

Introduction

Why Latinx Environmentalisms?

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When Priscilla Solis Ybarra asked the poet, playwright, and feminist theorist Cherríe Moraga, “Do you personally identify as an environmentalist?” Moraga responded definitively, “I wouldn’t say that.” Similarly, Lucha Corpi told Gabriela Nuñez, “I don’t identify myself as an environmentalist.” It is a repeated refrain throughout the interviews in this volume: creative writers discussed the environmental themes in their work while disidentifying with the term *environmentalist*. Likewise, many of the scholars we approached about this project initially expressed surprise, and sometimes even distaste, at being hailed as writing about environmental issues. Given this hesitation, why bother to make such a label explicit? And, what, specifically, makes this work “environmental”? Moreover, how should we interpret the hesitancy of some contributors to see their work as environmental, while others openly embrace it?

Environmentalism in the United States is most often associated with a middle- to upper-class white demographic, working on behalf of nonhuman nature for the preservation of wilderness or the conservation of species. As Chicana studies scholar Randy Ontiveros observes, “Conventional wisdom often sees environmentalism as a ‘white thing’ comprised of boutique shopping, organic cooking, wilderness escapes, and other racially coded activities. It even gets represented occasionally as a twenty-first century update to the colonial nineteenth-century ‘white man’s burden.’” Although Ontiveros is quick to point out that “the reality of environmentalism . . . is considerably more complex” (87), his critique of the cultural and demographic whiteness

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of mainstream environmental movements is still largely correct. As environmental justice scholar Dorceta E. Taylor documented in 2014 for Green 2.0, “despite increasing racial diversity in the United States, the racial composition of environmental organizations and agencies has not broken the 12 percent to 16 percent ‘green ceiling’ that has been in place for decades.” This remains the case despite widespread polling data attesting to stronger levels of support for environmental initiatives among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, Latinxs, and African Americans than among white populations.¹ Not only are mainstream environmentalism’s practices and disciplines “racially coded” but, as the disavowal of Moraga and Corpi attest, its investment in whiteness, class distinction, and even national belonging serve to occlude environmental values that exist outside of the mainstream.²

Before the emergence of the environmental justice movement in the 1980s, which worked to protect low-income communities and communities of color from enduring a disproportionate burden of environmental destruction,³ the whiteness of mainstream environmentalism often obscured environmental racism and the connections between social and environmental health. This initial environmental justice activism and scholarship, which emerged from a civil rights framework, called for equal access to environmental benefits and equal distribution of environmental ills. It also challenged the wilderness focus of mainstream environmental organizations to redefine the environment as “where we live, work, and play” (Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*; Gottlieb; Di Chiro).

Indigenous activists and indigenous studies scholars expanded this initial civil rights framework to identify colonialism’s role in causing and perpetuating environmental injustice and to argue for sovereignty’s place within environmental justice movements. This sovereignty framework is visible in documents like the Principles of Environmental Justice authored by participants in the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (1991) and continues in more recent scholarship such as Traci Brynne Voyles’s *Wastelanding* (2015) and the special issue in *Environment and Society* on “Indigenous Resurgence, Decolonization, and Movements for Environmental Justice” (2018), edited by Jaskiran Dhillon, as well as in political activism like that of water protectors at Standing Rock. Latinx activists and scholars, most notably Devon Peña and Laura Pulido, also expanded the environmental justice frame to include the farmworkers movement, especially its campaign against pesticides, and land-based movements of the Southwest.

