Reimagining 'justice' in environmental justice: Radical ecologies, decolonial thought, and the Black Radical Tradition

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Abstract

In this article, we rethink the spatial and racial politics of the environmental justice movement in the United States by linking it to abolitionist theories that have emerged from the Black Radical Tradition, to critical theories of urban ecology, and to decolonial epistemologies rooted in the geopolitics of Las Americas. More specifically, we argue that environmental justice organizing among multi-racial groups is an extension of the Black Radical Tradition's epistemic legacy and historical commitment to racial justice. The article is divided into two parts. First, we review how this remapping of environmental justice through the lens of the Black Radical Tradition and decolonial border thinking reshapes our understanding of anti-racist organizing. Part of our remapping includes an examination of African American and Latinx social movement organizing to reveal how such geographies of interracial solidarity can reframe abolitionist politics to take nature and space seriously. In the second part of the article, we present a series of maps that illustrate the geography, temporality, and inter-racial solidarity between Chicanx social movement organizations and the Black Radical Tradition. Our mapping includes identifying sites of interracial convergence that have explicitly and implicitly deployed abolitionist imaginaries to combat the production of racialized capitalist space. We use environmental justice to argue for a model of abolitionist social movement organizing that invites interracial convergence by imagining urban political ecologies that are free of the death-dealing spaces necessary for racial capitalism to thrive.

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Each of us has previously argued that environmental justice (EJ) activism and scholarship have been constrained by its inability to theorize the logics of ecological devastation as central to the machinations of racial capitalism (De Lara, 2018; Pulido, 2017). In this article, we rethink the spatial and racial politics of the EJ movement in the United States by linking it to abolitionist theories that have emerged from the Black Radical Tradition (BRT) (Johnson and Lubin, 2017; Robinson, 1983), to critical theories of urban political ecology (UPE) (Heynen et al., 2006; Keil, 2003), and to decolonial epistemologies rooted in the geopolitics of Las Americas (Mignolo, 2012; Smith, 2010). We argue that elements of these theoretical frameworks were present in the radical political imaginaries articulated by activists of the early EJ movement. They were present, for example, in the *17 Principles of Environmental Justice* (Delegates, 1991) that were published by participants in the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in 1991. For instance, the principles call for:

> a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities ... to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples. (Delegates, 1991: 1)

Nonetheless, these more radical activist imaginaries have slowly been replaced by more moderate appeals to the liberal state for inclusion and redress (Carter, 2016; Pellow, 2018). This shift has constrained the ability of EJ scholarship and activists to address the more profound aspirational imaginaries laid out in the principles of early movement leaders. Our focus on the BRT, UPE, and decolonial border thinking asks whether we can imagine forms of freedom that are not dependent on recognition or alleviation of injury by the liberal state (Brown, 1995; Weheliye, 2014). To answer this question, we place the radical spirit of the early EJ principles into conversation with more contemporary critical theory from ethnic studies, geography, and indigenous decolonial studies.

Our interdisciplinary approach will break down some of the disciplinary barriers that have kept discussions of race, ecology, and space as separate intellectual pursuits. For example, we challenge geographers who frequently approach the study of Black people and Blackness as discrete things that are limited to Black bodies.[1] Instead, we underscore the centrality of Blackness to US notions of justice by showing how it has shaped the landscape and political culture far beyond narrow conceptions of Black activism. More specifically, we argue that EJ organizing among multi-racial groups is an extension of the BRT's epistemic legacy and historical commitment to racial justice. We trace this genealogy by showing how the struggle against environmental racism can be linked to a longer history of abolitionism as a political consciousness—a type of epistemic dialectic—that extended beyond specific policies like the 14th Amendment.

Our second goal is to stretch the thinking of EJ theorizing and organizing by defining justice not in overly juridical and distributive models (Walker, 2009) or by arguing about the explicit intentionality of locating deadly pollution sources in poor Black and Brown neighborhoods (Pastor et al., 2001). Instead, we argue that decolonial border thinking and abolitionist thought provide alternative ways to frame EJ without succumbing to the limits of the liberal state because they each acknowledge the central role that nature, space, and the state have played in the entrenchment of racial capitalism. These epistemic challenges call into question the ability of process-oriented and juridical state solutions

that do nothing to abolish the underlying systemic violence of a society rooted in racial capitalism. EJ should, as Julie Sze (2017: 54) writes, be "a way to critique and restructure existing power relations, [because] representation and participation, however important, are never enough."

Instead, we claim that EJ needs to focus on abolitionist theories, which seek, according to Johnson and Lubin (2017: 12), "the destruction of racial regimes and racial capitalism" that "entails the end not only of racial slavery, racial segregation and racism, but also the abolition of a capitalist order that has always been racial." This form of abolitionist thinking recognizes that racial capitalism "not only extracts life from Black bodies, but dehumanizes all workers while colonizing indigenous lands and incarcerating surplus bodies" (Johnson and Lubin, 2017: 12). Therefore, abolitionism provides a way to imagine a political project of liberation that extends the struggle for Black freedom to abolishing the same racial and capitalist relationships of power that produced the colonial project of plunder and dispossession in the Americas. Our reading of abolitionism, as part of a longer project of the BRT, helps us move beyond some of the limits connected to Du Bois' notion of abolition democracy because it recognizes that making appeals to the settler colonial state makes us complicit with dispossession; asking for 40 acres and a mule equates freedom and justice with a small piece of the plunder made possible by the past and present removal of indigenous people from the landscape (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Chicanx and Latinx scholars have used decolonial border thinking to make similar claims about sustainability and social justice. We use decolonial border thinking because this concept helps us transgress existing boundaries in order to argue for a form of freedom that does not revert to nation-bound definitions of peoplehood and nature. Decolonial border thinking extends beyond the United States and recognizes that indigenous spatial imaginaries and practice extend to the rest of the Americas. What are the main tenents of decolonial border thinking? It involves according to Mignolo (2012: ix), imagining "a society formed not only to protest and eradicate the depredatory work of corporations, and to protest financial crises and state delinquencies... but a society working towards global futures no longer ruled by coloniality, capitalism, or the 'diversity' of modern 'epistemic monoculture'." More specifically, decolonial border thinking involves the recognition that capitalism and modernity are unviable systems that put "growth before life and individual success before communal well-being" (2012: ix). For us, decolonial border thinking provides EJ activists and scholars space to think through what EJ looks like outside the confines of racial capitalism. Escobar (2007: 197) claims that ecology is central to decolonial thinking because the "current environmental crisis... is a crisis of modernity, to the extent that modernity has failed to enable sustainable worlds." Modernity, as the agent of Western imperial thought, has failed "to articulate biology and history save through the capitalization of nature and labor" (Escobar, 2007: 197). The result was a form of ecological hegemony that devalued other ideas of nature. Consequently, "local models of the natural are at the basis of environmental struggles today" (Escobar, 2007: 197). This capitalization of nature and labor is also present in the racial capitalism literature, where differently valued bodies and landscapes have enabled accumulation to do its work. Mignolo and other decolonial scholars also challenge the spatiality of settler colonial theory by tearing down the borders erected by the settler colonial state of the US. Their concept of border thinking is a necessary prompt that asks us to think about the geographies of a decolonial world order that does not mistake decolonial strategies for a new brand of imperial politics.

