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**“WE HAVE THAT OPPORTUNITY NOW”: BLACK AND LATINX GEOGRAPHIES,
(LATINX) RACIALIZATION, AND “NEW LATINX SOUTH”**

Rebeca Gamez
Johns Hopkins University

Timothy Monreal
California State University, Bakersfield

AUTHOR NOTE

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Rebeca Gamez, Johns Hopkins School of Education, 2800 North Charles St, Baltimore MD, 21218, rgamezd1@jhu.edu.

ABSTRACT

The “New Latinx South” is a term used by a number of interdisciplinary scholars to describe recent demographic shifts in a region not traditionally home to large Latinx communities. While this scholarship often posits that examining the Latinx experience in regions of the South will shed light on developing processes of racialization, we argue that more specific attention needs to be paid to the construction of *Latinidad* in the “New Latinx South.” More specifically, and applied to education, we ask what might be gained by interrogating constructions of *Latinidad* within school spaces in the South. In this conceptual article, we draw on Black and Latinx geographies scholarship to analyze our own (auto)ethnographic layered accounts about living, teaching, and researching in Maryland and South Carolina. We pay particular attention to how the script (and subject) of Latinx is relationally deployed to mark Latinx as both forever outside the South *and* as a tool to perpetuate deficit notions of Black students and communities. We hold that in interrogating these relationally racialized discourses we might highlight opportunities in newer spaces to build emergent infrastructures and systems towards more just educational outcomes for marginalized and minoritized youth while guarding against the tendency to unintentionally reproduce essentializing and marginalizing ideas of ethnoracial categorization.

Keywords: The New Latinx South, racialization, Latinx, anti-Blackness, Latinx education, (auto)ethnography

Introduction

Scholars have forwarded a number of different frameworks and descriptors to describe the changing demographics of Latinxs¹ across the United States, and more specifically the U.S. South. Among these monikers, the “New Latinx South”² has emerged as a central descriptor used by a

number of interdisciplinary scholars to describe newer Latinx communities in a region not traditionally home to such (Kochhar et al., 2005; Portes & Salas, 2015; Powell & Carrillo, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021). While recent scholarship often posits that examining the Latinx experience in the “New Latinx South” will shed light on developing processes of racialization and race relations, the focus typically favors temporal description, documentation, and demographics leaving aside more theoretical engagement with the diversity, complexity, and production of racialized Latinxs in daily (schooling) life in Southern spaces (Jones, 2019; Hamann & Harklau, 2015; Winders & Smith, 2012). We argue that more specific attention needs to be paid to the construction of *Latinidad* in the space(s) of the “New Latinx South.” In other words, little research in/on the “New Latinx South” has fully grappled with the institutional construction and creation of *Latinidad* and what looking at these processes within the “New Latinx South” might reveal about broader processes of racialization within localized educational contexts. Thus, in this article we ask what might be gained by interrogating constructions of *Latinidad* within school spaces in the South.

Drawing on vignettes from our (auto)ethnographic material about living, teaching, and researching about *Latinidad* in Maryland and South Carolina, we posit the “New Latinx South” as a case to examine how national discourses, particularly regarding the category of Latinx as (always) immigrant, get laminated onto (extra)local contexts. Moreover, we pay particular attention to how the script (and subject) of Latinx as immigrant is relationally deployed to mark Latinx as both forever outside the South *and* as a tool to perpetuate deficit notions of Black students and communities. Recognizing that autoethnography often refers to a systematic approach to research and writing that “seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand the cultural experience” (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 1), we use the term (auto)ethnography here to highlight a crucial distinction. While we do focus on personal experiences grounded in particular cultural settings, we use these to primarily create “layered accounts” (Charmaz, 1983), where we analyze our experiences alongside our ethnographic data and critical texts to interrogate Latinx racialization in the “New Latinx South.”

Given the explicitly spatialized descriptor of the “New Latinx South,” and responding to calls from scholars who study the interplay between race and geography, we utilize these (auto)ethnographic layered accounts to examine how place, in particular localized educational contexts in the “New Latinx South,” intersect with broader racial structures and discourses. We apply a Black and Latinx geographies lens to our reading and analysis of our experiences and ethnographic material in an effort to further nuance, complicate, and “(un/re)knot” the production of Latinx as a relationally made racial category. Through this exercise, we demonstrate how a twin focus on both the creative construction of *Latinidad* in reaction to often hostile Southern spaces *and* the deployment of racialized discourses that position *Latinidad* in relation to Blackness allow us to further explore questions about the borders between Black and Latinx and the creation of safe spaces for Black, Latinx, and Afro-Latinx youth. We hold that in interrogating these discourses and scripts through the lens of Latinx and Black geographies, we might highlight invisibilized opportunities and absences in the “New Latinx South” to build emergent infrastructures and systems, or “spaces of co-operation, stewardship, and social justice” (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 6). These spaces of “co-operation, stewardship, and social justice” help us work towards more just educational outcomes for minoritized and marginalized students while guarding against the tendency to unintentionally reproduce essentializing and marginalizing ideas of ethnoracial categorization.

To achieve the following argument, we outline the conceptual article as follows. After this preceding introduction, rationale, and purpose, we describe our theoretical framework, rooted in

Black and Latinx geographies. Not only does this theoretical framework offer a novel window into educational scholarship in the “New Latinx South,” it also provides a conceptual frame to examine tendencies to erase Black experience and space-making across literature that focuses on the so-called “Latinization” of Southern school spaces (Salas & Portes, 2017). To interrogate our argument empirically, we then turn to our ethnographic material and critical reflections about living, teaching, researching, and working in Southern public schools. In our analysis, we pay particular attention to moments in our work when *Latinidad* is relationally deployed by a variety of actors within the microspaces of Southern schools as both exception(al) to the South and also exemplar to perpetuate deficit notions of Black students, communities, and spaces.

This article concludes with a discussion of implications of our work on the “New Latinx South,” principally that scholarship about *Latinidad* move away from broad, overarching, implicit, and relatively under examined descriptions of Latinxs. Additionally, this article begins a conversation about how teachers and teacher education scholars in the U.S. South can engage in generative dialogues that expose the destructive, spatialized (re)construction of race and racism *and* advance future spaces of possibility *where Latinidad* is not constructed vis-à-vis Blackness. As such, this paper is significant because, as indicated above, most scholarship about the “New Latinx South,” especially in the interdisciplinary field of education, deploys broad, relatively uncomplicated descriptions of Latinx as a racial category. Furthermore, we suggest that such a move is significant because educational scholarship on the “New Latinx South” largely overlooks questions about anti-Blackness in relation to the construction of *Latinidad* in educational Southern spaces.

Conceptual Framework

Thinking through processes of the racialization of Latinxs with/in the “New Latinx South,” we put particular emphasis on the construction of *Latinidad* in places and spaces across the U.S. South. More specifically, we examine how national discourses, particularly regarding Latinx and different categories of immigrant/ion, get laminated onto and relationally deployed into (extra)local Southern educational contexts like schools and classrooms. We are interested not only in understanding and complicating why, where, and by whom certain discourses about *Latinidad* gain prominence, but also how various constructions of *Latinidad* in Southern schools are used in relation to other racialized groups. For example, in writing and reflecting on our layered accounts, we began to question how student, teacher, and scholar calls for Latinx educational spaces, crucial to help counter restrictive and racist Southern (educational) spaces (Castillo-González, 2011; Powell & Carrillo, 2019; Rodriguez & Monreal, 2017; Monreal & McCorkle, 2020), may also call upon certain scripts and subjects of *Latinidad* to unintentionally perpetuate deficit notions of Black students and communities (Gamez, 2020a; 2020c).