Building on insights of the environmental justice movement and environmental justice scholarship, academics in fields such as history, geography, literature, and cultural studies including Joni Adamson, Bruce Braun, Denis Cosgrove, William Cronon, Richard Grove, Donna Haraway, Jake Kosek, Carolyn Merchant, Mary E. Mendoza, and Mark Spence (as only a few examples) have firmly articulated mainstream environmentalism as a racial

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project. Postcolonial ecocritic Rob Nixon, for example, observes that the mainstream environmental movement in the United States has placed undue emphasis on “wilderness preservation, on wielding the Endangered Species Act against developers, and on saving old-growth forests” (252), leading some antiracist and anticolonial thinkers to dismiss “environmentalism as either irrelevant or complicit in imperialism” (253). At the very least, the whiteness of mainstream environmentalism fails to account for the diverse environmental ethics at work in communities of color, including Latinx cultures.

Thus, this volume seeks to account, in part, for the variety of ways in which Latinx cultures are often (although certainly not always) environmental but hardly ever identify as environmentalist. Indeed, we argue that Latinx cultures redefine and broaden what counts as environmentalism, even as they sometimes reject the term entirely. Part of this redefinition concerns how Latinx cultures make evident the racism inherent in some of the assumptions of environmentalism through a variety of forms of rejection, acceptance, or revision of the term itself. Perhaps most importantly, Latinx cultures hold the potential to make visible key aspects of the exploitation of the earth (introduced and exacerbated by colonization and capital) that figure into the historical marginalization of Latinx communities. This insight emerges both from the variety of cultural values that circulate in different Latinx communities, including indigenous and Afro-Latinx communities, and from the lived experience of being exploited alongside the land through the processes of colonization and present-day coloniality and ongoing neoliberal abstraction. Latinx literatures and cultural productions often offer deep and significant insights about environmental issues, environmental ethics, and the intertwining of environmental ills with the social ills of racism, capitalism, and colonialism. Our decision to use the term *environmentalisms* here, even with authors who may not identify in this way, represents a political choice to redress the vacuum of attention given to Latinx environmental thought, particularly in literature and cultural productions. We argue that this vacuum emerges from the colonialist and white supremacist ideologies embedded in the formulation of mainstream environmentalism.

We foreground the work of literary and cultural studies scholars and creative writers, as opposed to work in the social sciences or politics, as central to the project of *Latinx Environmentalisms*. Although literary critics have been writing about the environmental aspects of Latinx literature for at least twenty years, this is the first such collection of essays on Latinx environmentalisms in literary and cultural productions.⁴ As we contend throughout this volume, literary and cultural production are crucial to the processes through which social and environmental inequality are constructed. Social inequalities and the expendability of particular populations of people, plants, animals, and ecosystems are produced in part through narratives that either erase their existence or justify their disposal. As Julie Avril Minich argues in

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this volume, as opposed to other methodologies, “cultural critique offers an account of the unjust social relations that shape policy and of the narrative processes that naturalize and reify systemic injustice.” Similarly, as many ecocritics ask, to what extent is narrative itself caught up in environmental degradation? Textual and visual analyses are key strategies for contesting the epistemological processes of colonialism and racial capitalism and the policies they underwrite. Moreover, the literary, cinematic, and visual arts provide essential sites for envisioning radical alterities, as we take up in the third section of this volume, “The Decolonial: Alternative Kinships and Epistemologies of Futurity.” Latinx literary and cultural environmentalisms in particular offer new ways for scholars, students, and activists to apprehend the world as it is and envision (and thus work toward) the world as it might be.

Critical Approaches to the Environment within Latinx Studies

Social, political, and scholarly interventions generally understood to be “environmental” prioritize healing a rupture between humans and nature. We trace the genealogy of this rupture to the rise of Western modernity and the colonial encounter, instead of the dominant environmental historiography, which roots the rupture in Enlightenment dualistic thinking and the capitalist forms of production that followed. That is, environmental studies often invokes the Cartesian split between mind and body as a key moment that enabled the objectification of nature and eventual abuse of the environment.⁵ However, environmental studies rarely accompanies this critique of the Cartesian split with a similar assessment of the colonial encounter. This is where considering Latinx cultures alongside environmentalism becomes uniquely generative, particularly in relation to developing a decolonial environmental approach to Latinx cultural productions.

