

Remembrance, Rebellion, or Racism: Associations between Beliefs about the Confederate Flag's Symbolism and Political Affiliations, and Racist Attitudes

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: this research examines the extent to which beliefs that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, rebellion, or racism are associated with political affiliations and racial attitudes (Study 1) and patriotism and beliefs about social hierarchies (Study 2). **Methods:** A nation-wide sample of White adults in the United States were recruited and completed a series of questionnaires about their beliefs about the Confederate flag, political affiliations, and racial attitudes (Study 1, $N = 180$) and patriotism and beliefs about social hierarchies (Study 2, $N = 192$). **Results:** We found that those who believe the Confederate flag stands for remembrance or rebellion had more positive feelings about the flag, had more conservative beliefs, were more patriotic, had more negative attitudes toward Black Americans, and were more likely to adhere to beliefs about social hierarchies. **Implications:** Findings of these studies have important implications for race relations in the United States.

1. Introduction

“When they said ‘Dixie’ is an offensive word, I thought, ‘Well, I don’t wanna offend anybody’... you just do stuff not realizing, but as soon as you realize that it is a problem, you should fix it.”

-Dolly Parton, on the decision to rename Dixie Stampede (Mamo, 2020)

“I think all of Hazzard Nation understands that the Confederate battle flag is the symbol that represents the indomitable spirit of independence which keeps us ‘makin’ our way the only way we know how...Our beloved symbol is now being attacked in a wave of political correctness that is unprecedented in our nation of free speech and free expression.”

-Ben Jones, *Dukes of Hazzard* actor, in defense of the Confederate flag following the Charleston church massacre (McAfee, 2015)

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“Momma said that the Forrest part was to remind me that sometimes we all do things that, well, just don't make no sense”

-Forrest Gump, on why he was named after Nathaniel Bedford Forrest (Zemeckis, 1994)

As these quotes illustrate, while there is debate about what the Confederate flag¹ stands for, it is clearly a powerfully contentious symbol with a polarizing effect (Leib, 1995) and is an issue as complex as race and racism in the United States (Lippard, 2017). To some the Confederate flag commemorates the sacrifices of their ancestors and symbolizes Southern pride; to others it is a divisive symbol associated with racism, violence, and intimidation. This heritage vs. hate dichotomy is well documented (e.g., Glaser, 2000; Leib, 1995; Leib et al. 2000; Lippard, 2017; Orey, 2004; Reingold & Wike, 1998; Sinclair-Chapman, 2018; Strother et al., 2017; Wright & Esses, 2017) and the empirical research on the Confederate flag's meaning primarily employs samples of Southern participants (e.g., Cooper et al., 2021; Glaser, 2000; Holyfield et al., 2009; Huffmon et al., 2017; Orey, 2004; Reingold & Wike, 1998; Strother et al., 2017; Wright & Esses, 2017). However, the flag and other Confederate symbols surprisingly appear in non-Southern states; yet these unlikely occurrences, and the attitudes behind them, have received little empirical attention. Using nationwide samples, we explored attitudes about the Confederate flag beyond the heritage vs. hate dichotomy. Specifically, and in tandem with the second quote above, this research explores beliefs that the Confederate flag symbolizes rebellion.

1.1. Confederate Symbols in Unlikely Places

From the appearance of the Confederate flag in a New York City Parade and at a Boston Statehouse (Wellihoff, 1994) to a Confederate memorial fountain in a Montana city park (helenahistory.org), Confederate symbols have emerged throughout non-Southern areas of the United States. The Southern Poverty Law Center (2021) documents public symbols of the Confederacy which includes an elementary school named for General Robert E. Lee and a road near the Canadian border named for General George Pickett in the state of Washington. Additional reports occurred in South Dakota where a police department logo depicted the Confederate flag alongside the American flag from 2009 to 2020 (Long, 2020; Sand, 2020) and in California where one group of students posted photos of themselves in front of the flag (Rahman, 2020) while others flew Confederate and American flags in their truck beds (Nelson, 2017). News outlets report that Confederate memorabilia sellers have observed a 15% increase in sales to Northern and Western states over the past 20 years (McCammon, 2017; Sellers, 2018).

If Confederate symbols are present in Northern areas of the United States (i.e., states that were part of the Union or Northern Territories during the American Civil War) how might their presence be explained? The argument of a proud Southern heritage holds less weight in these areas among others whose ancestry cannot be traced back to the South or members of the Confederate army. The racism argument remains an option, and the presence of Confederate symbols in Northern areas of the United States has been connected to White Supremacy groups, racism, intimidation, and fear (AP News, 2021; Doyle, 2020; Geoghegan, 2013; Howells, 2020; the McLellan, n.d.; montanarightnow.com, 2018; Rahman, 2020; Sellers 2018; Venugopal, 2017). However, if asked, it is unlikely that those flying or wearing the Confederate

¹ The Confederacy had several national flags as well as a battle flag; additionally, many states and regiments adopted their own flags during the Civil War (see Lippard, 2017 for review). Our references to the Confederate flag are to the familiar and commercialized Confederate flag that bears resemblance to the Confederate battle flag.

flag in non-Southern areas will cite their reason for doing so as hatred of another group, yet the Southern heritage argument may not apply. Instead, other arguments must be created to provide non-racist explanations for the display of the Confederate flag. In these non-Southern areas, one argument is that the Confederate flag symbolizes rebellion.

1.2. The Confederate Flag as a Rebel Symbol

News reports provide indications that those who display or wear the Confederate flag do so because they see it as a symbol of rebellion (Doyle, 2020; Geoghegan, 2013; McCammon, 2017; McGregor, 2023; Sellers, 2018; Venugopal, 2017). One such flag supporter was quoted as saying, “As far as the racism goes, I dismiss it, because I’m not racist whatsoever. That flag doesn’t mean that to me” and another spoke about the rebellious symbolism, “They wanted their independence, they wanted a smaller government. I find that a lot in people, it’s just that rebelliousness” (McCammon, 2017). Likewise, others indicate, “the Confederate battle flag is a battle cry against the federal government and a call to buck the system (Doyle, 2020) and “It’s a sign of independence... I look at it as a rebel sign. In the biker community, a lot of people have the Confederate flag because we’re rebels” (McGregor, 2023).

Current conceptualizations align with historical explanations. The flag has been said to represent resistance to federal interference during Reconstruction (1865-1877), as some Southerners maintained that the federal government was too involved in state affairs and continued to interfere with their virtues and traditions after the Civil War (Lippard, 2017). In the 1950s, states again argued that the federal government was interfering with their rights (Leib, 1995; Lippard, 2017; Strother et al., 2017)². The Confederate flag as a symbol of rebellion and defiance to authority is often alluded to in scholarly work (Holyfield et al., 2009; Leib, 1995; Lippard, 2017; Woliver et al., 2001) and has been called “an all-purpose symbol of revolt, defiance, militancy and even general hell-raising” (Wellihoff, 1994). This idea of rebellion is often associated with the commercialized Confederate flag in shows like the Dukes of Hazzard to represent rebellion against authority by a typically conservative, redneck, rural working-class (Lippard, 2017).

1.3. General Overview and Purpose

The purpose of this research is to experimentally test the rebellion argument alongside the remembrance (heritage) and racism (hatred) arguments regarding the Confederate flag across two studies. We examine the connections to these beliefs to political affiliations and racial attitudes (Study 1) and patriotism and beliefs about social hierarchies (Study 2). In each study, we recruited a nation-wide sample of participants to understand the prevalence of these attitudes across the United States.

In Study 1, we pose the following question: are beliefs about the Confederate flag associated with political affiliations and racial attitudes? We predict that beliefs that the flag stands for remembrance and rebellion will be associated with more conservative ideologies and more negative racial attitudes. Our question in Study 2 is: are beliefs about the Confederate flag associated with patriotism and beliefs about social hierarchies? We predict that beliefs that the

² Of note the interpretation that the flag represents resistance to government interference in these two instances is entangled with race and structural racism (Lippard, 2017). The way of life that was being defended during the Civil War was an economic structure that depended on the enslavement of a group of citizens and largely only benefited White wealthy plantation owners who did not want to give rights to former slaves (Lippard, 2017). The federal interventions being protested in the 1950s were about racial equality and integration (Leib, 1995; Lippard, 2017), most notably the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision (Strother et al., 2017).

flag stands for remembrance and rebellion will be associated with greater patriotism and support for beliefs about social hierarchies.

2. Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 is to examine how symbolic beliefs that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, rebellion, or racism are connected political attitudes and affiliations in addition to attitudes toward Black Americans and other social groups.

2.1. Political Affiliations

The debate about the Confederate flag is intertwined with race, religion, politics, and economics (Webster & Leib, 2016). Greater support for the Confederate flag has been associated with conservative political ideologies and political parties (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cooper & Knotts, 2006; Huffmon et al., 2017; Orey, 2004; Wright & Esses, 2017). We examined the relationships between beliefs about the Confederate flag in relationship to political attitudes and affiliation.