Thus, important efforts aimed toward Latinx spatial inclusion in the “New Latinx South” benefit from attention to both the legacy, influence, and opportunities of Black and Latinx geographies. As such, our vignettes led us to draw upon scholarship that theorizes the relational production and process of space grounded in a critical, open, and imaginative understanding of the geographies of race as informed by both Latinx and Black geographies (Allen et al., 2019; Cahuas, 2019; McKittrick, 2006, 2011; McKittrick & Woods, 2007). Hence, we engage with theoretical literature that leans into the intersections and spaces of encounter between Black and Latinx geographies revealing both the “racialized workings of spatial violence” and the “refusal of commonsense codes that underwrite discrete racial and spatial categories” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 756, 758).

Turning first to Latinx geographies, the sub-discipline not only engages directly with the spaces and places of Latinx peoples, cultures, practices, and histories, but also applies a spatial reading to Latinx theorists and epistemologies. Towards the latter, Latinx geographers along with those interested in spatial thinking found, “Latinx studies offered intellectual nourishment to scholars hungering for an attention to the agency of Latinx communities alongside recognition of the violence they face” (Muñoz & Ybarra, 2019, para. 1). In this move to spatialize Latinx thinking, Anzaldúa’s (2012) conceptualization of borderlands has emerged as a leading source of Latinx geographic theorizing (Cahuas, 2019; Ramírez, 2019; Soja, 1996). Although a vast and malleable idea, Anzaldúa (2012) describes borderlands as a “thin edge of barbwire” that splits, wounds, and produces home—they are “the lifeblood of two worlds merging...an undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants” (p. 25). As such, borderlands as a concept escapes the purely locational markers that divide U.S./Mexico by extending the border to meeting points where “physical, social, cultural and psychic boundaries are created that mark some as less than others” (Cahuas, 2019, para. 12).

Given the broader demographic and population shifts we outlined in the introduction, Latinx borderlands are always already being remade and extend deep into the United States (Gallo & Link, 2016). Reflecting on our own regional focus, Powell and Carrillo (2019) link an Anzaldúan understanding of borderlands to analyze the challenges and opportunities of Latinx growth in Southern school spaces. The researchers suggest a critical border pedagogy informed by teacher and student practices of straddling, translanguaging, and *testimonio* to create collective and geographic spaces that counter (present) histories of deleterious and racialized boundary making. Yet, while such spatialization of Latinx theory adds important insights into place-making in regions like the South by complexifying the notion of borderlands and problematizing ephemeral notions of Latinxs’ “arrival/settling,” we were struck by a relative “absence of Black life, thought and history” (Cahuas, 2019, para 25) across such engagements, especially when applied to the U.S. South. Thus, in line with Southern geographer Jamie Winders’ (2005) words that, “the South has been *unthinkable* without its complement of ‘race’ (p. 686, emphasis original) and heeding Cahuas’ (2019) challenge to “think more deeply about how engagement with Black studies and Black geographies in particular could enrich [our] analysis” (para. 4), we consider Black geographies as a crucial and missing link for a critical examination of the construction and/un(knotting) in the “New Latinx South.”

Black geographies emerged as a field of inquiry for responding to geography’s troubling history with regards to questions around race and Blackness (Hawthorne, 2019). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a thorough treatment of Black Geographies scholarship, three key themes cut across this work. First, Black Geographies scholarship centers the spatial knowledges and practices of Black diasporic communities in the production of space and place to counter analyses that render Black people as lacking geography. As McKittrick (2006) explains, “The relationship between black populations and geography...allows us to engage with a narrative that locates and draws on black histories and black subjects in order to make visible social lives which are often displaced, rendered ungeographic” (p. 29). Second, and related to the first theme, a Black Geographies framework foregrounds how Black subjects and Black life are not simply reducible to racism, violence, and death but are active agents in the production of space (McKittrick, 2006; McKittrick & Woods, 2007).

Yet, at the same time, and as the third theme highlights, Black Geographies scholarship tethers a focus on Black life and agency to the “sedimentations of racist histories in contemporary

landscapes” (Hawthorne, 2019, p. 7). Rooted in the Black Studies tradition, the plantation emerges as a central organizing principle and “provides the future through which contemporary racial geographies and violences make themselves known” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 950). Geographically, the slave plantation exists as a *spatial* and historical link that connects legalized Black servitude, gratuitous violence, and Black dispossession to present-day forms of capital accumulation, spatial organization, and racialization. In other words, Black Geographies scholarship rejects analyses that analytically separate racism, racialization, or race-making from place and space and from the production of past and future place and space. Linked to the plantation, space and place both reflects and (re)produces racial violence, racisms, and reifies anti-Blackness by, for example, positioning Blackness as perpetually “out of place” and placeless (Domosh, 2017; Hawthorne, 2019; Lipsitz, 2011). Given this latter point on the relationship between the plantation and a continued logic of racial-spatial violence, the South emerges as an important geographical site where questions about race and space, racial violence, and anti-Blackness acquire particular significance. Indeed, while acknowledging that depictions of the South are often exoticized and that narratives often juxtapose the region to the rest of the country, where a certain “racial progress” is imagined (Robinson, 2014), Black Geographies scholars also point to the importance of exploring Black experiences, and in particular, anti-Blackness and racial violence in Southern spaces specifically (Eaves, 2017; Williams, 2017).

However, and important to our understanding of anti-Blackness and its relation to the “New Latinx South” specifically, McKittrick (2011) argues that while past spatial and racial violence “has produced untidy historically present geographies,” Black Geographies allow scholars to move away from deficit narratives and questions that replicate such racialized violence (p. 950). For in calling forth and upon the invisible and absent—the imaginative, open, resistant, and decolonial practices rooted in Black Geographies—we might “move away from territoriality, the normative practice of staking a claim to place...and [toward] place as the location of cooperation, stewardship, and social justice” (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 6). In other words, a Black Geographies framework insists on conceptualizing present practices of racialized and spatialized exclusion and anti-Black violence without succumbing to a *fait accompli* determinism. Rather, the framework asks us to identify and expose the destructive (re)construction of race and racism *and* advance futures of possibility where geographies of inequality are challenged. As described above, a Latinx geographies framework insists on a similar challenge but, crucial to our own analysis, we are concerned with what is sacrificed and/or invisibilized in such a process—principally the tendency to erase Black experience and particular forms of rather covert anti-Black violence. Thus, as Cahuas (2019) argues, Latinx geographical thought must pay attention to the “*absences* of Black experiences and geographies” (para 25, emphasis ours). In the next section we apply these overlapping but interconnected frameworks of Black and Latinx geographies to our ethnographic vignettes and critical reflections about our experiences as researchers in the “New Latinx South.”