UPE is also an important part of our analysis because it brings together a critical examination of space, capital, and nature. Our reading of UPE insists that race must be part of this conversation. Some scholars have pointed out the research gaps that tend to separate a rigorous analysis of how race, space, and nature intersect, but that scholarship remains sparse and preliminary. For example, Nik Heynen has argued that an ''abolition ecology'' framework can push UPE scholars to consider how cities have been ''produced through racialized logics'' (2016: 842). We argue that EJ and ethnic studies scholars can contribute to this discussion, especially by connecting landscape and ecology with theories of racial capitalism. Several scholars who focus on race, including Cedric Robinson (1983), Clyde Woods (2000), Walter Johnson (2013), and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007) have already examined how race and capital have played key roles in the production of space. Laura Pulido (2000) has argued that racism is pervasive in the landscape and therefore cannot be separated from questions of justice and the environment. We want to expand on these earlier explorations by making an explicit connection between EJ organizing and what we call abolitionist and decolonial imaginaries that emerge from the dialectical tensions between race, space, and nature.

Having provided a conceptual framework, the article will proceed as follows: first, we review how this remapping of EJ through the lens of the BRT and decolonial border thinking reshapes our understanding of anti-racist organizing. Part of our remapping includes an examination of African American and Latinx social movement organizing to reveal how such geographies of interracial solidarity can reframe abolitionist politics to take nature and space seriously. The connections between the Black diaspora and the struggles of Latinxs, Asian Americans, Native Americans and others have attracted growing attention in recent years. This literature is part of a more general growth in comparative and relational ethnic studies (Almaguer, 1994; Foley, 1997; Miles, 2015; Pulido, 2006). One approach has been to highlight what John Márquez (2013: Chapter 1) describes as ''foundational blackness'' to denote the centrality of the Black experience, including consciousness, culture, and activism, to US Latinxs. We build on this concept by mapping the foundational nature of Blackness to EJ activism. A second approach and one that we elaborate on later, is to make explicit connections between the history of settler colonialism, ecological justice, and Latinx spatial imaginaries. As we show, this spatial-temporal remapping of EJ as part of a longer project of social movements in Las Americas opens up new political possibilities that can help us escape the confines of racial capitalism, colonial plunder, and ecological crisis.

In the second part of the article, we present a series of maps that illustrate the geography, temporality, and inter-racial solidarity between Latinx social movement organizations and the BRT. Our mapping includes identifying sites of interracial convergence that have explicitly and implicitly deployed abolitionist imaginaries to combat the production of racialized capitalist space. The notion of political convergence, something we describe in more detail below, is important because convergence creates political space for people with different radical epistemologies to come together and reimagine radical futures. This thinking is informed by the idea that social movements are spaces and ''moments of collective creation that provide societies with ideas, identities, and even ideals'' (Eyerman and Jamison, 1991: 4). Our mapping shows that EJ provides a key site of convergence because it creates space for political solidarities that cut across racial, gender, and class lines. We use EJ to argue for a model of abolitionist and decolonial social movement organizing that invites interracial convergence by imagining urban political ecologies that are free of the death-dealing spaces necessary for racial capitalism to thrive.

Locating Black and Brown solidarity in the early 21st century

In *Black Marxism*, Robinson (1983: 167) defines the BRT as "the ideological, philosophical, and epistemological natures of the Black movement whose dialectical matrix... was capitalist slavery and imperialism." He describes it as "an accretion, over generations, of collective intelligence gathered from struggle." According to Robinson, "the purpose of the struggles informed by the tradition became the overthrow of the whole race-based structure" (Robinson, 1983: xxx–xxxi). One could not therefore talk about Black freedom without calling for the dismantling of a racist system that transcended the physical bondage of Black bodies. Wendy Cheng (2013a: 148) has argued that Robinson's "ontological totality of Blackness" represented "a revolutionary consciousness that has never been destroyed or subsumed by world systems dominated by imperialism and capitalism." Blackness persisted according to Cheng (2013a: 148), as "an important set of intellectual and political provocations not only for Black and African diaspora studies, but also for anyone interested in understanding the relationship between racial identity, racial capitalism, and the development of oppositional consciousness." This ontological consciousness is what we mean when we say Blackness and abolitionism.

Our engagement with the BRT is meant as a productive gesture that recognizes the history of Black social movements. We are aware that the genesis of abolitionist theories, when traced directly to Du Bois, can be read as a settler-colonial move that guarantees civil rights by integrating Black people into the possession of indigenous land. Indigenous scholars have pointed out this tension between abolitionist democracy and the politics of inclusion that seek entrance into the settler colonial state through the possession of Native land (Byrd, 2011; Tuck and Yang, 2012). This is why we focus on racial capitalism and the BRT rather than on the explicit political arguments articulated by Du Bois. One of the reasons we adopt Robinson's historiography of the BRT is because his trajectory of radical thought is written as a dialectically evolving consciousness that treats abolition less as scripture written by Du Bois (1935) and more as a dialectical space for radical and contingent possibilities. Thus, the ideas and freedom dreams of the BRT need to be read as the potentiality for radical futures that respond to the shackles of the present but that are not confined by them. The struggle for abolition today cannot therefore be defined by the same spatial-temporal realities that Du Bois used to articulate his political project in the aftermath of reconstruction.

Robinson's reading of the BRT is also critical to the epistemological convergence between ethnic studies and UPE. One of Robinson's goals involved complicating Marxist historiographies of capitalism by challenging the idea that racism was derivative rather than central to economic relationships of power. His positioning of racialization as critical to the development of capitalism means that what scholars have described as the metabolic relationship between humans and nature (Gandy, 2004; Heynen et al., 2006; Moore, 2000) must also grapple with race and racism as constitutive forces, which are in addition to and not derivative of capitalism, the state, and space. Therefore, to speak of urban metabolism or UPE necessitates a conversation about how race has been written into capitalist space. We take this thinking a step further by introducing decolonial Latinx spatial imaginaries into the spatial-temporal milieu that constitutes racial capitalism to reveal how notions of justice in the EJ movement must resolve the relationships and infrastructures of power that enabled the rapacious expansion of European capitalism to take hold across the Americas after 1492. It is both an acknowledgement and a necessary correction to Marx's (1867: 760) genealogy of capitalism, which fused "the discovery of gold and silver in the Americas," the "enslavement and entombment in mines" of indigenous people, and "the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins" into a brutish empire from which "capitalism was born, 'dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with

blood and dirt'."[2] Space, nature, society—all present and central to the birth of racial capitalism—all present and central to the ongoing struggle for EJ.

