

Plantation Wedding

Mallory and Ross are to be married this summer. Both grew up in the South and can trace their family lineages to wealthy plantation owners in pre-Civil War North Carolina. Although the couple takes little pride in their respective families' history, their immediate family members take their heritage very seriously. In fact, Ross's family has offered to pay for the entire wedding on the condition that they hold the wedding on a plantation-turned-wedding-venue that used to belong to one of their ancestors. This, his family claims, would be a way of celebrating the two families' Southern heritage while celebrating their union.

Mallory and Ross are conflicted. On the one hand, the venue is objectively beautiful—in fact, it's the most beautiful venue that the couple has seen in their planning efforts for the wedding. And by agreeing to have the wedding on the plantation, they would be doing two things that would make their lives much easier: first, they would make their family members very happy, and second, they could have a lavish and memorable wedding without spending a dime. Were they to refuse, many (though not all) of their family members would be upset at their decision and take it as a personal affront and a repudiation of their shared identity. They would have to settle for a less beautiful location for the wedding, and would, of course, need to foot the bill without the help of their families.

On the other hand, it is highly likely that the ancestor who owned the property also owned slaves—in which case the plantation they would be getting married on contributed to the institution of slavery, and to the suffering of many people. They want their marriage to be a happy occasion and don't want to begin their new life together on a site of past cruelty and racism. Even on the off chance that this particular plantation never had slaves, Mallory and Ross feel that the association between Southern plantations and slavery is significant enough to potentially put a damper on their wedding day.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should Mallory and Ross have the wedding on the plantation? Why or why not?
2. Is it possible to separate a place from its historical significance?
3. When making their decision, how much weight should the couple give to their families' preferences? To their own well-being? To their moral concerns about using this venue?