(Auto)Ethnographic Layered Accounts

Our intention in this conceptual paper is to interrogate constructions and deployments of *Latinidad* in school spaces of the U.S. South in order to extend the conversation on racialization within educational studies of the “New Latinx South.” We argue that entangling Black geographies into conceptualizations of *Latinidad* and Latinx spaces in the “New Latinx South” is a way to counter the risks of relationally outlining the Latinx subject vis-à-vis anti-Black discourse while also leaning into the transformative potentialities of Black spatial imaginations. As a way of both highlighting the need for such examinations of *Latinidad* and emphasizing the problematic

potential of rooting the creation of *Latinidad* in relational opposition to Blackness, we purposely draw from our own experiences in the form of (auto)ethnographic layered accounts. We situate our vignettes as (auto)ethnographic to highlight the fact we are reflecting on our individual, broadly ethnographic research projects in the South, and also our experiences living, teaching, researching, and working in Southern public schools.

In sum, our conceptual project draws on our collective layered accounts that use “vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection” and places them in conversation with Black and Latinx geographies scholarship (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 5). Through this process, we pay particular attention to how the script (and subject) of Latinx as immigrant is relationally deployed to mark Latinx as both forever outside Southern educational spaces *and* as a tool to perpetuate deficit notions of Black students, communities, and spaces. Thus, these layered accounts demonstrate the need for more nuanced conversations and conceptualization about *Latinidad* in the South.

Tim: Positionality Reflection

I moved from Los Angeles, California to Columbia, South Carolina in the summer of 2015. For the next four years I worked as a full-time middle school social studies teacher and took doctoral classes in Foundations of Education. Thus, I spent the vast majority of time working in, or at least thinking about, Southern educational spaces. Looking back, I wish I would have written a journal or notes about my perceptions about the South prior to my arrival as I had relatively little experience with the region outside textbooks and a few, short vacation-oriented trips. As such, I very much pictured spaces defined in stark binaries, White³ and Black. While my time in the South provided many opportunities to evidence such an image, my own sixth-grade social studies classes eluded such dichotomies. My students were quite diverse, both in terms of socio-economic status and racial/ethnic identification. For example, my students included the children of visiting university faculty members from Asian and Latin American countries, wealthy White families with lake residences, and White, Black, and Latinx students living in subsidized housing. To the later point, I admit I was shocked that Latinx students were a growing population in my school and school district. Even as someone who took many Chicax Studies courses in college, I simply had no prior knowledge of the growth and history of Latinx in the South (Guerrero, 2017; Monreal & Tirado, forthcoming; Weise, 2015).

Moreover, my arrival to South Carolina also coincided with the presidential campaign and eventual election of Donald Trump. Not only did I viscerally feel a palpable anger emanating from his discourse, I learned from Latinx communities and students about the material impact of local anti-Latinx policy and politicians (Arriaga, 2017; McCorkle & Cian, 2018; Rodriguez & Monreal, 2017 Rodriguez, 2020). At a micro level, I witnessed first-hand how district officials and coworkers advanced deficit notions, stereotypes, and inaccuracies about Latinx individuals and communities. Some examples included an administrator who continually, and purposely, addressed me in mock Spanish (Hill, 1993), numerous teachers who insisted that students needed citizen status to attend our school, and a policy that made guardians present driver’s licenses to come to the school. Thus, I felt compelled to work against such injustices aimed at the larger Latinx community by trying to build accepting Latinx spaces for my students at school that focused on developing pride in being Latinx, in seeing the strengths of their families, communities, and cultures (Monreal, 2017, 2019; Rodriguez, Monreal, & Howard, 2018).

Ofrendas and Bóvedas

I begin with one particular instance when my social studies class built an *ofrenda* (offering/altar) for *Día de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead). The goal was to publicly assert my own image of *Latinidad* so students felt safe in claiming ownership in the class and school (see Monreal, 2019). Somewhat surprising, the *ofrenda* seemed to resonate with my Black students at levels equal to or even higher than my Latinx students.

My Black students excitedly brought pictures of deceased aunts, close family members, and other important figures in their lives. As we placed their pictures on the *ofrenda*, my Black students proudly took pictures of the altar and eagerly shared stories of their loved ones. However, it wasn't until I read an article about the *Lukumí* practice of constructing *bóvedas*, or altars to the dead, (Brooks, 2020) that I connected Cahuas (2019) and McKittrick's (2006, 2011) theorizations of space to my own classroom project. *Lukumí*, or as many call it *santería*, emerged from communities of enslaved West Africans in Cuba and Caribbean and the *bóveda* fuses Catholic and Latin American religiosity with West African ancestor worship (Brooks, 2020). Brooks (2020) writes, "Many black folks keep *bóvedas* and don't even recognize it...Connecting to the elders and the passed-on has strengthened black folks through the oppressions of enslavement and Jim Crow" (paras. 6,10). While I have no idea whether my own Black students connected the *ofrenda* with a *bóveda* (or even knew what one was), they had a keen sense that the class altar was a significant political act, a way to foreground Black communities in space-making processes.

In sharing their stories and producing space, my students disclosed a central component of Black geographies, one that I undoubtedly was trying to develop with my Latinx students—that "the racialized production of space is made possible in the explicit demarcations of the spaces of *les damnés* [their relatives and loved ones] as invisible/forgettable at the same time as the invisible/forgettable is producing space" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 4, emphasis original). Moreover, entangling the *ofrenda* with the *bóveda*—weaving Latinx and Black geographies—might have opened up the overlapping yet concealed geographies of enslavement and labor exploitation, the violent spatial projects that brought, and continue to bring, racialized bodies to the South along with their continual spatial struggles to imagine and make different spaces (McKittrick, 2006). In short, my own quest for developing the Latinx identity of my students and corresponding Latinx safe spaces for them left such opportunities unexplained as my practice "was devoid of Black spatial knowledges and struggles" (Cahuas, 2019, para. 18). I had failed to "directly grapple with Blackness, or Black worldviews and geographies" (Cahuas, 2019, para. 18), and thus, reflecting on the *ofrenda*, with the conceptual frame of Black Geographies, I see how my construction of *Latinidad* closed off potentialities and possibilities, how my attempts at constructing *Latinidad* in Southern spaces resulted in the creation of a site to be "dominated, enclosed, commodified, and segregated" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 6). Moving to my own research with Latinx teachers in South Carolina, I noticed a similar trend of invisibilizing the entanglement of Black and Latinx geographies in order to construct a certain categorization of *Latinidad* in opposition to Blackness.