2.2. Attitudes toward Black Americans and Other Social Groups

Support for the Confederate flag appears to be associated with higher levels of racism (Cooper et al., 2021; Cooper & Knotts, 2006; Huffmon et al., 2017; Reingold & Wike, 1998; Strother et al., 2017; Wright & Esses, 2017), including old-fashioned racism and contemporary racial resentment (Orey, 2004). We included measures of old-fashioned racism (Orey, 2004; Strother et al., 2017), modern racism (Brigham, 1993), symbolic racism (Henry & Sears, 2002), and discomfort when interacting with Black people (Devine et al., 1991).

Additionally, we examined the extent to which beliefs about the Confederate flag are associated with attitudes toward other racial and social groups. We therefore assessed participants' feelings about Asians, Blacks, Hispanics and Latinos, and Mexicans in addition to asking them their feelings about religious groups (Muslims and Atheists), homosexuals, and poor people.

2.3. Denial of Racism

The belief that we live in a post-racial society where racism is no longer a problem is as problematic as negative racial attitudes and may be connected to support for the Confederate flag. The belief in a post-racial society is connected to symbolic and modern racism and to colorblindness (Holyfield et al., 2009). Believing that discrimination is no longer an issue creates resistance to conversations about race relations (Lippard, 2017): If racism is not a problem, then conversations about race-related issues are not needed and the concerns of minority groups are dismissed. Hardie and Tyson (2013) note that this creates a further problematic situation wherein White persons (who already have higher status and power) are in a position where they define and choose what is racist and deny that language and symbols have negative effects. In doing so, they defend and perpetuate external racist structures, have an inability to recognize systemic racism, and blame minorities for creating their own problems (e.g., they just aren't working hard enough) (Hardie & Tyson, 2013). Thus, someone who believes that racism is no longer a problem in the United States may be more likely to support symbols such as the Confederate flag and dismiss others' pain associated with race issues.

2.4. Realistic and Symbolic Threats

We additionally examined the extent to which supporters of the flag feel threatened by Black Americans. As Strother et al. (2017) noted, the greatest support for Confederate symbols occurs when racial tensions are high; the Confederate flag seems to be something worth protecting in times of conflict. Threats can appear in realistic or symbolic forms (Kinder & Sears, 1981). Realistic group conflict theory (LeVine & Campbell, 1972) concerns more tangible threats and often appears when there is direct competition between groups for scarce resources such as jobs or the distribution of tax dollars; this competition then increases hostility toward outgroups (Kinder & Sears, 1981). In an analysis of racial tensions of a high school in North Carolina, Hardie and Tyson (2013) note that the students who wore Confederate symbols were the same students who came from a lower socioeconomic status, in more vocational courses, and were in more direct competition with minorities for jobs after graduation.

Symbolic threats are more abstract and moralistic than realistic threats (Kinder & Sears, 1981). Individuals express symbolic threats and symbolic racism (Henry & Sears, 2002) when expressing concerns that the integration of minority groups threatens the status quo and their way of life: minority groups are often said to have different sets of values that affect housing, education, jobs, morality, family life, and safety (Kinder & Sears, 1981). Southern identity is often connected to hard work, the Christian religion, and strong moral values- values that others may pose a threat to and that are worth defending (Holyfield et al., 2009). During the Civil Rights movement, many believed that Southern traditions were being challenged (Webster & Leib, 2002).

2.5. Predictions

We predict that, compared to those who believe the Confederate flag is a symbol of racism, those who believe the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion will show more support for the flag, more conservative political affiliations and beliefs, more negative attitudes toward Black Americans, a greater denial of racism, and a greater belief that Black Americans pose realistic and symbolic threats.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

Participants from the United States were recruited from Amazon MTurk. Participants ($N = 180$)³ were White⁴, primarily male (57.5%) with an average age of 38.26 ($SD = 12.29$). Most of the participants received a bachelor's degree (50.0%), identified as middle class (60.0%), identified as Christian or Catholic (77.2%), and were from urban communities (43.6%). Participants resided in regions across the US: 21.7% were living in the North East, 15% in the Midwest, 22.2% in the South, 17.2% in the Rocky Mountain region, and 23.9% on the West Coast.

³ G*Power (3.1.9.7) was used to estimate an a priori effect size for a one-way ANOVA with three groups. This analysis indicated that a sample of 159 would be needed for a for a medium effect size (.25) at an α of .05, and power of .80 (Faul et al., 2007).

⁴ Initially, 254 persons participated in the study; however, because our study objectives concern the attitudes of White Americans, 56 participants were removed from data analysis because they either indicated they were not White or did not indicate their race. Another 17 participants' data were removed from analysis after they failed to correctly respond to an item assessing their ability to follow instructions and a final participant was removed as they had only responded to one item in the questionnaire.

3.2. Materials and Procedure

Participants responded to measures assessing their attitudes toward the Confederate flag, political attitudes and affiliations, and attitudes toward Black Americans and other social groups along with completing a social desirability scale and reporting demographic information. To reduce participant fatigue, a few items were selected from longer established measures⁵. Unless otherwise noted, participants responded to each of the items below using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) scale. For scales containing multiple items, necessary items were reverse coded before average composite variables were calculated so that higher values reflect a greater representation of each construct.

Study procedures followed APA ethical guidelines and were reviewed and approved by the Carroll College Institutional Review Board. Before beginning the study, participants read an informed consent form and gave their consent to participate. After the study's completion, participants were debriefed and reminded of the researcher's contact information should they have questions about their participation or the study.

3.2.1. Attitudes toward the Confederate Flag

To assess participants' primary symbolic belief about the Confederate flag, they responded to a single item by selecting one of three options: Which of the following statements do you most agree with? (a) the Confederate flag is a symbol of heritage; (b) the Confederate flag is a symbol of rebellion; or (c) the Confederate flag is a symbol of racism.

Additionally, following Strother et al. (2017), participants were asked to "rate your feelings about the Confederate flag" using a 1 (*extremely negative*) to 9 (*extremely positive*) scale. Three items assessed overall support for the Confederate flag ($\alpha = .73$; e.g., *People who fly the Confederate flag are exercising free speech*) and two items assessed negative associations with the Confederate flag ($\alpha = .85$; e.g., *The Confederate flag is a reminder of systematic oppression*). Finally, participants responded to five items (cited by Murty & Vyas, 2017) regarding their support for removing Confederate symbols from public realms ($\alpha = .91$; *Removing Confederate flags from government property that is not part of a museum*) using a 1 (*very much oppose*) to 9 (*very much support*) scale.

3.2.2. Political Attitudes and Affiliations

Two items assessed the extent to which participants affiliated with the Republican party ($\alpha = .82$; *I identify as a Republican*) and two items assessed Democratic party affiliation ($\alpha = .75$; *I identify as a Democrat*). Additionally, using a 1 (*not at all supportive*) to 9 (*extremely supportive*) scale, participants indicated their support for various policies and actions in the United States that are typically more conservative (10 items; $\alpha = .88$; *Speaking English while in the United States*), more liberal (13 items; $\alpha = .94$; *Less restrictive immigration for refugees*), those that reflect general American principles (2 items; $\alpha = .71$; *Freedom of Speech*), and eight items that reflected more extremist views (Tannenbaum Institute; $\alpha = .84$; *Mainstream conservatism is too soft these days; politicians should take a harder stance*).

3.2.3. Racial Attitudes

Participants reported their attitudes about Black persons utilizing items from existing measures of racial prejudice. These scales included Attitudes Towards Blacks (Brigham, 1993; 8 items;

⁵ The supplemental materials contain a copy of all measures used in this study.

$\alpha = .83$; *Whites should not support blacks in their struggle against discrimination and segregation*); Symbolic Racism (Henry & Sears, 2002; 4 items; $\alpha = .67$; *Irish, Italian, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks could do the same*); Old-Fashioned Racism (Orey, 2004 and Strother et al., 2017; 4 items; $\alpha = .82$; *I would object if my child dated someone of a different race*); Discomfort (Devine et al., 1991; 4 items; $\alpha = .97$; *Interacting with Black people makes me feel uneasy*); Denial of Racial Issues (Neville et al., 2000; 5 items; $\alpha = .83$; *Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations*); Group Economic Competition (Levin et al., 1988; 2 items; $\alpha = .82$; *Better jobs for African Americans means fewer good jobs for Whites*); Realistic Threats (Stephen et al., 2002; 5 items; $\alpha = .94$; *Blacks dominate American politics more than they should*); and Symbolic Threats (Stephen et al., 2002; 5 items; $\alpha = .92$; *Blacks and Whites have different family values*).