Part of our goal in this volume is to reevaluate environmental ideas through the lens of Latinx studies, particularly the focus on critical race theory that guides much of the scholarship in this field. Scholars such as Juan Flores, Marta Caminero-Santangelo, and Rosaura Sánchez and Beatrice Pita have noted that a focus on processes of race and racialization is a key theoretical concern in Latinx studies. Similarly, scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano have argued that the projects of Western humanism cannot be understood as separable from the advent of racism and colonialism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. When considered from these perspectives, it is important to note that the insufficient attention environmental studies pays to processes of race and racialization, the colonial encounter, and sexualization and heteronormativity is both a manifestation of Western Enlightenment rationality and a result of Eurocentric forms of knowledge. In

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short, we contend that a fundamental contribution of this volume is as a corrective to forms of knowledge that do not take sufficient account of how racism, colonialism, capitalist exploitation, patriarchy, heteronormativity, anthropocentrism, and environmental degradation emerge from similar logics of domination and the Western will to know. Following the lead of Franz Fanon and Edward Said, whose ideas are considered more decolonial than environmental, we agree that given, as Said writes, “empire is an act of geographical violence,” (225) discussions about the environment ought to engage colonialism, or they risk extending colonialism by ignoring this ongoing legacy. Inversely, decolonial efforts must address the environment, and failing to do so simply because of the environmental movement’s prevailing investment in whiteness risks perpetuating the notion that land, geography, and spatial sovereignty are separate from ecosystemic conditions and their dynamic (as opposed to deterministic or anachronistic) relationship to cultural identities.

Thus, this volume is not strictly an environmental justice project, as it takes seriously these broader historical, geographical, epistemological, and biopolitical schisms between environment-as-geography (echoing Said) and “justice.” That is, environmental justice as a framework does not capture the myriad forms of Latinx environmental expression and activism and has thus far failed to fully engage the ways that colonization as a form of geographical violence perhaps constitutes, as some scholars such as Voyles, Kyle Whyte, and Dhillon argue, the first environmental injustice: the colonial project itself.⁶ It is therefore helpful to look to the decolonial and to critical geography to expand beyond the analyses delimited by any framework described as centering the “environment.” In other words, land sovereignty can be an environmental justice issue, but it is also fruitful to understand it as geographical (i.e., relating to space) or as colonial. And if we take Said seriously, these two concepts cannot be separated.

Therefore, while environmental justice has been crucial for bringing questions of race and environmental inequality into the scholarly conversation, we hope to extend the frameworks from which these issues can be approached. Critical race studies scholarship by thinkers such as Michelle Alexander, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Mel Y. Chen, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Davis, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Cheryl Harris, Lisa Lowe, George Lipsitz, Charles Mills, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Natalia Molina, Laura Pulido, David Roediger, and others have underscored the structural relationship between racism, capitalism, and social inequality. This body of scholarship also credits the innovative ways people of color resist their marginalization, including by mobilizing forms of power that leverage environmental ideas to consolidate existing social relations, as the opening story about our interviewees suggests. Although many of the essays included in this volume invoke environmental justice, we note the ways much of this work also extends conversations between Latinx studies and environmental studies by crediting authors and artists for the innovations they bring to environ-

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mental thinking, precisely through their intertwining of resistance to social, political, and environmental concerns. For these authors and artists, it is simply impossible to separate these struggles. They shift the terrain on which environmentalism takes place, emphasizing instead how racism, colonialism, and environmental racism are manifestations of a larger capitalist logic of power—what Quijano calls the “coloniality of power.”

