, B. A., Armstrong, P., Azfar, F., 2006). A subcommittee of the Belmont Faculty Senate spearheaded the creation of a monument to address the relationship of the land on which the University existed to the practices of slavery, racism and white supremacy. The Senate worked with community stakeholders to raise funds for the creation of the Freedom Plaza Memorial (Hefner, 2021). Memorials have the ability to transform spaces and ingrain the histories and narratives of times past into current landscapes (Henihan, A., & Langness, 2019). The Freedom Plaza Memorial would serve to honor the legacy and lives of the enslaved people who toiled on the estate where Belmont University now sits (Hefner, 2021). After the creation of Freedom Plaza, the study's authors created and distributed a voluntary survey at a Juneteenth Celebration to determine the impact of the creation and installation of the monument on campus.

One objective of the study was to measure the impact of Freedom Plaza and measure the perception of the impact that enslaved persons had on the Belmont Community. The data reveal that the creation of Freedom Plaza had a positive impact on survey participants. Several participants stated that

they believed Freedom Plaza was a good investment because it acknowledged the enslaved people's contribution to the Belmont community in a way that had not been done previously. Another objective was to raise awareness about the existence of Belmont's Freedom Plaza. The data revealed that awareness was raised about Freedom Plaza. The authors believe that the objectives of the study were achieved.

This study fulfills its purpose of assessing the university's aim to continue to embrace hope and inclusive excellence to help reweave the social fabric through their creation of the Freedom Plaza Memorial. Given the perceived importance of the impact of memorial spaces, and the University's desire to help reweave the social fabric through cultural humility, life-long learning, and self-reflection, The Freedom Plaza Memorial will be a lasting symbol of Belmont's commitment to be patient, brave, reflective, and aware while ensuring a sense of belonging for everyone connected to the campus community moving forward. Through accomplishing the study's objectives, the authors believe this purpose was fulfilled.

Implications for More Research

A key limitation of this study is that survey respondents were recruited exclusively from attendees at the 2022 Belmont University Juneteenth Celebration. Even with a limited cohort size, staff, faculty, students of Belmont and the larger community engaged in the study. In the future, this could allow for additional research to be conducted for each demographic who participates in the survey.

Given their knowledge of the Freedom Plaza at Belmont, respondents to this survey have communicated their perceptions of the creation of the plaza are positive. This study reveals that a variety of survey respondents believe resources used to create the plaza were a good investment. The study could be expanded at Belmont and at other institutions or organizations desiring to address injustices and bring about positive change.

Future research may include a larger data set that is more reflective of the community that is being assessed. A variety of events, courses, or workshops may be held at Belmont or at other institutions interested in taking similar steps to be more inclusive and collaborative when seeking to bring about change. The study could be expanded to include the families of students who attend or tour the university to learn the breadth of the impact of Freedom Plaza on those who encounter it on Belmont's campus.

Researchers may seek to determine the effects that the Freedom Plaza Memorial may have on their understanding of what it means to reweave the social fabric for Belmont University faculty, staff, students and the larger community. They may discuss challenges and opportunities for community building on other campuses. After several years, additional research may be conducted to consider the actions Belmont faculty, staff, and students have taken to sustain the relevance of Freedom Plaza Memorial and Monument.

Given the variety of stakeholders needed to move from ideation to creation with the development of Freedom Plaza, additional research may be conducted on the need for collaboration when striving to complete similar efforts to reweave the social fabric and bring about positive change.

Other institutions may consider actions that Belmont faculty, students and staff have taken to sustain the relevance of Freedom Plaza and Monument and mirror those same steps. In light of this study and given the history of injustices of people past and present in America, other institutions of higher education may also be encouraged to continue to dive into their own history, discover the impact of their history on the people who currently exist at those institutions, and help reweave the social fabric. Seeing the positive impact of Belmont's Freedom Plaza on its constituents and those in the larger community,

other institutions may be inspired to create monuments to acknowledge and recognize those whose stories might have been unraveled or torn from the social fabric over time.

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