3.2.4. Attitudes toward Other Social Groups (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2014)

Participants reported their feelings toward ten social groups (Blacks, Asians, Hispanics, Mexicans, Canadians, Muslims, Atheists, homosexuals, poor people, and rich people) using a thermometer scale with 1 representing 0° (*very cold or uncomfortable feeling*) and 9 representing 100° (*very warm or favorable feeling*).

3.2.5. Demographics and Social Desirability

Participants reported their age, race/ethnicity, sex, religious affiliation, highest level of education achieved, the type of community they spent most of their life in, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, participants reported their likelihood of engaging in five socially desirable behaviors (e.g., *Do you smile at people every time you meet them?*) by selecting *yes* or *no* (Haghighat, 2007).

4. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are provided in the supplemental materials⁶. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to test the extent to which participants' Confederate flag beliefs affected each of the dependent measures, after controlling for social desirability⁷. Each one-way ANOVA compares the main effect of Confederate flag beliefs on a dependent measure; each main effect is reported in the following sections as an *F* value along with the significance level and effect size. A significant main effect indicates that there is at least one mean difference between Confederate flag beliefs on the dependent measure. To understand the mean differences, Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons were conducted to examine significant main effects. Tables 1-4 display mean values and the Bonferroni post-hoc difference scores. Cohen's conventions were used to determine the strength of the effects: these benchmarks were η_p^2 of .14 for a strong/large effect, η_p^2 of .06 for a moderate/medium effect, and η_p^2 of .01 for a weak/small effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010).

⁶ Analyses examining the extent to which participants were more likely to report that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, rebellion, or racism based on demographic categories are reported in the supplemental materials.

⁷ Separate ANOVAs were conducted, one for each dependent measure. In the interest of brevity and to reduce repetition, results and interpretations for similar dependent measures are reported together in the following subsections. Corresponding tables contain all of the mean values and Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons used to interpret the significant effects.

4.1. Attitudes toward the Confederate Flag

Beliefs about the Confederate flag were significantly and strongly associated with feelings about the flag ($F(2, 174) = 40.53, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .32$) and support for the flag ($F(2, 173) = 27.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$). Participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance had the most positive feelings and showed the greatest support for the flag whereas those who believed the flag stands for racism had the least positive feelings and support (see mean scores and Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons in Table 1).

Beliefs about the flag were also significantly related to negative associations with the flag ($F(2, 172) = 7.36, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$; moderate effect) and support for removing Confederate symbols ($F(2, 171) = 16.52, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$; strong effect). As shown in Table 1, participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for racism demonstrated the greatest negative associations with the flag and were more supportive of policies and actions that would remove Confederate monuments and namesakes compared to those who believed it stands for remembrance or rebellion.

Table 1.
Mean Comparisons in Study 1

Dependent Measure	Confederate Flag Belief	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
				Confederate Flag Belief Comparison	<i>M</i> _{diff.}	Std. Error	<i>p</i>
Feelings about the Flag	Remembrance	6.67	1.68	Remembrance - Rebellion	1.45	.40	.001
	Rebellion	5.18	2.17	Remembrance-Racism	3.32	.37	<.001
	Racism	3.25	2.69	Rebellion-Racism	1.87	.45	<.001
Flag Support	Remembrance	6.83	1.28	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.99	.33	.009
	Rebellion	5.83	1.51	Remembrance-Racism	2.23	.30	<.001
	Racism	4.57	2.39	Rebellion-Racism	1.24	.37	.003
Negative Associations	Remembrance	5.41	2.42	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.33	.43	1.00
	Rebellion	5.74	1.93	Remembrance-Racism	-1.51	.40	<.001
	Racism	6.93	2.01	Rebellion-Racism	-1.18	.48	.05
Removing Confederate Symbols	Remembrance	5.27	2.23	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.49	.38	.59
	Rebellion	5.76	1.81	Remembrance-Racism	-2.00	.35	<.001
	Racism	7.23	1.44	Rebellion-Racism	-1.50	.43	.002

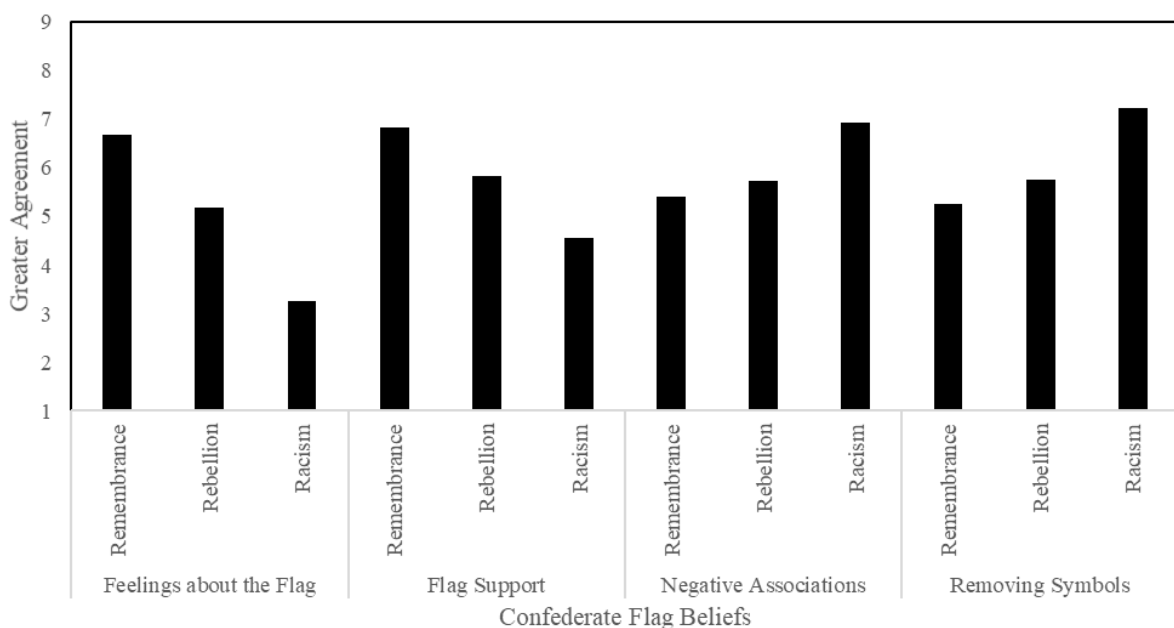


Figure 1. Attitudes Toward the Confederate Flag

4.2. Political Attitudes and Affiliations

Confederate flag beliefs were significantly associated with Republican party affiliation ($F(2, 174) = 27.49, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$; strong effect), conservative beliefs ($F(2, 164) = 20.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .20$; strong effect), and extremist beliefs ($F(2, 171) = 9.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$; moderate effect). As shown in Table 2, participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance and rebellion were more likely to report affiliation with the Republican party, greater agreement with conservative beliefs, and agreement with extremist beliefs than those who believed the flag stands for racism.

Confederate flag beliefs were significantly associated with Democratic party affiliation ($F(2, 174) = 4.03, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .04$; weak effect) and liberal beliefs ($F(2, 161) = 7.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$; moderate effect). Participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for racism were more likely to report that they affiliated with the Democratic party and demonstrated greater agreement with liberal beliefs than those who believed the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion (Table 2).

Support for general American principles was not significantly associated with beliefs about the Confederate flag ($F(2, 173) = 0.13, p = .88, \eta_p^2 = .001$; weak effect).

Table 2.
Mean Comparisons in Study 1

Dependent Measure	Confederate Flag Belief	M	SD	Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
				Confederate Flag Belief Comparison	M _{diff.}	Std. Error	p
Republican	Remembrance	6.31	2.03	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.60	.42	.46
	Rebellion	5.68	2.08	Remembrance-Racism	2.85	.39	<.001
	Racism	3.39	2.52	Rebellion-Racism	2.26	.47	<.001
Democrat	Remembrance	5.14	2.57	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.56	.46	.68
	Rebellion	4.56	2.11	Remembrance-Racism	-0.87	.43	.13
	Racism	5.97	2.21	Rebellion-Racism	-1.43	.52	.02
Conservative Beliefs	Remembrance	6.65	1.16	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.33	.27	.68
	Rebellion	6.30	1.01	Remembrance-Racism	1.61	.26	<.001
	Racism	4.98	1.96	Rebellion-Racism	1.28	.31	<.001
Liberal Beliefs	Remembrance	5.80	1.94	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.002	.34	1.00
	Rebellion	5.79	1.67	Remembrance-Racism	-1.19	.32	.001
	Racism	6.94	1.36	Rebellion-Racism	-1.19	.39	.008
American Principles	Remembrance	7.46	1.31	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.14	.27	1.00
	Rebellion	7.33	1.41	Remembrance-Racism	0.04	.25	1.00
	Racism	7.45	1.54	Rebellion-Racism	-0.10	.30	1.00
Extremist Beliefs	Remembrance	5.82	1.61	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.47	.32	.44
	Rebellion	5.28	1.44	Remembrance-Racism	1.26	.30	<.001
	Racism	4.44	2.02	Rebellion-Racism	0.79	.36	.09