Research with Latinx Teachers in South Carolina: "Good" Immigrants and Spatial (Re)Imaginations

Next, I reflect on my own research with Latinx teachers in South Carolina. Interested in understanding K-12 Latinx teacher experiences and subject formation within the spaces of the South, I completed a mixture of semi-structured interviews, photovoice, and ecomaps with 25 Latinx teachers in South Carolina from August 2019-January 2020. I also analyzed school

websites, teacher staff pages, and district publications like blogs and press releases to better understand how Latinx teachers constructed themselves vis-à-vis, and sometimes in concert with, how they were expected to be(come). Among many findings (see Monreal, 2020, 2021), in this vignette I highlight how teachers felt pressures to be a certain type of role model for their Latinx students and perform the role of a certain categorization of Latinx, that of cultural ambassador, for their non-Latinx students. In many cases, teachers found these roles to be a point of pride and of central importance to establishing safer spaces for Latinx students in their schools/classes. However, even as these teachers were steadfast in their desire to improve the daily lives of their Latinx students, it was clear that such actions were often tied up with deployments of *Latinidad* that relied on “good” immigrant scripts (Nagel & Ehrkamp, 2016; Patel, 2015; Patler & Gonzales, 2015; Rodriguez, 2018; Yukich, 2013), sometimes as a direct foil to their Black students.

In some cases, teachers in my research used their own family immigrant experiences to forward a “good immigrant” narrative where they hoped a specific deployment of *Latinidad* would connect with racially minoritized students and prove an example of hard working, upwardly mobile merit. For example, Kim, a high school business teacher, sought to use her grandfather’s immigrant story from Cuba as a way to motivate, build solidarity, and show a positive example of “an American success story.” Kim explained how, when, and where she claimed *Latinidad*:

My school was 99.9% African-American...and so, to get through to the kids and get them to give me a chance...identifying as a Cuban instead of as a White Hispanic benefited me tremendously...I bring up that I am Hispanic and they seem to find some common ground...especially given what my family went through when they first came to the country and discrimination against Hispanics. It [family story] helps me drive home the importance of overcoming obstacles and of working hard if you don’t like the position you are in then you gotta be the one to change it. (Interview, October, 2019)

At first glance, we see Kim use a *Latinidad* subjectivity to build “common ground” with her Black students and to create spaces of shared struggle and mutual respect. However, her discourse, couched in normative, individualistic, and exceptional logic, inadvertently forwards *Latinidad* vis-à-vis Blackness in her classroom space. In setting up her family as an exemplar, she contrasts *Latinidad* to Blackness; to be Latinx is to be a hard-working immigrant who takes advantage of opportunities, something her Black students can learn from. However, without attention to the historical legacies of racialized spatial organization, violence, and resistance, her use of *Latinidad* to create space is devoid of the potentialities of her Black student’s geographies.

Somewhat similarly, Jenny, a high school Spanish teacher born in Colombia placed her own father as a model in contrast to her own Black students. In explaining her own family’s journey to South Carolina, she said:

My dad [born and educated in Colombia] was poor, but he cared about his education...and eventually became a physical therapist. And a lot of people tell me, “Jenny most people don’t think like your dad. People think education sucks, I’m just going to go to work. College is nothing I can afford.” So, the cycle keeps going, and I tried to break, I’ve tried to break it...I try to do pep talks with them [Black students]. I try to show them the world. Nothing. (Interview, September, 2019)

Although Jenny heeds implicit attention to larger spatial structural factors that influence the difficulty of completing, and even the efficacy of, a school education, she explicitly calls out individual effort as cause. Jenny not only holds her father as a model of individual perseverance,

but also sees herself as an individual intervener in their lives. The later point is especially important in thinking through *Latinidad* and space. Jenny's comment that she "tries to show them the world" works to (re)create her *Latinidad* by bringing her family's migration story into the local context of her classroom and community. Jenny sees herself as *the* space-maker even as her use of Latinx geographies as a blueprint for resilience minimizes if not invisibilizes the space-making of her Black students. In effect, it is as if showing Black students the world does not include their own local geographies.

Not all teachers in the study (unintentionally) drew on such dichotomies. One teacher in particular, Amara, highlighted her own personal experiences as Afro-Latina to illustrate the urgent need to open up, and recognize, different types of spaces for immigrant, Black, and Latinx students at her school. Even though she described herself as a "unicorn," because "no one is mixed like me," she stressed how important it was for students to see her as Black and Latinx. As she stated in one interview, "Usually at some point it [Afro-*Latinidad*] comes up and the biggest thing for kids in South Carolina is when you say you're mixed, they just assume Black and White and that's the only possible mixing that could ever take place." The intersections of Black and Latinx geographies were central to Amara's explanations of herself, both in her classroom praxis and in our interview conversations. For example, even as a math teacher she wanted her students to know how the lasting impacts of Jim Crow extend to current labor exploitation and marginalization in the South. Tying current Latinx immigration to Southern Reconstruction she stated:

It all comes down to profit. And that's what's really hard trying to explain to adults and students. Even like the school to prison pipeline and why the focus on immigration now...but I'm like, okay so Reconstruction, pre-Jim Crow, reconstruction [Black] people were supposed to get the 40 acres and the mule and then Lincoln is assassinated. The new guy comes in, stops that, and a lot of that land was taken back. I try to explain to my kids, prisons didn't exist before the Civil War but if you read the Thirteenth Amendment carefully, if you are in prison you were a slave and I was like, so like think about it, you know I tell my kids you're used to your land being tended to, free labor. So if people were in prison you get free labor and now if certain people are in prison you have to fill that with cheap labor, Latino immigrants.

Rather than draw Latinx and Black geographies as binaries, like the previous two teachers, Amara leans into absences and entangles Black space with her deployment of *Latinidad*. Interweaving Reconstruction, Jim Crow, capitalism, migration, and the school-to-prison pipeline, Amara shows students "there would be no Latinx geographies without Black geographies." (Cahuas, 2019, para. 1). Further, just as she highlights the possibilities and multiplicities of her own identity, she offers students examples that:

Latinx and Black geographies are inextricably linked, because Blackness and *Latinidad* are not mutually exclusive and because Black thought, experiences, history and politics, along with the legacy of transatlantic slavery, profoundly shape contemporary social and spatial arrangements in las Americas. (Cahuas, 2019, para. 1)

Drawing on the connections of geographies, Amara creates new spaces in which one can be immigrant and Black, one can be structurally and historically marginalized and continually creative and resistant. Perhaps, Amara's understanding of the potentialities of Latinx and Black geographies is evidenced in the following exchange with a student:

I was reading this book, um to my kids on black women who made impacts on different things and one of my very stereotypical White skater boys asked me, Mrs. Franklin, what it be like if, you know, this, this, and this didn't exist. I was like it would be freakin' Wakanda, like we would be so advanced.

Rebeca: Positionality Reflection

Similar to Tim, I moved to a large, predominately African American urban city located in the Southeast to pursue my PhD in educational studies. I left my position teaching 5th and 6th grade English Language Arts in a school located in Trenton, New Jersey to immerse myself, or so I thought, in scholarship on critical literacy and language awareness. Yet, as I learned more about the local and regional spaces that were now my new home, I became especially curious about what local media and academic sources were describing as the unprecedented migration of Latin and Central American immigrants to the city and, more broadly, to regions of the Southeast and South (e.g., Deeb-Sossa, 2013; Jones, 2019; Marrow, 2011; Massey, 2008; Ribas, 2015; Steusse, 2016; Zúñiga & Hernández-León, 2005). I wondered how these spaces differed from those I had previously inhabited like parts of New York City and New Jersey, where various versions of *Latinidad* and Latinx diasporic communities were firmly rooted. Indeed, many of these spaces provided me with a sense of community during early adolescence and adulthood, as I grappled with understanding my own *Latinidad* as a first-generation Mexican immigrant.