When taken together, our historical and theoretical remapping of EJ as an abolitionist and decolonial project disrupts the idea that ecological precarity can be overcome without negotiating the entrenched histories and current articulations of racial capitalism. It also provides an ecological and spatial framework that can extend theories of freedom and justice beyond discrete notions of race. We think that this reading creates new political possibilities for multi-racial organizing by focusing on the spatial intersections among race, capitalism, and nature. Recent comparative and relational ethnic studies scholarship (Hong and Ferguson, 2011; Kun and Pulido, 2014; Ortiz, 2018), including a growing interest in Black and Latinx relations can be attributed to spatial convergence in places like Los Angeles, Oakland, and the New South. These more recent studies have challenged the historiography of Chicanx studies by broadening the contours and substance of the Latinx experience. Consequently, Latinx scholars have begun to document and theorize the critical roles that nonChicanx history and actors have played in defining the Chicanx experience (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2011). The spatiality of earlier Chicanx historiography produced a geographic isolation that did not account for Black people. Most scholarship was on post-1848 history that centered the Chicanx experience on the US—Mexico borderlands. The focus was on White and Chicanx relations, it evacuated other groups even as scholars have shown that this mapping was more complicated (Gomez, 2008; Guidotti-Hernández, 2011). Of course, a broader reading of history in Las Americas—one that acknowledges the African diaspora that enabled US and European capitalism to flourish as a world system—necessitates placing Blackness as central to Latin American history. Additionally, Afro-Latinxs have made it clear, that for some Latinx people, Blackness is not distinct from their identity as Latinxs (Jimenez Román and Flores, 2010).

By locating Blackness within the main narrative of Las Americas, we disrupt white-centered racial binaries that do not always account for more comparative and complex racialized experiences. Likewise, this notion of Blackness forces ethnic studies scholars to consider the contributions that the BRT has had on critical studies of race, especially in the field of Latinx Studies, where it has not historically been emphasized.[3] While some of the drive to focus on discrete racialization was unique to Chicanx studies, which was struggling for legitimacy and to define itself, parallels could be found in all ethnic studies projects (Acuña, 2011; Soldatenko, 2009). The challenges of birthing and developing a discipline arguably necessitated erecting solid and clear borders. Yet over the past decade, ethnic studies have shifted towards more comparative and relational approaches. Although still under attack (Santa Ana and Gonzalez de Bustamante, 2012), ethnic studies are now more established, and researchers are increasingly demonstrating how racial histories and geographies are, in fact, produced by multiple racial/ethnic groups (Cheng, 2013b; Kim, 1999; Kurashige, 2008; Onishi, 2013; Smith, 2010). This shift has been facilitated by the emergence of critical ethnic studies, which foregrounds racial processes over the study of a particular racial/ethnic group (Elia et al., 2016).

The distinct geography of Mexican Americans also contributed to viewing specific communities of color as disconnected. Early Chicanx history and geography were confined to the southwestern United States. Mexicans in the Midwest, for example, were treated as an anomaly and Latinxs in the southeast, with the exception of Cubans in Florida, were thought to be nonexistent.[4] These assumptions enabled Chicanx studies scholars to treat Black activism as something truly separate—not only involving a distinct people but also distinct places. Some Chicanx scholars have made an effort to challenge the erasure of Blackness among ethnic Mexicans (Menchaca, 2001). Starting in the 1980s, however, the

geography and demographics of US Latinxs shifted dramatically. Besides becoming far more diverse, with immigration from Central and South America as well as the Carribean, Latinxs moved into the midwest, southeast, and northeast in unprecedented numbers. Now that the geography of ethnic Mexicans, and Latinxs more generally, encompasses the entire US, we are better poised to see connections and overlaps that were previously obscured (Smith, 2006; Winders, 2013; Zúñiga and Hernández-León, 2005).

Although Black bodies may not have figured large in many of the places where Latinxs have organized—their ideas and practices certainly did. This leads us to our point about the role that "freedom dreams," as described by Robin Kelley (2008), have played in cultivating new political opportunities for EJ. Christina Heatherton (2012) has studied geographies of political solidarity, hybridity, and consciousness and termed them, "spaces of convergence." For her, this concept denotes "sites where disparate radical traditions were forged into alliances, leading to unique models of political mobilization and the subsequent creation of new political theory" (Heatherton, 2012: xvi). Heatherton (2012: 1) shows how the Mexican Revolution of 1910 inspired people inside and outside of Mexico as a "global model of revolutionary struggle." It is a reminder that although the BRT is more renown and developed in the scholarly literature, we must not assume that it is always Latinxs who draw inspiration from African Americans. At times, African Americans have drawn directly on Latinx oppositional formations. At others, Latinxs have created spaces that enabled Black activists to once again draw upon the BRT. We provide numerous examples of how this has taken place in the second part of the article. Thus, while the BRT has arisen out of the singular experiences of Black people, it has been nurtured by other peoples of color as well. It is another example of how the BRT did not develop solely within a Black–white context because white supremacy has never been a strictly black–white affair in Las Americas (Almaguer, 1994; Miles, 2015; Smith, 2010).

The Mexican Revolution is also an important site of convergence because—like elements of the BRT—it was rooted in an ongoing struggle against colonialism and racial capitalism that stretched back to 1492. Emiliano Zapata and other leaders of the Mexican Revolution understood their movement as a fight for justice that applied to "the supreme interest of all oppressed people" (Quoted in Heatherton, 2012: 2). Zapata's indigenous and decolonial revolutionary spirit stretched across space, time, and national borders (Stephen, 2002). In fact, the political consciousness embodied in the Mexican Revolution is present in what Alicia Schmidt Camacho (2008: 5) calls "migrant imaginaries." Migrant imaginaries are an oppositional "symbolic field" where people, in this case, Mexican immigrants, become politically conscious. Not only is their consciousness oppositional to the nation-state (given that it is produced by a diasporic community), but it is an effort to defend their humanity from a political and economic system that fundamentally denies it. This imaginary is evident in literature, music, art, and activism, wherever ethnic Mexicans have sought to create a more socially just world.[5] It is also present in the social movement maps that we discuss in the next section.

Spaces of convergence challenge the boundaries of discrete radical imaginaries. Cultural studies scholars have argued that identity is relational and comparative. We make the same argument for social movement organizing around EJ. Before moving on to the cartographic part of this exercise, it is important to note that the circulation of oppositional activism between African Americans and Latinxs at times makes it difficult to discern the boundaries and origins of particular practices and episodes of radicalism. Márquez (2013: 12) argues that both groups are structurally similar in that they are united by a state of "racial expendability." Because they are both vulnerable to state-sanctioned death, they have similar experiences whose memories function as an "imaginative adhesive" (Márquez,

2013: 12). In turn, this adhesive engenders a subjectivity that can lead to new forms of resistance. Echoing Heatherton (2012), Márquez is suggesting that entirely new forms of opposition can arise between African Americans and Latinxs that cannot be neatly contained or traced to a single group. The challenges of hybridity become even more complex if we consider Afro-Latinxs: those Latinxs who are either visibly Black and/or identify as part of the Black diaspora (Oboler, 2016; Román and Flores, 2010). Accordingly, lines demarcating the BRT and "migrant imaginaries" are frequently fictitious at best.