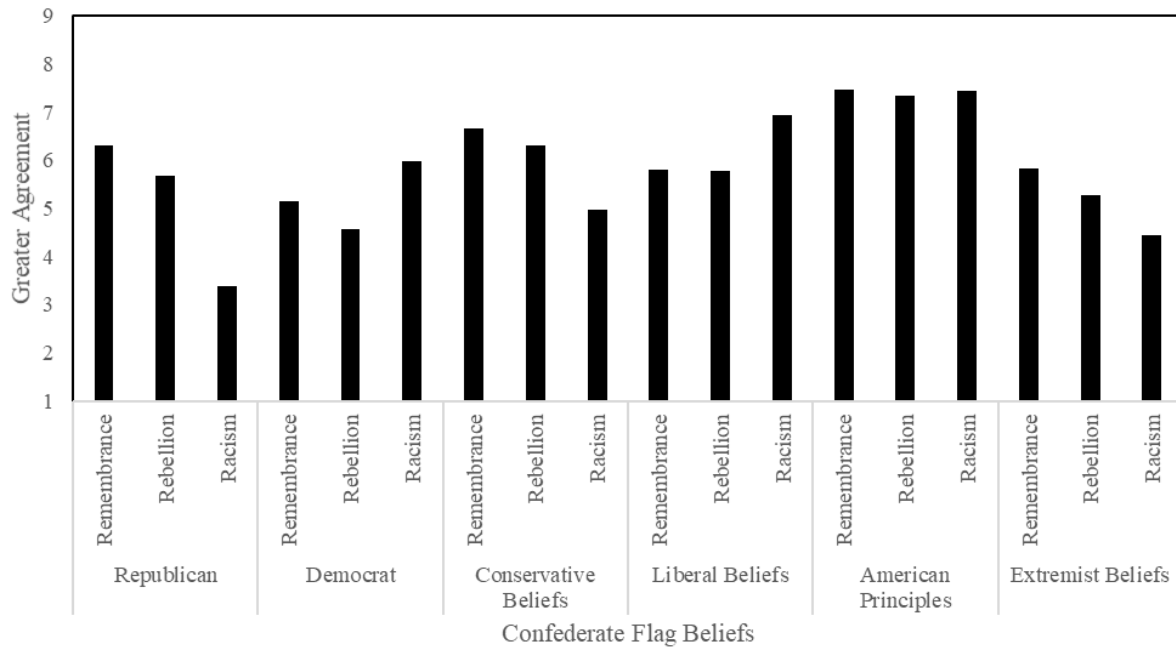


Figure 2. Political Attitudes and Affiliations

4.3. Racial Attitudes

Confederate flag beliefs significantly predicted Attitudes toward Blacks scores ($F(2, 170) = 18.71, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .18$; strong effect), Symbolic Racism scores ($F(2, 169) = 22.75, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .21$; strong effect), Old-Fashioned Racism scores ($F(2, 170) = 11.58, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$; moderate effect), Discomfort ($F(2, 171) = 4.60, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$; weak effect), Denial of Racism ($F(2, 172) = 25.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$; strong effect), Economic Competition ($F(2, 172) = 7.74, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$; moderate effect), Realistic Threat ($F(2, 171) = 12.86, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .13$; moderate effect), and Symbolic Threat ($F(2, 174) = 11.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$; moderate effect). As shown in Table 3, compared to those who believed the flag stands for racism, participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance or rebellion had higher racism scores (as measured by the Attitudes toward Blacks, Symbolic Racism, and Old-Fashioned Racism scales), reported greater discomfort around Blacks, were more likely to report that Black Americans pose economic, realistic, and symbolic threats, yet were more likely to deny the existence of racism.

Table 3.

Mean Comparisons in Study 1

Dependent Measure	Confederate Flag Belief	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
				Confederate Flag Belief Comparison	<i>M</i> _{diff.}	Std. Error	<i>p</i>
Attitudes toward Blacks	Remembrance	4.95	1.27	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.45	.30	.35
	Rebellion	4.48	1.38	Remembrance-Racism	1.66	.27	<.001
	Racism	3.24	1.92	Rebellion-Racism	1.21	.33	<.001
Symbolic Racism	Remembrance	5.50	1.52	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.44	.32	.51
	Rebellion	5.05	1.52	Remembrance-Racism	1.98	.29	<.001
	Racism	3.51	1.89	Rebellion-Racism	1.53	.36	<.001
Old-Fashioned Racism	Remembrance	4.86	1.91	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.13	.38	1.00
	Rebellion	4.68	1.88	Remembrance-Racism	1.65	.35	<.001
	Racism	3.05	2.29	Rebellion-Racism	1.52	.43	.001
Discomfort	Remembrance	4.97	2.58	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.56	.49	.78
	Rebellion	4.37	2.31	Remembrance-Racism	1.39	.46	.008

	Racism	3.44	2.78	Rebellion-Racism	0.83	.55	.41
Denial of Racism	Remembrance	5.23	1.40	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.59	.32	.21
	Rebellion	4.62	1.66	Remembrance-Racism	2.10	.30	<.001
	Racism	3.08	2.07	Rebellion-Racism	1.51	.36	<.001
Economic Competition	Remembrance	5.58	2.24	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.49	.44	.80
	Rebellion	5.05	1.99	Remembrance-Racism	1.61	.41	<.001
	Racism	3.87	2.65	Rebellion-Racism	1.12	.49	.08
Realistic Threat	Remembrance	5.63	2.01	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.84	.43	.15
	Rebellion	4.75	2.12	Remembrance-Racism	2.00	.39	<.001
	Racism	3.51	2.66	Rebellion-Racism	1.16	.48	.05
Symbolic Threat	Remembrance	5.85	1.89	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.45	.40	.76
	Rebellion	5.36	1.94	Remembrance-Racism	1.76	.37	<.001
	Racism	4.00	2.48	Rebellion-Racism	1.30	.44	.01

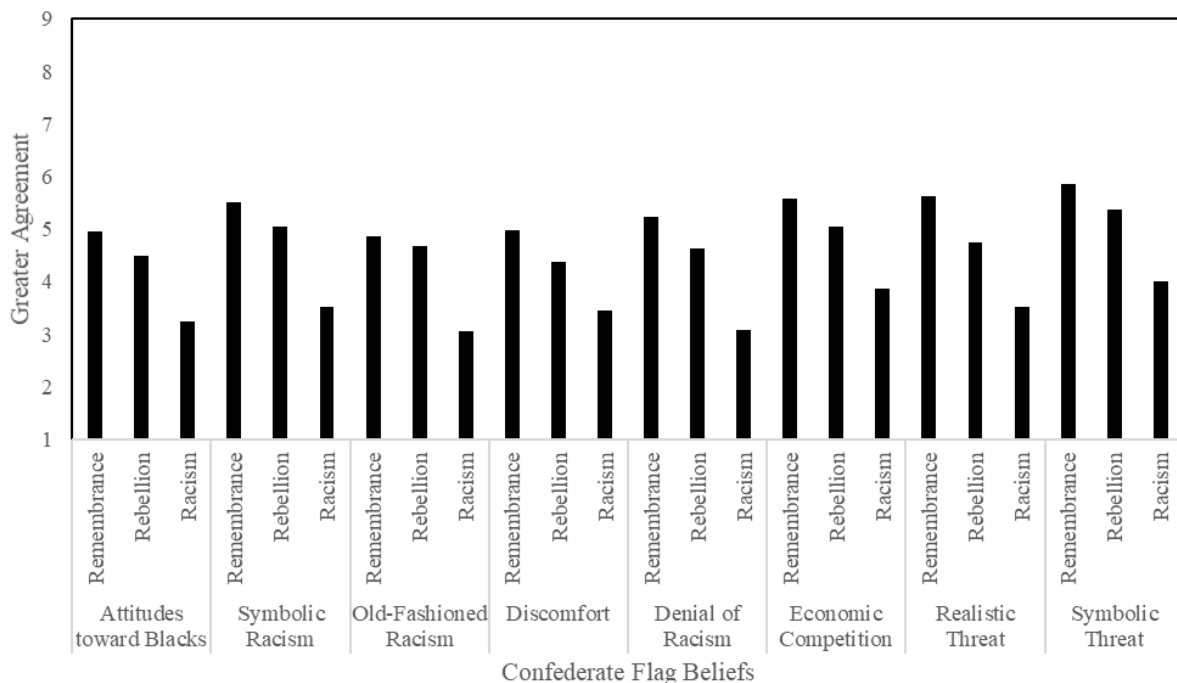


Figure 3. Racial Attitudes

4.4. Attitudes toward Other Social Groups

Compared to those who believed the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion, participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for racism had warmer feelings toward Blacks ($F(2, 174) = 5.46, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .06$; moderate effect), Mexicans ($F(2, 172) = 3.34, p = .04, \eta_p^2 = .04$; weak effect), Canadians⁸ ($F(2, 172) = 7.05, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$; moderate effect), Muslims ($F(2, 172) = 4.88, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$; weak effect), atheists ($F(2, 174) = 7.06, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$; moderate effect), homosexuals ($F(2, 173) = 7.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$; moderate effect), and poor people ($F(2, 174) = 4.39, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .05$; weak effect) (see Table 4). Beliefs about the Confederate flag did not influence participant's feelings toward Asians ($F(2, 174) = 1.67,$

⁸ Canadians were included in the measures as a filler social group. While there are investigations of Anti-American attitudes amongst Canadians (Bow, 2009; Granatstein, 1997) and intergroup attitudes amongst Americans and Canadians (Gravelle, 2014), we did not expect to find any differences between groups, so this is an unexpected but interesting finding.