When I moved to this hypersegregated Southeastern city, I also grappled with understanding the rapid and unprecedented arrival of primarily socioeconomically marginalized Latin and Central American immigrants to an urban space so profoundly marked by a legacy of White supremacy and anti-Black violence. Years of White-enacted racist and discriminatory practices have produced a city characterized by a stark Black and White racial divide, where African Americans are significantly more likely to live in poverty and send their children to underfunded schools than their White counterparts. And, I wanted to know what these demographic changes within such a hyper-segregated space located in the Southeast meant for the primarily Latinx and African American youth attending schools together in the city. These were the questions that became the focal point of my research.

To better answer these questions, I immersed myself in local educational spaces, primarily schools, across different neighborhoods in the city that had different levels of experience with the arrival of Latin and Central American immigrant youth. Starting in 2014, I spent time volunteering and tutoring, as well as working on other research projects that although not directly related to my developing research interests about educational spaces in the “New Latinx South,” nonetheless provided me with an opportunity to interact with schools and communities. I soon noticed a disconnect between what was happening in some of the spaces and places that I now inhabited as volunteer and tutor and percolating dominant narratives developing from local media and government sources about these primarily Latinx-driven demographic changes.

First, there were a number of media reports that linked the arrival of Latinx immigrants to the city with growing instances of conflict between “Black and Latino” youth. Second, local government reports, as well as media coverage, disseminated reports and initiatives contending that immigrants were key to reviving an economically struggling city and regenerating a stagnant population growth. What struck me about these narratives, reports, and media stories were the underlying relationally racialized narratives they emitted that implicitly drew on tropes, stereotypes, and racialized representations about immigrants, *Latinidad*, and Blackness as they described conflict and immigrants’ role in the city (see Gamez, 2020a for a more detailed

description of these discourses). Coverage of developing tensions among “Black and Latino” youth not only positioned Blackness and *Latinidad* as two distinct racialized groups, omitting the experiences of Afro-Latinxs, but, importantly, also reported on a litany of potential reasons for this conflict that primarily relied on individual level explanations of prejudice and competition. And, African American youth were often positioned as the main instigators of conflict because of what the media characterized as their negative and harmful actions towards newly arrived Latinx students. In a similar vein, media and city government documents outlining a city-wide immigrant initiative meant to retain and woo immigrant families as a measure to combat a faltering city economy and declining population rates implicitly positioned African Americans negatively: as immigrants, particularly Latin and Central American immigrants, were described as “valuable employees” and “job creators,” African Americans remained the unnamed comparison. In other words, these kinds of discourses implicitly yet actively linked immigrants to cultural tropes of model minority values of hard work and family values that perniciously positioned African Americans as the unnamed reference against which these representations are made (Dávila, 2008).

Yet, at the same time, I also noticed that the prevalence and strength of these seemingly race-neutral discourses appeared to vary depending on the educational spaces one encountered and the communities within which they were located. In some schools located in particular corners of the city, especially those that had received larger numbers of Latinx immigrants, discourses of “Black and Latino” youth conflict, coupled with narratives that linked the arrival of Latinx immigrants with economic growth manifested themselves in adult talk in schools and in neighborhood talk and media coverage. In other parts of the city, these relational discourses that constructed *Latinidad* as not only an already solidified ethnoracial category but also as a foil to Blackness were relatively absent. How was I to make sense of these intersecting demographically changing places/spaces--the “New Latinx South”, the Southeast in particular, the city and its varied neighborhoods and the schools that populated them--and their relationship with the abundance and/or absence of these racialized narratives and discourses?

A Black and Latinx geographies framework provided the grammar for understanding that what I noticed were the intimate connections between place and race. Race, as a social formation, is spatially imbricated and “subject to the ‘stickiness’ of place” (Markusen, 1996 as cited in Price, 2012). Yet, as Black studies scholars and a Black geographies framework remind us, place in the United States is intimately connected both to the sedimentation of specifically anti-Black racist practices *and* to Black space-making. As such, the arrival of Latin and Central American immigrants to the “New Latinx South” and to this city located in the Southeast, as well as their uneven dispersal throughout the city, suggests that entanglements between and across *Latinidad* and Blackness are subject to both White enacted historical legacies of exclusion and the particularities and possibilities of extra local spaces.

Research in Changing Schools: Relationally Racialized Scripts: “Good Latinx” and “Anti-Black” Scripts

Indeed, the personal experiences and research vignettes I include in this paper draw from a broader study that precisely explored how schools, given their particular sociocultural contexts --that is, their spatial location within the city and their student demographics--respond to Latinx-driven demographic changes and how these responses, in turn, shape how youth come to understand the borders between Blackness and *Latinidad*. I completed 18 months of ethnographic research across two Title I middle schools, Roots Academy and New Horizons,⁴ located in this Southeastern city. On the one hand, the student population at New Horizons transformed from

predominantly African American to predominantly Latinx in the span of ten years (due to the rapid arrival of Latin and Central American immigrants). It is also located in the southeastern quadrant of the city, an area that experienced the highest growth in Latinx immigration since the early 2000s. On the other hand, Roots Academy is a predominately African American school that has only recently experienced the arrival of Central American immigrant youth. I took an unpaid role as an on-site tutor/academic aide and translator/interpreter across the two schools. I primarily spent time working and interacting with early adolescents as they made their way from 7th to 8th grade. In addition to in-depth participant observation, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 66 youth, as well as with parents, teachers, administrators, staff, and community members.

One key finding, among many others, focused on the kinds of national, local, and neighborhood level racialized scripts that schools drew on as they responded and tried to make sense of Latinx-driven demographic changes (Gamez, 2020b). While these scripts varied across both school contexts given their particular sociocultural contexts, they all implicated Blackness and *Latinidad* in some way. At New Horizons, adults drew on “good Latinx” racialized discourses that relied on culturalist-based model minority myths that positioned Latinx as a monolithic group, but that, crucially, also simultaneously relationally (re)produced essentializing anti-Black narratives that rendered Black youth and Blackness as deviant and placeless (Gamez, 2020c).

For example, like the teachers in Tim’s study, Jenny and Kim, Mr. Brody, a White teacher, also forwards a “good Latinx immigrant” script (Dávila, 2008) that relies on culturalist and individualist reasonings while implicitly contrasting Blackness. In his articulation of why certain students do well in school and others do not, Mr. Brody explains:

...It also varies on how important education is to the parents in the family, um, but that varies by race too, especially within city schools. Because you do have—one of the Spanish speaking newcomers, who is in 4th grade, who, Jesus, I don’t know how he picked up a second language, which is English, this fast (snaps his fingers) and he is doing that well with it. Because the family’s placing importance on, ‘we came here for you to get a good education.’ And he’s working his little butt off[...Yea, well, it’s that their parents value their children’s education. I think it really depends, like a lot of our kids that do well have that parent support because they have this push of ‘I came over with nothing, to work hard.’ Like school is your job. Um like if you really see the higher achievers, they make their children do their homework, they make their children read every night, and there are also no behavior issues. Like I think of in eighth grade now like a Jorge or say a Jimmy. But for many of our other kids, it’s the behavior and mental health issues that comes with, like, their experiences. (Interview, May 11, 2018)

Mr. Body gives Jesus, a “Spanish speaking newcomer” and Jorge and Jimmy, two second-generation Latinx youth, as examples of students’ whose success is due to parental influence. As he explains, these students are doing well “because the family’s placing importance on, ‘we came here for you to get a good education.’” If academic achievement varies by racial and cultural differences in a school that is overwhelmingly, and in the middle school, exclusively, populated by African American and Latinx youth, then who remains the unnamed racial group whose parents do not place importance on education? African American youth.