Mapping the geographical dimensions of solidarity

We have chosen to focus exclusively on mapping oppositional social formations and actions that were consciously seen as *crossing* a racial/ethnic line in order to assist and/or engage in solidarity with members of another racial/ethnic group. We are particularly interested in those instances when activists were cognizant of sharing a political tradition or entering into another space where more power could be generated by linking the histories and fates of those Black and Latinx communities. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that political and social convergence takes on many different forms. For instance, there is a significant literature in cultural studies exploring the shared cultural practices of Latinxs and African Americans (GT Johnson, 2013; McFarland, 2008). Stuart Hall (1980, 1986) has convincingly argued that culture is absolutely critical to any successful political formation that seeks to destabilize hegemonic regimes. George Lipsitz (2001) has demonstrated how popular culture can enable us to challenge hegemony by serving as a form of politics or a rehearsal for politics. Lipsitz also acknowledges that cultural practices may have no political meaning. Gaye Johnson's (2008) observation is helpful because it suggests that cultural overlaps between Brown and Black Angelenos indicate that they "...have consistently envisioned futures that include each other's memories and histories, even when it wasn't always a conscious choice." We acknowledge that such cultural overlaps, while not explicitly political, are important to the development of a shared consciousness even if they do not appear on our maps.

Mapping ideological influence across space and time is a difficult task. We have chosen to approach this challenge by mapping what we consider to be representational geographies that link abolitionist politics with decolonial strategies. We use what Doshi (2017: 125) calls "embodied urban political ecology" to link EJ movements with the longer history of racial capitalism in the Americas. This allows us to trace the economy of bodies that was created by the legacies of racial capitalism and that has positioned women, queer, Black and Brown bodies in positions of precarity. Devalued people are the ground "upon whose bodies environmental struggles are waged daily" (Doshi, 2017: 125) and represent the scale at which the metabolic relationship between nature and humans takes place. This reframing of UPE as embodied politics locates everyday life within the relationships and structures tied to racial capitalism. Schmidt-Camacho (2008: 252) implicates this relationship between human bodies, labor, and capitalist metabolism when she writes, "Telling their stories through union-organizing drives, human-rights forums, the media, and ethnographic studies, obreras anchored their labor politics in the laboring body. The forms of embodied consciousness that obreras articulated in their accounts of the labor process revealed how capitalist discipline relied on the very humanity of the workers that companies sought to control."

It is also important to state what this mapping is not: it is not a comprehensive mapping of Black/Brown political solidarity. Such a map would feature far more points and connections. One of our criteria for inclusion is that the political content of the exchange

must be explicitly oppositional in keeping with Robinson's definition. We have excluded most electoral initiatives, as well as church-based projects.[6] Instead, this map shows places where it can be demonstrated that the BRT played a key role in facilitating Latinx political consciousness and mobilization, either by supporting or otherwise influencing Latinx organizing efforts. It also shows the opposite, places were African Americans have drawn on the Latinx experience in their quest for justice. Moreover, though our research has been thorough, it has not been exhaustive. Our biases lie in the 20th and 21st centuries, the west coast, and ethnic-Mexicans. Despite these caveats, it is our hope that this map will elucidate the potential for an abolitionist and decolonial politics that reframes EJ organizing and Black and Latinx solidarity.

What does our mapping teach us about the geographies of abolitionist and decolonial solidarity? According to Figure 1, most political solidarity in the continental United States between 1900 and 2014 took place in urban centers. The size of the circle on the map denotes the number of points of solidarity in that place. The various lines and arrows depict mobile acts of solidarity, such as caravans. We produced a set of more detailed maps for those regions that feature very high levels of interracial solidarity. These maps include the name of the organizations/actions and are presented by historical era.

Clearly, geography, demographics, and political cultures influence where Black–Brown political solidarity emerges. Looking at the spatial distribution of political solidarity, one place clearly stands out: California. There are several possible reasons for this. For one,
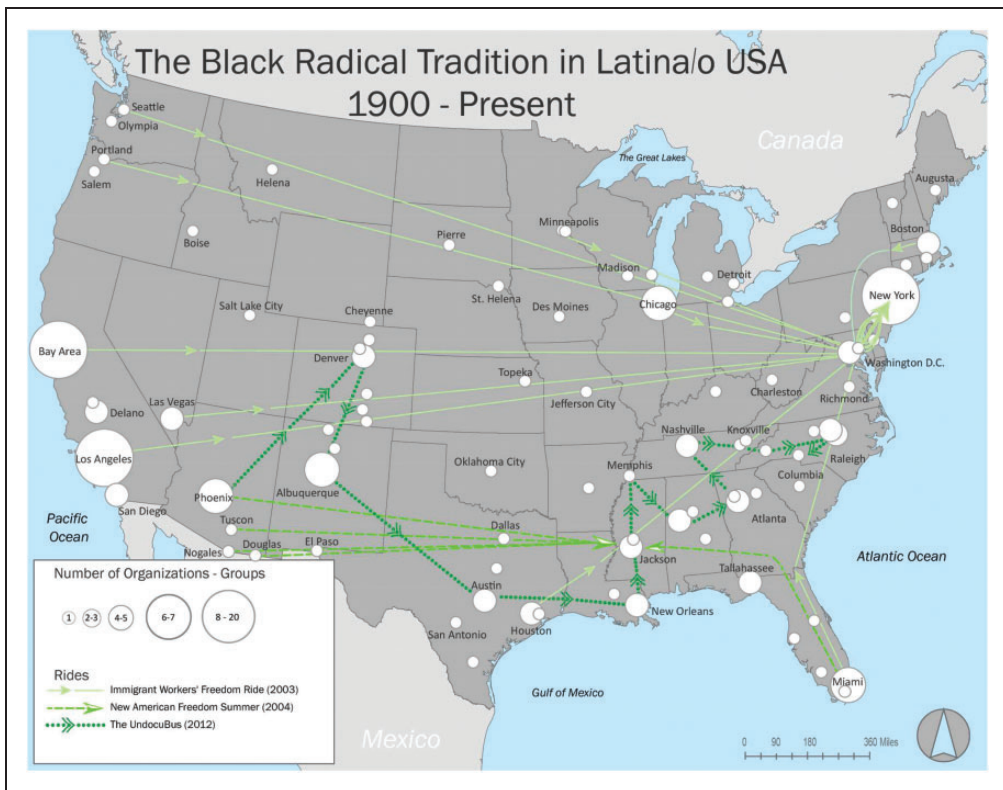

Figure 1. The distribution of Black/Brown solidarity in the Continental USA, 1900–2014.

California is simply very large in terms of territory and population and includes two major urban centers. Thus, there are many possibilities for interaction. Texas, however, is even larger, but has far less interracial solidarity. Second, and more importantly, California has a rich history of racial/ethnic mixing, which contributes to political cross-fertilization (Brilliant, 2010; Varzally, 2008; White, 1986). And finally, California has a tradition of political innovation and openness. It is not surprising that the Black Panther Party, the United Farm Workers, the Brown Berets, and the Peace and Freedom Party—all true political innovations—developed in California.