$p = .19$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; weak effect), Hispanics ($F(2, 174) = 2.09$, $p = .13$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; weak effect), or rich people ($F(2, 173) = 0.68$, $p = .51$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$; weak effect).

Table 4.
Mean Comparisons in Study 1

Dependent Measure	Confederate Flag Belief	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
				Confederate Flag Belief Comparison	<i>M</i> _{diff.}	Std. Error	<i>p</i>
Blacks	Remembrance	5.10	2.18	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.04	.39	1.00
	Rebellion	5.08	1.60	Remembrance-Racism	-1.11	.36	.01
	Racism	6.26	2.02	Rebellion-Racism	-1.15	.44	.03
Asians	Remembrance	5.17	2.09	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.16	.40	1.00
	Rebellion	5.05	1.83	Remembrance-Racism	-0.58	.37	.36
	Racism	5.86	2.37	Rebellion-Racism	-0.74	.45	.31
Hispanics	Remembrance	5.24	2.09	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.14	.39	1.00
	Rebellion	5.13	1.77	Remembrance-Racism	-0.64	.36	.23
	Racism	5.98	2.10	Rebellion-Racism	-0.78	.43	.22
Mexicans	Remembrance	4.89	2.07	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.02	.40	1.00
	Rebellion	4.95	1.90	Remembrance-Racism	-0.90	.36	.04
	Racism	5.86	2.15	Rebellion-Racism	-0.88	.44	.15
Canadians	Remembrance	5.32	2.14	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.48	.41	.74
	Rebellion	4.89	2.11	Remembrance-Racism	-1.12	.37	.01
	Racism	6.53	2.01	Rebellion-Racism	-1.60	.46	.002
Muslims	Remembrance	4.35	2.17	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.02	.41	1.00
	Rebellion	4.34	1.82	Remembrance-Racism	-1.12	.38	.01
	Racism	5.51	2.28	Rebellion-Racism	-1.14	.46	.04
Atheists	Remembrance	4.96	2.14	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.29	.40	1.00
	Rebellion	4.68	1.93	Remembrance-Racism	-1.21	.37	.004
	Racism	6.22	2.09	Rebellion-Racism	-1.50	.45	.003
Homosexuals	Remembrance	4.39	2.40	Remembrance - Rebellion	-.04	.45	1.00
	Rebellion	4.45	2.01	Remembrance-Racism	-1.58	.41	<.001
	Racism	6.02	2.40	Rebellion-Racism	-1.54	.50	.01
Poor People	Remembrance	5.20	2.21	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.07	.39	1.00
	Rebellion	5.13	1.40	Remembrance-Racism	-0.98	.36	.02
	Racism	6.20	2.03	Rebellion-Racism	-1.06	.44	.05
Rich People	Remembrance	5.31	2.06	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.47	.41	.75
	Rebellion	4.84	1.90	Remembrance-Racism	0.08	.38	1.00
	Racism	5.25	2.36	Rebellion-Racism	-0.39	.46	1.00

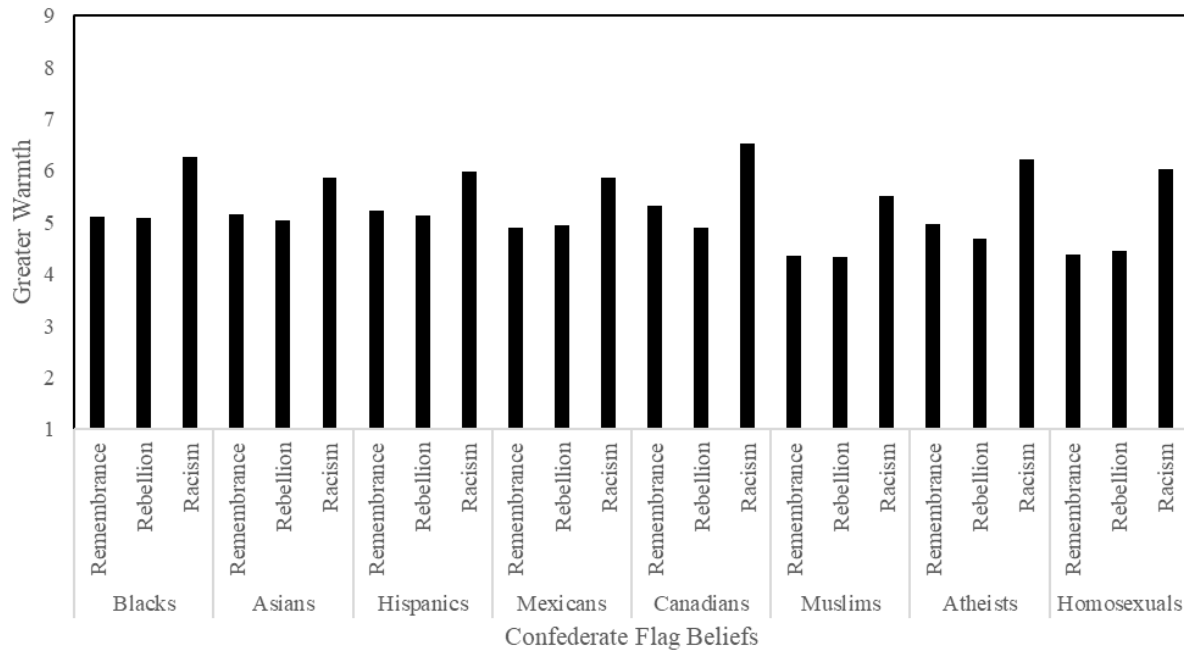


Figure 4. Attitudes toward Other Social Groups

5. Discussion

Overall, the results from this study provide two major contributions to the existing literature on the heritage vs. hate debate surrounding the Confederate flag. First, while some participants indicated the Confederate flag stands for remembrance or racism, others believed the flag symbolizes rebellion. Secondly, participants' beliefs about the Confederate flag influenced their attitudes about the flag, their political attitudes, and attitudes toward Black Americans and other social groups. Overall, data suggest that those who believe the Confederate flag is a symbol of remembrance have the greatest support for the flag, more conservative political attitudes, and more negative racial and social attitudes. Those who believe the flag is a symbol of racism conversely demonstrate the least support for the flag, more liberal political attitudes, and more positive attitudes toward racial and social attitudes. Those who believe that the flag is a symbol of rebellion show support for the flag, political attitudes, and racial attitudes that lie between the other two beliefs.

These findings are consistent with previous research connecting positive associations with the Confederate flag to Southern heritage (Reingold & Wike, 1998; Webster & Leib, 2002) and conservative political ideologies (Benjamin et al., 2020; Cooper & Knotts, 2006; Huffmon et al., 2017; Orey, 2004; Wright & Esses, 2017). Specifically, compared to those who believe that the Confederate flag is a symbol of racism, we found that those who believe that the flag is a symbol of remembrance, followed by those who believe the flag is a symbol of rebellion, have the most favorable feelings toward the flag, support displaying the flag in public spaces, and have the most conservative values and beliefs.

Our results also demonstrate similar general patterns regarding the relationships between beliefs about the Confederate flag and racism. Compared to those who believe the Confederate flag symbolizes racism, those who believe the Confederate flag is a symbol of remembrance, followed by those who believe it is a symbol of rebellion, report higher levels of old-fashioned and contemporary racism, yet are more likely to deny that racism is still a problem in the United States. These results are consistent with previous research connecting support for the Confederate flag and racism (Cooper et al., 2021; Cooper & Knotts, 2006; Huffmon et al.,

2017; Orey, 2004; Reingold & Wike, 1998; Strother et al., 2017; Wright & Esses, 2017). Additionally, consistent with previous theorizing (Hardie & Tyson, 2013; Forman, 1991; Strother et al., 2017; Trenticosta & Collins, 2011), beliefs that the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion were associated with perceiving Black Americans as economic, realistic, and symbolic threats.