These relationally racialized discourses also implicated me. Adults at New Horizons quickly labeled me as Latina or Hispanic and positioned me as a “role model” or “mentor” for

Latinx students, but in doing so they not only constrained and enclosed *Latinidad* but also obliquely engaged in relational racialization of anti-Blackness. As Ms. O’Hare, the White middle school English as a Second Language (ESOL) teacher, commented:

I’m glad they see someone like you, a Hispanic that made it, a young Latina woman well put together...You know, I think some of the Latina girls see you as a mentor, especially some of the newer ones. I feel there are already so little Latina girls in the school, and so the pool that serves as good role models is really small. But without good role models they’re learning all these bad behaviors, talking a certain way back to teachers, catching an attitude. (Field note, April 28, 2017)

I welcomed the chance to be a mentor and a role model for other Latinx youth. After all, there is a wide body of scholarship that links the creation of Latinx educational spaces to increased social belonging and positive educational outcomes (e.g., Irizarry, 2011). Creating these spaces in my classrooms and for my students were also important to me when I taught middle school. Yet, these interactions in the field sharply emphasized to me how *Latinidad* often gets reduced and essentialized in different spaces/places, as it also perpetuates deficit notions of Black students. Indeed, at first glance, we also see Ms. O’Hare acknowledge the need for mentorship and representation as important within the context of New Horizons, where she perceives there to be “so little Latina girls” given the school’s history with Latinx-driven demographic changes. However, the rest of her comment is couched in neoliberal notions of respectability that become expected of some racialized and minoritized groups (Shange, 2019; Singh, 2020). Crucially, these notions also insidiously position Blackness as a foil. As she sees it, newer Latin and Central American immigrant girls not only need Latina role models that evince upward social mobility and that appear to be “well put together,” attributes she associates as part of my *Latinidad*, but they also need these role models as a shield from the other youths’ “bad behaviors” and “attitudes.” Again, much like Mr. Brody’s comments, African American youth remained the unnamed reference group in Ms. O’Hare’s comments: only Latina girls/women can serve as good role models for each other, while other youth at school, who were exclusively Black youth at the middle school level, are reduced to stereotypes and dispossessed of their humanity, as they are cast aside as potential mentors and friends.

Interrogating the “New” in the “New Latinx South:” Reimagining and Contesting Borders

Interestingly, these relationally racialized narratives were hardly present at Roots Academy. Recall that Roots Academy is a predominately African American school located in a part of the city where, at the time of my study, the arrival and settlement of Latin and Central American immigrants proved to be a very recent phenomenon. In fact, as I detail elsewhere (Gamez, 2020a, 2020b), in this particular corner of the city, entanglements between *Latinidad* and Blackness took on a different character altogether. In the vignette that follows, I offer one example that exemplifies this difference and that demonstrates how the “new” in the “New Latinx South” may perhaps point towards instances and spaces of disrupting not only existing borders between *Latinidad* and Blackness but also exploring entanglements between Black and Latinx geographies. In a conversation about how to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, Ms. Blake, who self-identified as African American and served as the school’s Community School Site Coordinator, explained

that she saw the “newness” of Latinx enrollment at Roots Academy as an opportunity to rethink *Latinidad*, Blackness, and the relationship between the two:

So, this whole month is Hispanic Heritage month, I think it ends October 15th. I’d like to do something for our growing Central American population at our school, to make them feel heard. I wanted to do something the kids could do in class, but not like just talking about dances, or food, or the typical thing. We have the chance to lay the foundation for something new here, not just like superficial culture, Latino equals food. I mean that’s important and fun, but we have the opportunity to do something new here since we haven’t really done anything like this...Or maybe we could do something about migration journeys that would connect the kids in meaningful ways? Like many of our African American youth have migration journeys, from the deep South to here, or from different parts of the city, and that’s something they can connect on... It has to be more meaningful than the just Latino equals dancing and food. Cause we have kids like Avery that are both, Black and speak Spanish. I think she’s from Panama? I’m not sure how and even if we have time to really think things through, but I think it’s time, cause we can and we have that opportunity now, to rethink those like rigid, you know, Black on one side, they have their thing, and Latino on the other. There are many ways those cultures and histories are connected. (Field note, September 25, 2017)

Unlike at New Horizons, where *Latinidad* and Blackness sedimented as separate spheres and where adults continuously juxtaposed Blackness to an idealized “good” Latinx subject, the vignette above exemplifies how *Latinidad*, and its relationship to Blackness, proved to be contested and in-transition. Ms. Blake recognized that place, and the particular temporal dimension of place, created a space to “do to something new.” While she recognized existing essentialist articulations of *Latinidad* that link it to “food” and “dance,” her comments also reflect an understanding that because of the absence of Latinx youth at school, Roots Academy had seldom engaged in celebrations of *Latinidad*, like Hispanic Heritage Month. However, she sees this absence as precisely an opportunity to rethink *Latinidad* and, more importantly, its connection to Blackness. While she is unsure what thinking in new ways might look like exactly, she searches for opportunities that challenge simplistic understandings of *Latinidad*, recognize the lived experiences of Afro-Latinx students like Avery, and demonstrate how Latinx and Black geographies are inextricably linked. Thus, similar to Amara, the teacher from Tim’s study, Ms. Blake also grappled with possibilities for disrupting borders afforded by the specificity of the “New Latinx South.”

Discussion and Implications

In this discussion we further elaborate on two intersecting and overarching observations derived from our application of Black and Latinx geographies on to our (auto)ethnographic layered accounts about living, teaching, and researching about Latinx in Southern educational spaces. Specifically, we discuss these observations as they relate, first, to broader conceptual understandings of the “New Latinx South” in the existing educational literature and, second, to the field of teacher education more generally.

The “New Latinx South:” *Latinidad*, Blackness, and Anti-Blackness

A key contention we make in this paper is that the construction of *Latinidad* is relatively undertheorized within educational scholarship on the “New Latinx South.” Our interrogation of the construction of *Latinidad* in space(s) of the “New Latinx South” challenges existing approaches within educational literature that tend to position *Latinidad* as a static and monolithic ethnoracial category and removed from those dynamic processes, relations, and spatial configurations that actively give meaning to it. Further, by drawing specifically on Black and Latinx geographies scholarship, we link our understanding of Latinx racialization in the “New Latinx South” to Blackness and anti-Blackness.