Even in urban centers, geographic settlement and segregation have sometimes limited the spatial interaction between Black and Brown activists. Los Angeles's prominence is due to the enormous size and historical depth of the region's Latinx, especially Mexican, population. Its Black community, although far smaller, has been politically dynamic for well over a century and both groups have drawn upon each other's experiences. This is not surprising given Los Angeles's high rates of ethnic mixing, especially in the urban core (Ellis et al., 2012; Johnson, 2013; Kun and Pulido, 2014). In comparison, Texas, which also has large Black and Brown populations, has a political culture that has generally resisted such political solidarity. Although there are some important exceptions, such as El Plan de San Diego (1915), which called for an independent Mexican American republic and envisioned land and autonomy for Black and native people (Johnson, 2003; Sandos, 1992), the intensity of white supremacy in Texas resulted in ethnic Mexicans often claiming whiteness as an anti-discrimination strategy—a path largely unavailable to African Americans, and one that hardly inspired solidarity (Behnken, 2011a; Dowling, 2004; Telles and Ortiz, 2008).

In the San Francisco Bay area, African Americans have dominated numerically, politically, and organizationally. A significant Latinx population has only emerged within the last 30 or 40 years. Many of the sites in this region are Black-based initiatives that have included Latinxs. One example is critical resistance (CR), based in Oakland (Figure 2). Formed in 1987, CR's mission is to abolish prisons. While deeply rooted in the BRT, CR reaches out to all persons and groups interested in fighting the prison-industrial complex, including Latinxs, as they are now the largest racial/ethnic group in Federal prisons (Hernández, 2011). CR also has chapters in Los Angeles and New Orleans.

Also worth mentioning in California is the San Joaquin Valley. Although the Valley has relatively few Black residents, is rural, and conservative, it has been influenced by its proximity to the Bay area and Los Angeles. The BRT's influence essentially 'drifted' into the Valley from Bay area organizing. Consider the Center for Race, Poverty, and the Environment (CRPE), which was launched in Delano in the 1990s (Figure 2). Although the brainchild of white EJ activist, Luke Cole, the CRPE has drawn heavily from the BRT, specifically, the Civil Rights Movement, and works primarily with Latinxs.[7] Other regions with a relatively small Black population have also been sites of political solidarity. Southwestern sites, including Phoenix and Albuquerque have featured Black, immigrant, and Latinx organizing. Albuquerque's large native-born Latinx population has produced moments of solidarity that have stretched across multiple historical eras and was especially affected by the Chicanx movement.

New York's racial geographies complicate California's Black/Brown landscape because it is home to a vast, long-standing Black population and a more diverse Latinx community (Figure 3). Although Mexicans are becoming the largest Latinx group in New York, it is historically Puerto Ricans, and to a lesser extent, Dominicans, which comprise Nueva York's Latinx geographies. Puerto Ricans complicate any effort to neatly categorize and contain Black and Latinx racial identities. On the one hand, one could argue they *are* part of the African diaspora, but on the other, significant portions of the population are invested in
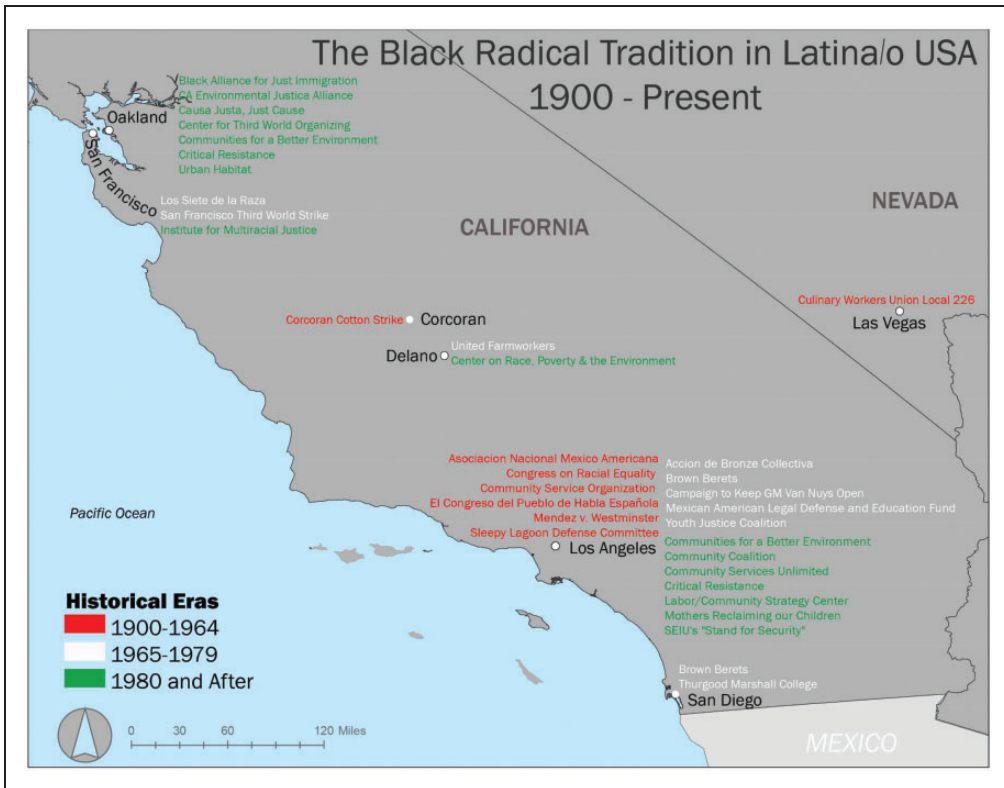
Figure 2. Points of Brown/Black solidarity in the far west by historical era, 1900–2014.

whiteness. These divisions have manifested in social protests, such as a school boycott in the early 1960s during which Puerto Ricans and African Americans organized themselves into two distinct groups (Fusté, 2014; Lee and Diaz, 2007). Likewise, the Young Lords, a militant Puerto Rican formation which patterned itself after the Black Panther Party, suggests that Puerto Rican activists have historically positioned themselves as separate from a distinct African American identity. Puerto Ricans also identify as a colonized people, an identity that is clearly implicated in the power relations of race but not always articulated in racial terms. Consequently, the performance of Puerto Rican political identity as part of the Latinx diaspora has often precluded a notion of Blackness that might serve to connect them with African Americans. However, New York is also home to such initiatives as the AfroLatin@ Forum, which seeks to redefine both Blackness and Latinidad by connecting them.[8]