Interestingly, negative feelings about racial groups were limited to Blacks and Mexicans as those who believed the flag is a symbol of remembrance or rebellion have similar feelings toward Asians and Hispanics as those who believed the flag is a symbol of racism. This suggests that the Confederate flag is connected to only some racial issues in the United States, namely those associated with slavery (Reingold & Wike, 1998; Webster & Leib, 2002; Woliver et al., 2001) and have extended to recent immigration issues (Diaz, 2011; Short & Magaña, 2010; Varela et al., 2013). However, since those who believe the flag was a symbol of remembrance or rebellion also had less warm feelings toward Muslims, Atheists, homosexuals, and poor people, the belief that the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion could be connected to more traditional and conservative values (Webster & Leib, 2016).

6. Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to examine how beliefs that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, rebellion, or racism are related to American patriotism and adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies.

6.1. Patriotism

The Confederate flag is often observed alongside the American flag (e.g., Levin, 2012; Ouellet, 2016; Sellers, 2018). These images are perplexing and seemingly contradictory, because as pointed out following the riots that occurred at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, “during the United States' long Civil War, no Confederate flag came within the shadow of the US Capitol, but on Wednesday, an insurrectionist carried one right through its halls” (McLaughlin, 2021). Scholars have found that, just as the Confederate flag may represent Southern identity to some, the Confederate flag may also be associated with a broader patriotic identity (Wright & Esses, 2017). Therefore, we included a measure of American patriotism in Study 2 to assess the associations between beliefs about the Confederate flag and patriotic attitudes.

6.2. Adherence to Beliefs about Social Hierarchies

In Study 1, we found that those who believe that the Confederate flag is a symbol of remembrance or rebellion expressed greater racism, yet believed discrimination is no longer a problem in the US. Hardie and Tyson (2013) and Holyfield (2009) observed that Whites perpetuate the mythical post-racial society using discursive language strategies, which have connections to colorblindness, power differences, White privilege, and belief in social stratification (e.g., meritocracy, egalitarianism, individualism). These strategies ultimately stigmatize discussions about racial inequality and make important discussions about racial relationships less likely to occur as they are seen as unnecessary. Consequently, in discussions about the Confederate flag, most participants acknowledged the flag as an emotional volatile symbol, but few were willing to challenge White privilege and racial inequality, describe the flag as offensive, or express understanding toward those who are negatively affected by the flag (Holyfield, 2009). Therefore, in Study 2, we examined symbolic beliefs about the Confederate flag in association with beliefs about social stratification. We included various individual difference measures that assess participants' awareness of social hierarchies, beliefs

that these hierarchies are “right”, and adherence to ideologies that justify and maintain the hierarchies.

First, we included measures of social dominance orientation (SDO), a group-based dominance perspective wherein individuals believe in social hierarchies and that those in higher positions should preserve the benefits and privileges associated with their positions (Pratto et al., 1994; Wright & Esses, 2017). Southern states have been described as areas with traditional political cultures that seek to maintain existing social hierarchies, uphold the status quo, and devalue activism and social change (Woliver et al., 2001). Second, right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is an individual difference variable associated with deference to authority, adherence to conventional beliefs, and aggression toward groups who disobey authority (Funke, 2005; Saunders & Ngo, 2017). This variable is associated with SDO, racism, and conservatism (Pratto et al., 1994). Third, high levels of Protestant work ethic (PWE) attribute moral value to hard work and believe that those who demonstrate effort will be subsequently rewarded (Mirels and Garret, 1971). PWE is more likely to be supported by advantaged groups, as this viewpoint maintains positions of power (Kachanoff et al., 2020). Fourth, system justification (SJ) theory examines the tendency to defend current social systems, especially when their group benefits from the status quo (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). Fifth, White privilege describes how White individuals vary in awareness of unearned societal advantages associated with racial identity (Pinterits et al., 2009). Rios et al. (2021) found that awareness of White privilege was associated with greater opposition to Confederate symbols.

6.3. Predictions

We predict that, compared to those who hold the belief that the Confederate flag is a symbol of racism, those who believe the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion will show more support for the flag, have higher levels of American patriotism, and have greater adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies (SDO, RWA, PWE, and SJ) but less likely to acknowledge White privilege.

7. Methods

7.1. Participants

Participants from the United States were recruited from MTurk. Participants ($N = 192$)⁹ were White¹⁰, primarily male (65.6%) with an average age of 35.06 ($SD = 10.10$). Most of the participants had received a bachelor's degree (58.9%), identified as middle class (47.9%), Christian or Catholic (73.5%), and were from urban communities (46.6%). Participants resided in regions across the US: 25.0% were living in the North East, 14.1% in the Midwest, 17.7% in the South, 16.1% in the Rocky Mountain region, and 26.6% on the West Coast (0.5% did not report the state they lived in).

⁹ G*Power (3.1.9.7) was used to estimate an a priori effect size for a one-way ANOVA with three groups. This analysis indicated that a sample of 159 would be needed for a medium effect size (.25) at an α of .05, and power of .80 (Faul et al., 2007).

¹⁰ Initially, 260 persons participated in the study; however, because our study objectives concern the attitudes of White Americans, 45 participants were removed from data analysis because they either indicated they were not White or did not indicate their race. Another 23 participants' data were removed from analysis after they failed to correctly respond to an item assessing their ability to follow instructions.

7.2. Materials and Procedure

Participants responded to measures assessing attitudes toward the Confederate flag, patriotism, adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies, and White privilege along with completing a social desirability scale and reporting demographic information. To reduce participant fatigue, a few items were selected from longer established measures¹¹. Unless otherwise noted, participants responded to items using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) scale. Necessary items were reverse coded before average composite variables were calculated so that higher values reflect greater representations of each construct.

Study procedures followed APA ethical guidelines and were reviewed and approved by the Carroll College Institutional Review Board. Before beginning the study, participants read an informed consent form and gave their consent to participate. After the study's completion, participants were debriefed and reminded of the researcher's contact information should they have questions about their participation or the study.

7.2.1. Attitudes toward the Confederate Flag

Participants completed the same measures from Study 1 to assess their attitudes about the Confederate flag. This included selecting a statement representative of their beliefs that the Confederate flag is a symbol of remembrance, rebellion, or racism; feelings about the flag (Strother et al., 2017); support for the flag ($\alpha = .77$); negative associations with the flag ($\alpha = .84$); and support for removing Confederate symbols from public spheres (Murty & Vyas, 2017; $\alpha = .90$).

7.2.2. Patriotism (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989)

Participants reported the extent to which they have patriotic feelings toward the United States (5 items, $\alpha = .81$; *The fact that I am an American is an important part of my identity*).

7.2.3. Adherence to Beliefs about Social Hierarchies

To assess participants' awareness of social hierarchies, the extent to which they support and believe social hierarchies to be fair, and their adherence to ideologies that justify and maintain these hierarchies, participants responded to several items from the existing scales: Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto et al., 1994; 10 items, $\alpha = .92$; *It's OK if some groups have more of a chance in life than others*); Right-Wing Authoritarianism (Altmeyer, 1981; Funke, 2005; 12 items, $\alpha = .82$; *What our country really needs instead of more "civil rights" is a good stiff dose of law and order*); Protestant Work Ethic (Miles & Garrett, 1971; 5 items, $\alpha = .84$; *Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy*); System Justification (Jost & Thompson, 2000; 5 items, $\alpha = .66$; *Economic positions are legitimate reflections of people's achievements*); and White Privilege (Swim & Miller, 1999; 5 items; $\alpha = .80$; *White people have certain advantages that minorities do not have in this society*).

7.2.4. Demographics and Social Desirability

Using the same items in Study 1, participants reported their age, race/ethnicity, sex, religious affiliation, highest level of education achieved, the type of community they spent most of their life in, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, participants reported their likelihood of engaging in socially desirable behaviors (Haghighat, 2007).

¹¹ The supplemental materials contain a copy of all measures used in this study.

8. Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations are provided in the supplemental materials¹². One-way ANOVAs were conducted to test the extent to which participants' Confederate flag beliefs affected the dependent measures, after controlling for social desirability¹³. Each one-way ANOVA compares the main effect of Confederate flag beliefs on a dependent measure; each main effect is reported in the following sections as an F value along with the significance level and effect size. A significant main effect indicates that there is at least one mean difference between Confederate flag beliefs on the dependent measure. To understand the mean differences, Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons were conducted to examine significant main effects. Tables 5-7 display mean values and the Bonferroni post-hoc difference scores. Cohen's conventions were used to determine the strength of the effects: these benchmarks were η_p^2 of .14 for a strong/large effect, η_p^2 of .06 for a moderate/medium effect, and η_p^2 of .01 for a weak/small effect (Sink & Mvududu, 2010).