For example, an important thread that weaves across our vignettes is how, in the absence of a solidified Latinx identity, *Latinidad* is being constructed differently and in relation to Blackness across these local educational spaces. Educational scholars of the “New Latinx South” have certainly noted the absence of what Hamann and Harklau (2015) describe as “established, historicized, and racialized Chicano or Latino communities or identities” (p. 164), yet the extent to which “absence” is analytically explored and linked to the relational construction of *Latinidad* and existing spatialized histories and racialized bodies is minimal (but see Guerrero, 2017; Gamez, 2020a, Monreal, 2020). Absence of *Latinidad* in the South is often equated with “newness” of *Latinidad* and so “new” becomes the overarching defining category of Latinx (Monreal & Tirado, forthcoming). Scholars often place their emphasis on understanding how the increased numerical quantity of Latinxs, or this “new” demographic, is affecting regions, communities, and schools but position Latinx as a bounded and pre-defined group. As such, scholars position this *Latinidad* as deterministic rather than relational, spatialized, and in process. In other words, the assumption is that the construction of *Latinidad* in the U.S. South will eventually follow what is an imagined singular and coherent Latinx subject in the United States.

However, in both our vignettes, our participants were actively articulating *Latinidad* in relation to both the particularities of regional and local contexts and racialized sedimentations of the past that invoked Blackness as well as anti-Black violence. In Tim’s vignettes, both Jenny and Kim drew on well-entrenched “good immigrant” narratives as they grappled with *Latinidad* in South Carolina, where they hoped a specific deployment of *Latinidad* would connect with their Black students and prove a model for upward social mobility. In Rebeca’s examples, how teachers understood *Latinidad* and linked it to Blackness varied across neighborhood context. The way in which adults engaged with deep-seated racialized violences of the past and circulating racialized scripts appeared to differ given each community’s relationship with Latinx immigration and its particular local demographics (Gamez, 2020a, Gamez, 2020b).

The juxtaposition of Blackness and *Latinidad* and the relational racialization of anti-Blackness within educational spaces is certainly not just a feature of Southern race-making (see for example Shange, 2019). Yet, in educational literature on the “New Latinx South,” the relationship between Blackness and *Latinidad* is often unarticulated and unexplored. This absence leaves existing examinations of how Latinx are shaping and interacting with Southern spaces as partial and incomplete. Yet, Blackness and *Latinidad* and the borders between them are crucial to further understand not only because Black and Latinx spatialized histories are intimately linked (Cahuas, 2019), but also because distinct (not equivalent) historical, political, and social processes have inevitably positioned Blackness and *Latinidad* side-by-side in many Southern communities and educational spaces (Jones, 2019; Ribas, 2015). Thus, our interweaving of Black and Latinx geographies and our vignettes collectively point our attention to how the construction of *Latinidad* in Southern educational spaces is always relational and tethered to Black life and space.

On the one hand, as our layered accounts demonstrate, the construction of *Latinidad* in Southern educational spaces can render Blackness ungeographic and placeless as it remains an innominate reference in adults' talk about *Latinidad*. For example, in Rebeca's vignette, Ms. O'Hare's comment about needing "good Latina" role models given the *absence* of a solidified Latinx community in this particular school and neighborhood insidiously forwarded Black youth and anti-Blackness. As Ms. O'Hare saw it, she not only put forth an idealized version of what a respectable Latina should be like ("well put together" and "having made it"), but also felt that Latinas' small numerical quantity and their demographic "newness" needed protection from what she positioned as always already deficient and troubled Black youth.

On the other hand, as both Amara, in Tim's vignette, and Ms. Blake, in Rebeca's example, demonstrate, the construction of *Latinidad* in Southern educational contexts can also center Blackness as both part of *Latinidad* and/or intimately connected. In Tim's example, Amara's articulation of her Afro-*Latinidad* in relation to the South, its demographic changes, and its histories and, in Rebeca's example, Ms. Blake's ruminations about how to forge linkages between African American students and Central American immigrants given the absence of a strong Latinx community, both point to a particular dynamic, in process, creative, and transformative construction of *Latinidad*. Indeed, as we contend in the next section, analyses that center the construction and racialization of *Latinidad* in Southern spaces and how these processes are intimately linked to Blackness and anti-Blackness are not only important to complicate existing conceptual scholarship on the "New Latinx South" in educational scholarship, but also have critical implications for educators and practitioners.

Refusing Binaries and Essentializations to Build Teacher Knowledges

A second general contention that we advance in this paper, and evidence in our layered accounts, is the need to engage generative dialogues with teachers/teacher educators to recognize the invisibilities of unjust geographies that extend into and co-constitute a racialized present and also advance spaces of possibility *where Latinidad* is not constructed vis-à-vis anti-Blackness. We feel this is especially important because as our own, as well as our teacher participants' experiences in Southern educational spaces attest, there is a general desire by educators to use *Latinidad* towards the ends of opening generative and safe spaces for Latinx students specifically, and marginalized and minoritized youth generally. Holding ourselves as examples, we point to Tim's efforts to create an *ofrenda* or Rebeca's (tepid) desire to serve as a mentor as representative of teacher's desires, in line with Kim's, Jenny's, Amara's, and Ms. O'Hare's attempts to foreground *Latinidad* in the interest of their students. However, even as we want to highlight and recognize these efforts, we also argue that such efforts in themselves are not nearly enough (Rodriguez, Monreal, & Howard, 2017). In fact, like Tim's inability to tie Black geographies to his practice of Latinx space-making, and the anti-Black, and often unnamed, foils of good immigrant discourse (Kim, Jenny, and Mr. Body), these endeavors erase or at least continually dehisibilize the transformative potentialities of Black geographies. As such, even as teachers work towards more just educational outcomes for minoritized and marginalized youth, there is the tendency to unintentionally reproduce essentializing, dichotomous, and marginalizing ideas of ethnoracial categorization.

Thus, we point to the need for teacher education/teacher education programs to explicitly interrogate and center the relationality of racialized discourse and racial formation so that practitioners lean into rather than refuse the interrelatedness and dynamism of local educational spaces. In this way, teachers may be less likely to fall back upon sedimented racial scripts that call

upon singular examples of success, like Kim’s grandfather or Jenny’s father, to explain away or erase spatial violences rooted in anti-Blackness. However, given the continual march of teacher education programs towards efficiency, accountability, technicalism, and credentialing (Apple, 2013; Hara & Sherbine, 2018; Popkewitz, 1998; Webb, 2009), and the relative exclusion of instruction about the intersections of race, immigration, and sociopolitical knowledge (Monreal & McCorkle, 2020; Bondy & Braunstein, 2019; Jefferies & Dabach, 2014; Rodriguez, 2019), we see how teachers feel compelled to use *Latinidad* as an instrument towards academic achievement rather than critical conversation. Rebeca’s positioning as mentor and role model is but one example of how *Latinidad* is called upon in this way. Yet what we have evidenced at length in this article is how such efforts, however rooted in empathy, good intent, and optimism they may be, reproduce singular notions of *Latinidad* often tied directly to anti-Blackness. In sum, without overt and critical instruction about the relationality of race within local education spaces, the potentialities of creative performances and expressions of *Latinidad* get folded back into the service of maintaining detrimental racial discourses.