The prominence of Miami is largely attributable to one organization, the Dream Defenders, young adults who challenge the criminalization of youth of color. Although Miami has African Americans, Latinxs, and Black Latinxs, it is not a city of great interracial solidarity. Of all Latinx groups, Cubans are the most likely to identify as white and the least likely to identify as Black. Research suggests that white-identified Latinxs are less apt to engage in social justice and interracial solidarity (Pulido and Pastor, 2013). In addition, many of the other local Latinxs, originating from across Latin America, tend to be wealthy and have exhibited limited interest in social justice activism and hence little connection to the BRT. However, Miami may be changing as more working-class Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans bring a different class politics to the region. Indeed, the
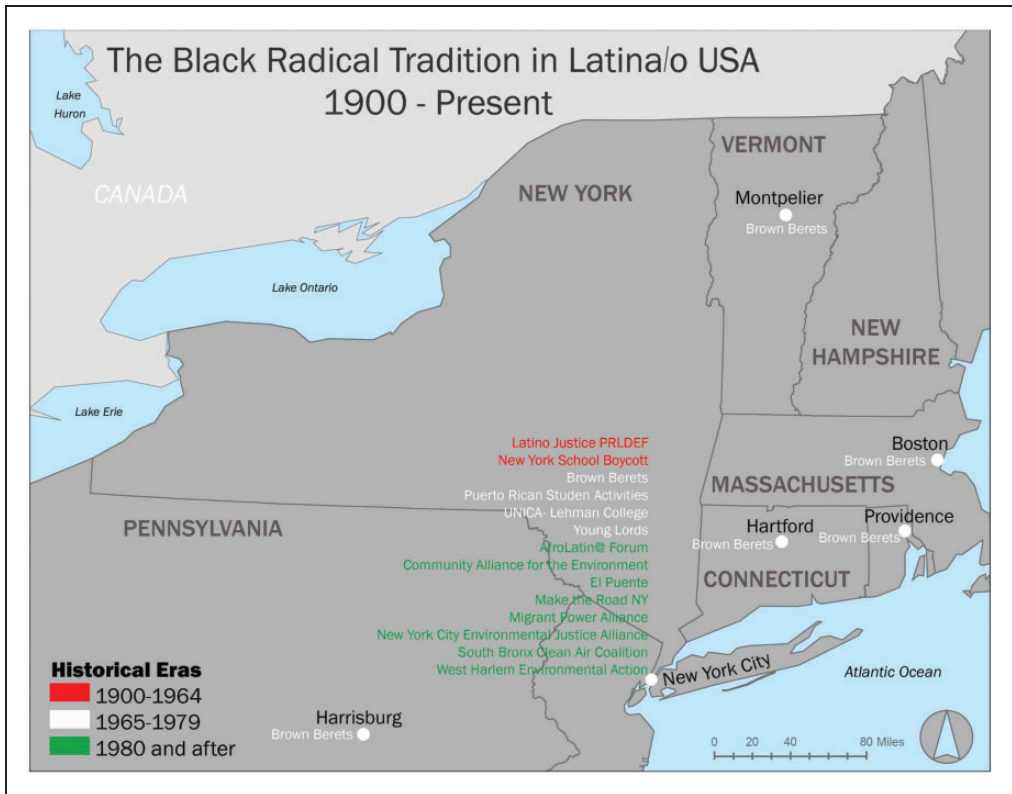
Figure 3. Points of Brown/Black solidarity in the northeast by historical era, 1900–2014.

Miami Workers Center, which focuses on social and economic justice for Black and Brown communities, may be indicative of the future.

The last big city with significant levels of interracial solidarity is Chicago. Chicago is unique in that it has one of the most textured landscapes of interracial solidarity, reflecting its unique demographics and history. There are instances of Black solidarity with Chicanxs and with Puerto Ricans from the late sixties, as well as contemporary immigrant rights struggles (De Genova and Ramos-Zayas, 2003). We also include Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition (1984), because although based in electoral politics, it went far beyond the electoral arena.

There are also false-positives—cities that appear to have significant political solidarity, but do not. Washington D.C. is prominent on the map (Figure 1), but most of these events are simply people converging on the capital and do not represent local solidarity. For instance, the Poor People's Campaign (1968), an extension of the Civil Rights Movement, entailed thousands meeting in D.C. Black organizers reached out to both Puerto Rican and Mexican leaders (Mantler, 2013). In the 21st century, there have also been immigrant rights and labor caravans whose destination was D.C.

Mapping the space-time continuum of political convergence

While geography is essential to understanding Brown/Black solidarity, so too is history. Neither Latinx nor Black political activity can be understood outside of its larger political

context. We have tried to impose a space-time order on our mapping project by categorizing our convergence organizing into three historical eras (1900–1965, 1965–1979, and 1980–2013) which can be seen in Figures 2 and 3. Our first period (1900–1965) is perhaps the most unwieldy, as it spans 65 years and includes major events like the Mexican Revolution, the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War, and the early Civil Rights Movement. In this first era, California, once again, particularly Los Angeles, stands out as a major site for political solidarity (Figure 2). Johnson (2008) has traced Brown/Black solidarity in Los Angeles to the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee (1942), in which Charlotta Bass, an African American leader, worked with a multiracial group to defend 17 Mexican American youth imprisoned for murder, in a case of wartime racial hysteria. Others have produced evidence to suggest that there was Mexican support for the abolition of slavery in Los Angeles dating to the 1850s (Benavides, 2006; Hayes-Bautista, 2012). Johnson (2008) suggests that the activism of Luisa Moreno and Charlotta Bass provided the model for Los Angeles's subsequent cross-racial politics. The Community Service Organization (CSO) is another example. Established in 1947 by Fred Ross, it was rooted primarily in Mexican communities, but became a multiracial organization by including African Americans and Jews. Both the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Civil Rights Congress followed a similar pattern but from the opposite direction: they were rooted in the Black community but became multiracial. Such organizations addressed the problems of poor and minoritized people and eschewed narrow nationalist or racial politics. Nonetheless, explicitly leftist and nationalist organizations, like the Asociación Nacional México-Americana (ANMA) also forged relationships with African Americans (Pulido, 2016), as seen in Figure 4. Equally important to note is the paucity of political solidarity outside the southwest during this era, reflecting the historical distribution of the Mexican-origin population.

The second historical era (1965–1980) is clustered around the civil rights movement (CRM) and its aftermath. The CRM enabled the movement of many groups, leading Frances Fox Piven (2008) to call it the "mother" movement. Examples from this era
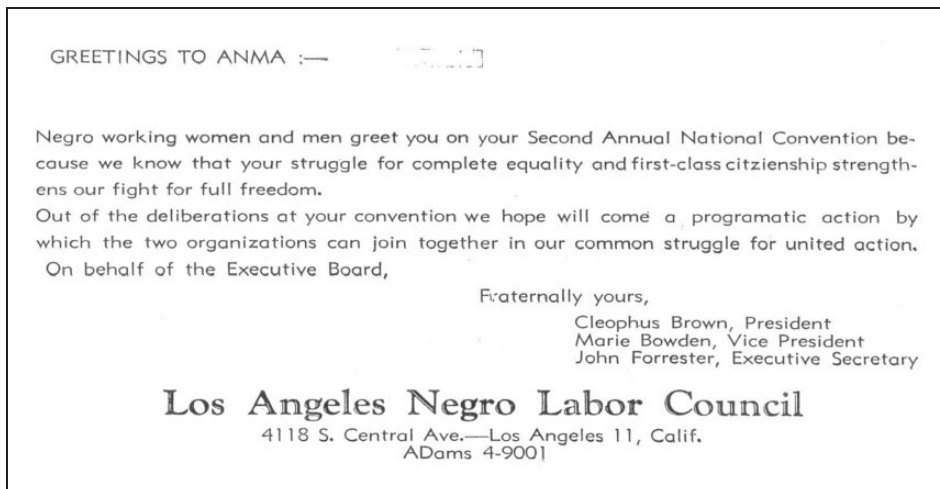

GREETINGS TO ANMA :—

Negro working women and men greet you on your Second Annual National Convention because we know that your struggle for complete equality and first-class citzenship strengthens our fight for full freedom.