8.1. Attitudes toward the Confederate Flag

Confederate flag beliefs were significantly and strongly associated with feelings about the flag ($F(2, 188) = 56.75, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .38$) and support for the flag ($F(2, 186) = 66.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .42$). Participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance or rebellion reported greater positive feelings and greater support for the flag than those who believed the flag stands for racism (Table 5). Confederate flag beliefs were also significantly associated with negative associations with the flag ($F(2, 188) = 3.72, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .04$; weak effect) and support for removing Confederate symbols ($F(2, 188) = 26.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .22$; strong effect). As shown in Table 5, participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for racism reported greater negative associations with the flag and greater support for the removal of Confederate monuments and memorials than those who believed the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion.

Table 5.
Mean Comparisons in Study 2

Dependent Measure	Confederate Flag Belief	M	SD	Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
				Confederate Flag Belief Comparison	$M_{diff.}$	Std. Error	p
Feelings about the Flag	Remembrance	6.52	1.78	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.63	.36	.24
	Rebellion	5.81	2.05	Remembrance-Racism	3.76	.36	<.001
	Racism	2.63	2.55	Rebellion-Racism	3.13	.40	<.001
Flag Support	Remembrance	6.68	1.26	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.41	.28	.46
	Rebellion	6.25	1.36	Remembrance-Racism	3.15	.28	<.001
	Racism	3.50	2.21	Rebellion-Racism	2.74	.32	<.001
Negative Associations	Remembrance	5.74	2.34	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.58	.40	.45
	Rebellion	6.25	1.72	Remembrance-Racism	-1.08	.40	.02
	Racism	6.71	2.69	Rebellion-Racism	-0.50	.45	.79
Removing Confederate Symbols	Remembrance	5.76	1.92	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.36	.30	.72
	Rebellion	6.06	1.63	Remembrance-Racism	-2.17	.31	<.001
	Racism	7.84	1.56	Rebellion-Racism	-1.81	.34	<.001

¹² The supplemental materials contain analyses examining the extent to which participants were more likely to report that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, rebellion, or racism based on demographic categories.

¹³ Separate ANOVAs were conducted, one for each dependent measure. In the interest of brevity and to reduce repetition, results and interpretations for similar dependent measures are reported together in the following subsections. Corresponding tables contain all of the mean values and Bonferroni post-hoc comparisons used to interpret the significant main effects.

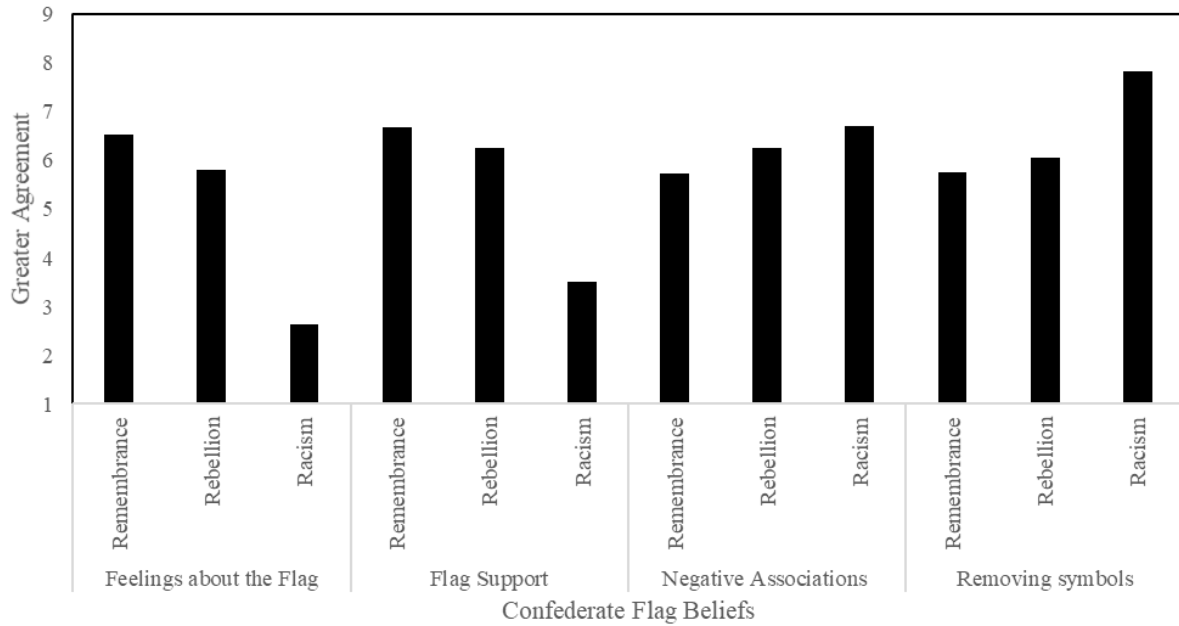


Figure 5. Attitudes toward the Confederate Flag

8.2. Patriotism

Confederate flag beliefs were significantly and strongly associated with patriotism ($F(2, 184) = 14.62, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$); participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance or rebellion reported greater American patriotism than those who believed the flag stands for racism (Table 6).

Table 6.

Mean Comparisons in Study 2

Dependent Measure	Confederate Flag Belief	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
				Confederate Flag Belief Comparison	<i>M</i> _{diff.}	Std. Error	<i>p</i>
Patriotism	Remembrance	6.80	1.36	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.49	.29	.29
	Rebellion	6.29	1.22	Remembrance-Racism	1.59	.29	<.001
	Racism	5.17	2.35	Rebellion-Racism	1.10	.33	.003

8.3. Adherence to Beliefs about Social Hierarchies

Confederate flag beliefs were significantly and strongly associated with SDO ($F(2, 183) = 39.41, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .30$), RWA ($F(2, 179) = 36.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$), PWE ($F(2, 188) = 17.99, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$), SJ ($F(2, 186) = 19.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .17$), and White privilege ($F(2, 188) = 17.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .16$). As shown in Table 7, participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance or rebellion had higher levels of SDO, RWA, PWE, SJ, and were less likely to recognize White privilege than those who believed the flag stands for racism.

Table 7.
Mean Comparisons in Study 2

				Bonferroni Post-Hoc Comparisons			
Social Dominance Orientation	Remembrance	4.82	1.47	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.21	.28	1.00
	Rebellion	4.55	1.63	Remembrance-Racism	2.38	.28	<.001
	Racism	2.34	1.85	Rebellion-Racism	2.17	.32	<.001
Right-Wing Authoritarianism	Remembrance	5.14	0.85	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.40	.21	.18
	Rebellion	4.72	1.22	Remembrance-Racism	1.79	.21	<.001
	Racism	3.31	1.56	Rebellion-Racism	1.39	.23	<.001
Protestant Work Ethic	Remembrance	6.53	1.21	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.28	.27	.91
	Rebellion	6.16	1.65	Remembrance-Racism	1.62	.28	<.001
	Racism	4.77	2.13	Rebellion-Racism	1.34	.31	<.001
System Justification	Remembrance	4.83	1.05	Remembrance - Rebellion	0.27	.24	.76
	Rebellion	4.55	1.31	Remembrance-Racism	1.45	.24	<.001
	Racism	3.36	1.72	Rebellion-Racism	1.18	.26	<.001
White Privilege	Remembrance	5.57	1.48	Remembrance - Rebellion	-0.31	.28	.82
	Rebellion	5.85	1.47	Remembrance-Racism	-1.67	.28	<.001
	Racism	7.20	1.94	Rebellion-Racism	-1.36	.32	<.001