The call to (un/re)knot assumptions about Latinx racialization within teacher preparation is particularly relevant as ephemeral calls for teacher representation hold that simply increasing the number of Latinx teachers in Southern classrooms will lead to better outcomes for minoritized and marginalized youth. Yet such thinking ignores the reality that Latinx teachers, too, have often been schooled in a White supremacist society and “need critical teacher preparation programs that challenge deficit perspectives, undermine entrenched inequities, and develop the practice of teaching for social justice” (Monreal, 2020, p. 90; see also Cherry-McDaniel, 2019; House-Niamke & Sato, 2019; Smith-Kondo & Bracho, 2019). Without greater attention to their role in relational racialization, particularly when tied to anti-Blackness, Latinx teachers might do little to challenge and disrupt the underlying and spatialized webs of existing racial scripts that reproduce racial categories. As such, even as Latinx teachers recognize their role in creating safe spaces for Latinx students, they preclude their own potential. Yet, we also see what is possible when teachers like Amara and Ms. Blake proclaim the invisible and reference the forgotten; those two armed with their own personal and experiential knowledge recognize a different possibility. Ms. Blake’s words are powerful attestations towards such shared, transformative, and cooperative educational spaces, invoking the “opportunity to do something new here.” We imagine teacher and continuing education preparation that capitalize on the knowledge of Amara and Ms. Black and the desires of those like Kim, Jenny, and Ms. O’Hare to advance expansive notions of *Latinidad* that creatively advance justice rather than instrumentalism, anti-racism rather than neoliberal multiculturalism, and multiplicity rather than assimilation.

Conclusion

Collectively, the layered accounts elaborated in this paper profoundly demonstrate both the creative construction of *Latinidad* in reaction to and contestation to often hostile Southern spaces and the deployment of racialized discourses that position *Latinidad* in relation to Blackness. Specifically, we applied a Latinx and Black geographies lens to our research experiences and ethnographic material, which lifted up absences within Latinx scholarship, particularly in relation to Blackness and anti-Blackness. By linking our research and experiences to a Black geographies framework, we highlighted the possibilities of Black geographies as a way for both researchers and teachers to more thoughtfully create, theorize, and practice safe spaces for their Black, Latinx, and Afro-Latinx students. Such a conceptualization allows us to recognize how the organizing violences of the past create our present spaces, but also that the multiplitious potentialities of Black

Geographies demand different spatial arrangements, and thus, different and more expansive, subjective, (*Latinidad*) imaginations.

Related to teachers and educators, as we elaborated earlier, foregrounding more expansive and relational understandings of *Latinidad* requires deep engagement with theoretical perspectives and scholarship that centers the relationality of racialized discourse and racial formation. One avenue through which pre- and in-service teachers and educational leaders might begin to counter over-simplistic understandings of *Latinidad* that potentially reinforce deficit narratives of Blackness rests on encouraging educators to engage in a similar process employed in this manuscript--creating and conceptualizing (auto)ethnographic layered accounts. Through this process, educators would interpret and explore their personal experiences and identities in relation to critical scholarship on processes of racialization and racial formation.

Engaging in critical self-reflection by tapping into the potential of modes and variations of autoethnography as a way for pre- and in-service teachers and other practitioners to learn about race/ethnicity, social justice, education, and educational disparities is not a novel idea. Indeed, a robust body of scholarship in the field of education has directly addressed how the autoethnographic mode of inquiry might facilitate complex explorations of power imbalances, race, and processes of racialization (e.g., Ohito, 2019; Pennington & Brock, 2012; Taylor et al., 2008). Yet, our conceptual work foregrounds how pedagogical models that draw on modes of reflexivity should also be proactively connected to broader understandings of how processes of racialization are relational, embedded in specific places and places, and tethered to Black geographies of domination. Thus, we highly encourage engagement with Black geographies literature to be part of this critical reflection process.

For example, Tim's engagement with Black and Latinx geographies scholarship led him to critically examine how his efforts of developing student Latinx identity and corresponding Latinx safe spaces in his classroom through his lesson on *ofrendas* were also linked to an absence of "Black spatial knowledge and struggles" (Cahuas, 2019, para. 18). And, Rebeca's engagement with processes of relational racialization led her to reflect on how teachers in her field site read her *Latinidad* through neoliberal discourses of respectability that also obliquely reinforced anti-Black narratives. Pre- and in -service teachers, then, might share and interrogate similar experiences as they are also pushed to engage with theoretical perspectives and scholarship that centers the relationality of racialized discourse and racial formation. It is through one such process--of generating (auto)ethnographic layered accounts--that pre- and in-service teachers might pursue more inclusive spaces in their classrooms.

Beyond direct implications for teacher education programs, our (auto)ethnographic layered accounts grounded in a Black geographies framework also expand scholarship on the "New Latinx South." As we elaborated, a Black geographies framework nuances, and explicitly centers, the relationality of *Latinidad* to Black Geographies rather than as a singular counter to White spaces. The intersections of Black and Latinx geographies provides a framework through which we can productively begin to think about developing Latinx scholarship--as it expands to understanding "new" spaces and places--while simultaneously not erasing Blackness or the ways in which Blackness and *Latinidad* are intimately connected. At the very least, then, scholars interested in (un/re)knotting assumptions about (Latinx) racialization and exploring Latinx or the construction of *Latinidad* in the context the "New Latinx South" need to thoughtfully engage in substantive exchanges with not only Black geographies scholarship but also the rich work on anti-Blackness and on Afro-*Latinidades* that troubles "monolithic representations of *Latinidad*" (Busey & Silva,

2020, p. 3). Such exchanges push scholars to theorize more expansive understandings of Latinx and critically ask how anti-Black racisms articulate with the construction of *Latinidad*.

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NOTES

1. In this manuscript we prefer to utilize the term Latinx or Latinxs to speak broadly about a supposed ethnoracial demographic category that is always *in the making*. While we sometimes refer to “Latinx youth” or “Latinx people,” we intentionally limit these phrases precisely because our paper attempts to capture the construction of this ethnoracial category across different spaces/places.
2. We place the term the “New Latinx South” in quotations to highlight the complexity of the term and to emphasize, in part, our apprehension in utilizing the term. Privileging the “new” can function to erase not only established Latinx communities in the U.S. South but also other newer and established immigrant groups (Guerrero, 2017; Monreal, 2020; Monreal & Tirado, forthcoming). Despite our apprehension, we utilize the term to capture the unprecedented growth and settlement of Latinx immigrants in a region that has long organized itself along a Black and White racial binary and which, despite heterogeneity across place and context, continues to uphold a regime of White supremacy and the exploitation of racial difference.
3. We chose to capitalize White in this paper. We follow scholars who argue that capitalizing White asks scholars and readers to interrogate what Whiteness is (Ewing, 2020). As sociologist Eve Ewing explains for why she capitalizes White: “In maintaining the pretense of invisibility, Whiteness maintains the pretense of its inevitability, and its innocence [...] As long as White people do not ever have to interrogate what Whiteness is, where it comes from, how it operates, and what it does, they can maintain the fiction of race is other people’s problem, that they are mere observers in a centuries-long stage play in which they have, in fact, been the producers, directors, and central actors” (Ewing, 2020).
4. To protect the identities of participants, all names (city, schools, students, and teachers) are pseudonyms.

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