Out of the deliberations at your convention we hope will come a programatic action by which the two organizations can join together in our common struggle for united action.

On behalf of the Executive Board,

Fraternally yours,

Cleophus Brown, President
Marie Bowden, Vice President
John Forrester, Executive Secretary

Los Angeles Negro Labor Council

4118 S. Central Ave.—Los Angeles 11, Calif.
ADams 4-9001

Figure 4. Message of solidarity from the Los Angeles Negro Labor Council to Asociación Nacional México-Americana, 1952.[9]

(Source: Program of Segunda Convención Nacional, July 1952. Nathalie Gross Collection, 1948–1975, Archive #819, Mexican American Box 1, Folder Mexican American – Civil Rights – ANMA. El Paso Public Library).

include the previously mentioned Poor People's Campaign (1968) (Mantler, 2013), African American support for Los Siete de la Raza (Puerto Rican political prisoners) (Ferreira, 2003), and a limited set of labor connections, as seen in the Farm Labor Organizing Committee (FLOC) (Barger and Reza, 1994). The most widespread instance of political solidarity featured in Figure 1 stems from this era, the Brown Berets, who were inspired by the Black Panther Party (BPP). We identified over 30 Brown Beret chapters. Generally speaking, wherever a small circle appears in a remote location on the map—it is the Brown Berets. Indeed, if it was not for the Brown Berets, the map would look much different, with a far greater concentration in major urban areas. Also of note in this era is the previously mentioned Young Lords, who were found in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia (Morales, 1998; Whales, 1998). Finally, there are at least two civil rights organizations that emulated the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Legal Defense and Education Fund: The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund and the Mexican American Legal and Education Defense Fund, both of which received initial funding from the Ford Foundation.

The final historical era extends from 1980 to the present. The year 1980 marks the end of the long civil rights movement, and the shift towards a "post-racial era." A distinctive characteristic of this period is the breadth of organizing, as activists move beyond narrow economic and social issues. EJ is an example of this shift. Table 1 presents a partial list of EJ organizations involving both Latinxs and African Americans.[10] What our maps reveal is that contemporary Black–Brown organizing has centered on EJ. Therefore, along with the more recent focus on police violence and immigration, EJ has been an important site of convergence for social justice organizing.

Some of these EJ organizations practice polycultural (Kelley, 2003) political traditions that make it impossible to label them either Latinx or African American. Richard Moore, for example, was key in the development of both Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP) and Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ). He is a Puerto Rican who was a member of the Young Lords. After moving to Albuquerque, he co-founded SWOP, an explicitly multiracial organization focused on social, economic, and EJ. This eventually led to the development of a regional network comprised of African American, Latinx, Native, and Asian American organizations. Moore's political

Table 1. List of environmental justice organizations by state that include Latinxs and African Americans (1980–present).

Arizona	Concerned Residents of South Phoenix (CRSP)
California	California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)
	Center for Race, Poverty & Environment (CRPE)
	Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)
	Labor/Community Strategy Center (LCSC)
	Urban Habitat
New Mexico	Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP)
	Southwest Network for Economic and Environmental Justice (SNEEJ)
New York	Community Alliance for the Environment (CAFE)
	El Puente
	South Bronx Clean Air Coalition (SBCAC)
	West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT)
Texas	People Organized in Defense of Earth and its Resources (PODER)

genealogy illustrates how multiple histories and traditions have been woven together in the creation of new political formations.

In addition to EJ, one of the most important developments of this era is the blossoming of immigrant rights organizations in the southeastern US (Figure 1). This solidarity is a recent and direct response to the growing immigrant presence and its concomitant backlash (Winders, 2007). Some older organizations, such as the Highlander Center in Tennessee, have retooled to address Black/Brown relations. More often, however, new formations have emerged, such as the Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance and the Cobb Immigration Alliance. And in still others, Latinx concerns have been folded into larger movements, as seen in North Carolina's Moral Mondays, in which all people opposed to the state's Republican agenda gather every Monday to engage in civil disobedience. And, in an entirely different kind of immigrant rights, the Black Alliance for Just Immigration in Oakland focuses on Black immigrants by expanding the traditional Latinx-centered discourse on immigrant rights (Figure 2). While most points of solidarity in the southeast center on immigration, that is not exclusively the case. In addition to the previously mentioned activism of Miami, El Kilombo Intergalactico in Durham is creating a self-organized community inspired by the radical decolonial imaginaries of the Zapatistas.

Despite the fact that both Latinxs and African Americans are overwhelmingly low-income, labor does not register significantly in any era or region. This reflects occupational segregation and the distinct ways each group experiences poverty. We can identify episodes of multiracial labor activism at least as far back as the 1930s in California, as seen in the multiracial Corcoran cotton strike, as well as labor struggles in the Imperial Valley (Kurashige, 2008; Weber, 1994). In the 1960s, the BRT was seen in the United Farm Workers (UFW). Lauren Araiza (2014) has shown how diverse Black organizations, including the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panther Party assisted the UFW. Currently, the multiracial Culinary Workers Union Local 226 in Las Vegas has been weaving together labor rights, civil rights and immigrant rights (Ortiz, 2013). In 1980s, Los Angeles the Campaign to Keep GM Van Nuys Open forged a multiracial consciousness that drew heavily on both the BRT and Chicana/o activism (Mann, 1987). In the contemporary period, when organized labor in Los Angeles has become overwhelmingly Latinx, the leadership has sought to incorporate African Americans through targeted campaigns, such as Service Employees International Union's, Stand for Security organizing drive, aimed at Black security guards. Here, a Latinx led movement created space for African Americans out of a concern with Black poverty as well as the desire to create a stronger movement (Bonacich et al., 2010). Likewise, the mostly Latinx immigrant UNITE-HERE Local 11 union led a campaign to create the Hospitality Training Academy to increase the number of Black workers in higher-paid front-of-the-house hotel occupations (*Los Angeles Hospitality Training Academy*, n.d.).

Forms of solidarity

A final way to categorize Brown/Black convergence is by the mode of political engagement. We identify four types: individual, organizational, multiracial, and "legacy" actions. The first group refers to individuals who manifest the act of political sharing—it is through such embodied politics that new political possibilities are created. Richard Moore illustrates this mode of cross-fertilization, as do Maria Varela and Betita Martinez. Both women joined SNCC because of their commitment to anti-racism. In 1968, SNCC took a pivotal turn and asked all white people to leave as the organization shifted towards Black Power. Both Varela and Martinez struggled with whether they should leave. Neither activist identified as white, but

they also knew that they were not Black. Moreover, they realized that few Black members of SNCC grasped Chicanxs' racial subjectivity. Eventually, both women left and went to northern New Mexico. Martinez edited *El Grito del Norte* (The Shout from the North) and created the Chicano Communications Center. Varela worked in community development and helped establish a clinic and Ganados del Valle, an economic development project. Although both projects were focused on Mexicana/o communities, Martinez and Varela acknowledge the centrality of SNCC and the BRT to their political development. Martinez later moved to the Bay area, where, along with Phil Hutchings, she cofounded the Institute of MultiRacial Justice. Varela continued the photography she began with SNCC and has exhibited her civil rights photographs (Araiza, 2011; Mantler, 2013; Martínez, 2002; Varela, n.d.). Given these histories, is it possible *not* to consider Varela and Martinez as part of the BRT?