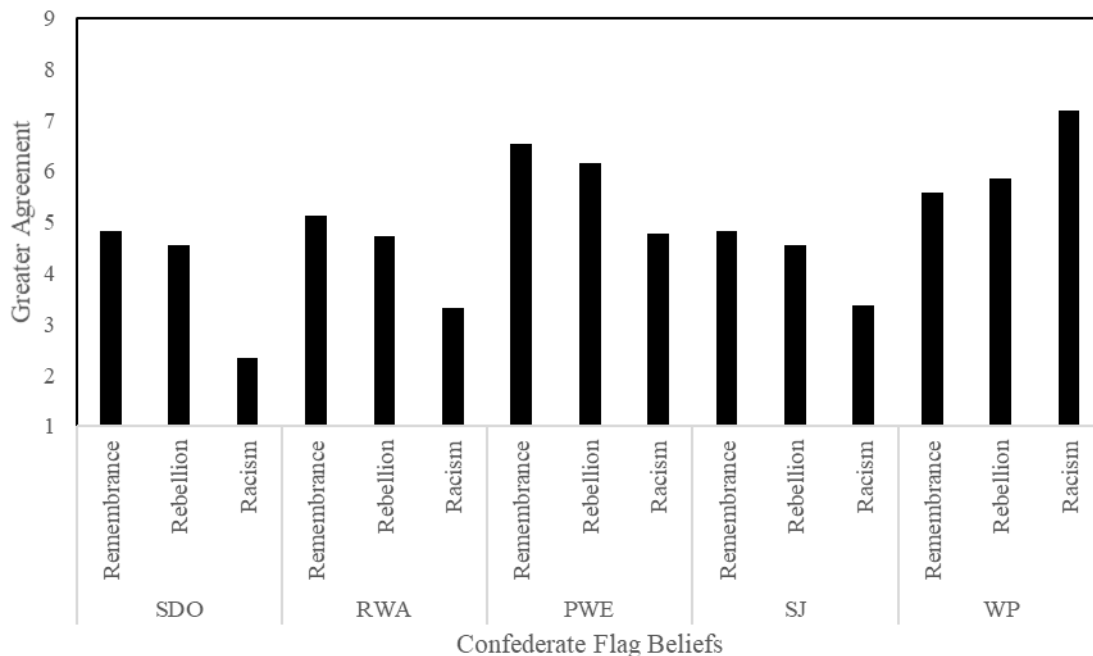


Figure 6. Adherence to Beliefs about Social Hierarchies

9. Discussion

Overall, in Study 2, we found those who believe that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance have greater patriotism, greater adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies, and lesser White privilege recognition. Those who believe the flag symbolizes racism have lesser patriotism, lesser adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies, and greater White privilege recognition. Those who believe the flag is a symbol of rebellion show patriotism levels, adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies, and recognition of White privilege scores that lie between the other two beliefs.

Consistent with our findings in Study 1, we found that those who believe that the Confederate flag is a symbol of remembrance, followed by those who believe the flag symbolizes rebellion, have the most favorable feelings toward the flag and support displaying the flag in public

spaces. Additionally, consistent with Wright and Esses (2017), believing that the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion was associated with greater American patriotism.

Participants who believed the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, followed by those who believe the flag is a symbol of rebellion, reported greater adherence to beliefs about social hierarchies and were less likely to acknowledge White privilege than those who believe the flag is a symbol of racism. These internalized ideas about social hierarchies (SDO, RWA, PWE, and SJ) serve to justify racial stratification, maintain status quo, and hinder social change allowing for greater equality (Hardie & Tyson, 2013; Holyfield, 2009).

10. Overall Discussion and Conclusions

We found that, compared to those who believed the Confederate flag stands for racism, White participants who believed the Confederate flag symbolizes remembrance, followed by those who view it as a symbol of rebellion, were more likely to have negative attitudes toward Black Americans, deny that racism is still a problem, see Black Americans as economic and symbolic threats, and adhere to beliefs about social hierarchies. Those with beliefs that the flag symbolizes remembrance or rebellion were also more likely to affiliate with the Republican party, have conservative beliefs, and report greater levels of patriotism.

Previous research on this topic tends to collect data from participants in Southern states (e.g., Huffmon et al., 2017; Reingold & Wike, 1998) even though Confederate symbols appear in non-Southern states (e.g., Wellihoff, 1994; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2021). By gathering a national sample, our studies demonstrate these issues are not limited to Southern states and beliefs about the Confederate flag are not limited to either heritage (commemorate ancestors and honor Southern heritage) or hate (slavery, oppression, and racism); individuals also believe that the Confederate flag stands for rebellion.

Although the American Civil War ended over 150 years ago, Americans are still divided on whether symbols of the Confederacy should occupy public spheres and monuments commemorating Confederate generals should remain standing. Those who support these symbols say they do so to honor their ancestors and celebrate their Southern heritage (Bonner, 2002; Reingold & Wike, 1998; Webster & Leib, 2002) or see the flag as a more generalized symbol of rebellion (Holyfield et al., 2009; Lippard, 2017; Wellihoff, 1994). There are others who perceive Confederate symbols as more problematic. To these individuals, these symbols remain connected to the Confederacy's fight for slavery, White Supremacy groups, and opposition to the Civil Rights Movement (e.g., Forman, 1991; Leib, 1995; Trenticosta & Collins, 2011; Woliver et al., 2001).

Research centering on beliefs about the Confederate flag and other symbols have important implications related to public policies as well as provide considerations with educational settings. Concerning public policies, previous research shows that voters' beliefs influence their votes about whether the Confederate flag should be represented on their state flag (Leib et al., 2000; Orey, 2004; Orey et al., 2011; Reingold & Wike, 1998) and whether segregationist language should remain in state laws (Orey et al., 2011). In schools, these beliefs may affect school dress codes (Hardie & Tyson, 2013), mascots (Vanderford, 1996), and the names of public schools that commemorate Confederate generals (Chappell, 2024). This research suggests that those who believe the flag stands for remembrance or rebellion would be most in favor of allowing the presence of Confederate symbols in these public realms. Those who believe the flag symbolizes racism on the other hand would show the least support and instead may advocate for conversations about the societal impact of the symbols. Although there may be resistance to the conversations (Holyfield et al., 2009), they are important for understanding how the symbols represent oppression, disrespect, and intimidation (Murty & Vyas, 2017).

10.1. Limitations and Future Directions

While beliefs that the Confederate flag symbolizes remembrance and rebellion were similarly associated with outcome variables, there are differences between the two groups. Participants who believed the flag symbolizes remembrance were more likely to also believe the flag symbolizes rebellion; the correlations were moderate, however ($r = .36$ Study 1 and $r = .43$ Study 2)¹⁴, suggesting the two beliefs are related, but not redundant. Further, while those who believed the flag represents remembrance were less likely to believe it symbolizes racism ($r = -.22$ Study 1 and $r = -.21$ Study 2), there were positive associations between beliefs that the flag stands for rebellion and racism ($r = .28$ Study 1 and $r = .29$ Study 2)¹⁵. The rebellion argument may serve as a way to express support for the Confederate flag while distancing from the remembrance argument, perhaps because they do not have Southern ancestry or because they are distancing themselves from societal associations between racism and remembrance. A flag supporter mentioned in the introduction said, “As far as the racism goes, I dismiss it, because I’m not racist whatsoever. That flag doesn’t mean that to me” (McCammon, 2017). While our research shows that participants may prefer one set of beliefs about the Confederate flag, we do not know *why* they have a greater preference for that set of beliefs. This opens the door for future research to explore greater identification with remembrance or rebellion arguments.

Another limitation of our work is that it is correlational. We demonstrated that certain beliefs about the flag were associated with racism and negative beliefs about social groups. Future studies should also examine the consequences of beliefs about the Confederate flag. Specifically, because those who believe the flag symbolizes remembrance or rebellion have higher racism scores, does this mean that they would be more likely to discriminate against members of another race? Preliminary studies from our lab are ongoing and suggest that these beliefs are associated with greater instances of discriminatory behaviors (McManus et al., unpublished data).

A final limitation of this work is derived from our samples. Our goal was to recruit a nationwide sample of adults from the United States. The quality of data achieved from MTurk samples, however, has been critiqued (e.g., Burnham et al., 2018; Chmielewski et al., 2019; Matherly, 2019). In response to these criticisms, researchers have identified best practices that can be used to alleviate concerns (Aguinis et al., 2020; Cobanoglu, 2021; Goodman et al., 2012). Consistent with these recommendations, we included attention checks and measures of social desirability along with setting the location parameters to the United States and included notes in the recruitment scripts that we were interested in recruiting White participants from the United States. Because we anticipated that not all participants would comply with those instructions or would be within the demographic parameters, we recruited over 250 participants in each study. By recruiting a larger number of participants than necessary, this allowed us to remove participants who failed attention checks or did not meet demographic parameters. Despite our precautions, concerns about the reliability of the samples may still exist, suggesting the need for future replication and research to validate these findings. Greater emphasis has been placed on replication studies in the field of psychology (Chambers, 2019) and we have included copies of our measures in the supplemental materials for this purpose.

¹⁴ In three separate items, participants were asked to report the extent to which they believed the Confederate flag represents rebellion, heritage, and racism using a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) scale. See Tables 1 and 2 in the Supplemental Materials for additional details.

¹⁵ The Supplemental Materials contain an alternative analysis of the data in Studies 1 and 2 which examines participants’ beliefs along a continuum rather than as forced choice. The data reach similar conclusions as those presented in Studies 1 and 2.

10.2. Conclusion

Beliefs matter. Beliefs that the Confederate flag symbolizes remembrance or rebellion are associated with beliefs that are detrimental to race relations in the United States. Confederate monuments, Confederate flags, and the commercialization of the Confederate flag on clothing and accessories may be reflections of these beliefs. In this regard, beliefs that the Confederate flag stands for remembrance, rebellion, or racism at the individual level are an indication of the Confederate flag's symbolism of racial tension at a national level.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Sharing

Data available by request from the first author.

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