The second kind of political exchange is organizational. Here, collectives made conscious decisions to support the activism of other racial/ethnic groups. In places with deep histories like Los Angeles, organizational solidarity can be traced to the early 1940s with the Popular Front, which included El Congreso del Pueblo de Habla Española (the Congress of Spanish-Speaking people). Through the Popular Front El Congreso mobilized with African Americans opposing discrimination in state relief programs (García, 1989). Of even greater significance during this era was *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947), a lawsuit filed in Orange County California opposing the educational segregation of Mexican students. Several civil rights groups, including the NAACP, supported the appeal in which the doctrine of "separate but equal" was seriously weakened. The case is usually seen as setting the stage for *Brown v. Board of Education* (Robinson and Robinson, 2003; Strum, 2010). These examples demand that we recognize the multiracial nature of abolitionist alliances and the degree to which they stretch theories of organizing based on racial-identities.

But easily the most famous examples of organizational solidarity are the previously noted relationships between the Black Panther Party, the Young Lords, and the Brown Berets.[11] The Brown Berets and the Young Lords, with their emphasis on self-defense, were seen as parallel organizations within the Chicanx and Puerto Rican communities, respectively. In Chicago, the relationship between the Panthers and Young Lords went even further resulting in a new organization that included poor whites: The Rainbow Coalition.[12]

The third type of solidarity is the development of self-consciously multiracial organizations. While these extend back to the 1950s and 1960s, as illustrated by the CSO and CORE in Los Angeles, they burgeoned in the 1980s and into the present. These organizations are a generation or two removed from the civil rights era and the various Power movements and should be seen as their descendants. Often, members of monoracial organizations subsequently built multiracial formations. One example is the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO) based in Oakland. CTWO was established in 1980 by Gary Delgado and Hulbert James to address problems of race and class with a particular focus on low-income communities of color. Delgado came out of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), a predominantly Black group. Similar organizations that also emerged in the 1980s, in addition to the entire EJ movement, include the previously mentioned Labor/Community Strategy Center, Community Coalition, and Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE) (see Figure 2). This later round was influenced by Los Angeles's changing demographics.

The final category of shared activism that can be discerned is Latinx activists drawing directly on the legacy of the Black civil rights movement. Over the last decade or two, this can be seen primarily among immigrant rights activists, especially in the south. Activists have drawn on the language, geography, tactics, and memories of the Black civil rights movement as resources in their struggle. For example, in Georgia, white and Latinx

activists created Freedom University to serve undocumented students who are barred from attending the University of Georgia (Figure 1). Likewise, the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride, the New American Freedom Summer, and the Undocubus, all of which can be seen in Figure 1, draw on the legacy of the Black Civil Rights movement in an overt fashion. While many African American are happy to share this heritage, some have opposed it, seeing it as exploitive and resenting the implication that the Black civil rights struggle is complete, when much remains to be done. These tensions signal the power of the BRT, the degree to which it resonates with all oppressed people, and the many ways in which it has and will continue to shape the political and racial landscape of the US.

Conclusion

Our mapping of multiracial political solidarity shows that EJ can serve as a space of convergence for activists and scholars who want to think about the intersections among UPE, decolonial border thinking, and racial capitalism. The maps document that the activist landscape is far more complicated than we typically imagine and that while the racial categories we (re)produce on a daily basis are useful tools in navigating life, they are limited and do not do justice to the complexities of our world. Unpacking these complex geneaologies helps us understand the past, but can also assist us in developing the skills we need to mobilize in the present.

What we need are new tools to help us craft radical imaginaries. Social movements are key to this reimagining because they can serve as spaces of convergence and epistemic communities. For instance, Eyerman and Jamison (1991: 55) define a social movement as a "cognitive territory, a new conceptual space that is filled by a dynamic interaction between different groups and organizations." They go on to note the dialectical relationship between concrete struggle and theory when they write that "It is through tensions between different organizations over defining and acting in that conceptual space that the (temporary) identity of a social movement is formed." We place this definition into conversation with Stuart Hall, who argues for a radical epistemological tradition based on the relationship between the concrete historical specificity of the moment and the abstract theoretical practice that allow us to move beyond the limits of the real in order to imagine the possible. The concrete political struggles of the EJ movement, when combined with critical thinking about race, capital, and nature can contribute to the radical epistemological traditions we have discussed.

Finally, we have argued for a reimagined framework for EJ scholarship that reclaims the radical epistemic traditions outlined by early social movement activists. This is necessary because rights-based strategies that seek recognition and redress from the liberal state only validate the underlying injustice of racial capitalism and colonialism. Such approaches may be strategic and pragmatic politics, but they do not represent the aspirational desires of the abolitionist and decolonial traditions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

Notes

1. On the differing ways that geographers approach race, see Jamie Winders and Richard Schein (2014).
2. Here is the quote in its entirety. ''The discovery of gold and silver in the Americas, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production...Through such varied forms of violent expropriation, capitalism was born, 'dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (Marx, 1867: 760). Blaut (1976: 1) made a similar point when he wrote that, 'the plunder of the New World after 1492' resulted in 'the hegemony of... European capitalism'.''
3. On the relations between African Americans and Latinxs more generally, see (Behnken, 2011a, 2011b; Foley, 2010; McClain, 2006; Mindiola Jr. et al., 2002; Rochmes and Griffin, 2006; Telles et al., 2011; Vaca, 2004)
4. For example, in 1976, *Aztlan* published a special thematic issue entitled, ''Chicanos in the Midwest'' 7(2).
5. We extend her term to include all ethnic Mexicans and working-class Latinxs in the US.
6. One could argue that both are *potentially* radical, but because we lack the space to make those demarcations, we forgo the entire category.
7. This raises the larger question of the role of whites in the BRT. I believe that whites can draw upon the BRT and actively reproduce it.
8. www.afrolatinoforum.org (accessed 4 July 2014). (*Afrolatin@ Forum*, n.d.).
9. (Source: Program of Segunda Convención Nacional, July 1952. Nathalie Gross Collection, 1948–1975, Archive #819, Mexican American Box 1, Folder Mexican American – Civil Rights – ANMA. El Paso Public Library).
10. Most of these organizations are actually multiracial.
11. The BPP also inspired the American Indian Movement (AIM) and the Chinese American Red Guard.
12. There were actually two distinct Rainbow Coalitions in Chicago. The first one emerged in the late 1960s, and the second one in 1984 during the Jackson campaign. There was a third Rainbow Coalition in Houston, which was unrelated.

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