Latinx cultures often resist participating in the ruptures caused by the Cartesian split between human and nature, and Latinx cultural productions offer frequent and rich environmental representations.⁷ It is, in fact, arguable that Latinx cultural productions evidence engagements with environmental ideas that precede the modern environmental movement (popularly dating to Rachel Carson’s publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962). Authors such as Doña María Amparo Ruiz de Burton, Jovita González, Fabiola Cabeza de Baca, Josefina Niggli, and José Antonio Villarreal evidence keen environmental awareness of issues like land use, farmworker justice, culture and geography, and conservation that anticipates many of the concerns of the contemporary environmental movement. In such texts, we suggest, we can identify a tradition of decolonial environmental thought in Latinx cultural productions—thought that serves as precursors to the rich varieties of Latinx decolonial environmentalisms evident in the more contemporary (post-1950s) cultural productions explored in this collection.

Our use of such a term, *Latinx decolonial environmentalisms*, raises certain questions as to how we are using the concept of “the decolonial.” For this volume, we define “the decolonial” as both an epistemological and a material project that emerges in large part from Latin American thought. Scholars such as Mignolo and Quijano have described the projects of modernity, coloniality, and racism as inextricable from one another as the “colonial matrix of power.” In particular, Mignolo has debunked Western epistemology as a normative logic from which all knowledge might emerge. He instead demonstrates how this epistemological project has served as an ideological cover for the very material projects of capitalism, racism, and colonialism. The essays in this volume expand on these lines of reasoning by making visible the contributions of previously marginalized Latinx epistemologies to environmental thought. As author Helena María Viramontes explains in an interview for this volume, “when I refer to decolonizing the imagination, I begin with us—the colonized. We who have to question our assumptions and realities to break our chains of colonization and to decolonize ourselves into another form of thinking about who and what we are.” In centering the decolonial, this collection supports a claim Paula Moya makes in Chapter 14: “Not merely challenging current relations of power and the logics that structure them, decolonial thinkers seek to subvert a colonial way of being by setting aside inherited assumptions to envision new social, political, and environmental possibilities.”

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We recognize that our use of the decolonial in a Latinx settler-colonial context may raise some red flags among indigenous studies scholars. This is because a certain incommensurability exists between the ways that indigenous studies scholars approach the decolonial, such as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's compelling argument against the use of the decolonial as metaphor, and the decolonial projects of Latin American studies, the framework from which the editors and the contributors of this volume most often draw. However, we find the intersections of these two approaches to the decolonial to be generative, especially from the unique perspective of Latinx creativities. Indeed, we might note that both indigenous studies scholars and decolonial Latin American studies thinkers caution against totalizing narratives, the erasure of incommensurabilities (Tuck and Yang 17, 28), and the creation of "new abstract universals" in decolonial thought (Mignolo and Walsh 1). Moreover, both conversations recognize the interconnections between the epistemological, ontological, and material workings of colonialism, especially the centrality of the process through which indigenous relationships to lands suffer a process of ongoing erasure by colonialist claims to land as property.

We note, as well, the complexities of Latinx engagement with Tuck and Yang's definitions of the decolonial given Latinx subject positions. Latinxs share an uneasy relationship with settler colonialism as both perpetrators of colonial violence and objects of settler-colonial dispossession. It is without question that Spanish conquistadors and mestizos were part of the force that appropriated indigenous lands during the conquest of the Americas, as well as participants in other colonial and neocolonial projects from the Civil War to the ongoing imperial violence of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. Yet it is also true that, as the Chicano Movement and ongoing social movement groups dedicated to decolonizing the island of Puerto Rico attest, Latinxs have experienced the theft of lands by settlers. As a group that also claims historical ties to indigenous communities from what is now the United States and other parts of the Americas, Latinxs share complicated relationships with the decolonial that can neither be encapsulated by indigeneity nor be easily dismissed. Additionally, Latinx identities include formerly enslaved African populations, adding another dimension to settler-colonial dynamics.

Consequently, the essays in this volume explore the complex relationship between Latinx identities and lived experiences and the sometimes conflicting ways Latinxs seek to engage, disrupt, and amend decolonial forms of environmentalism. For example, the resistance to the neoliberal production of space by Latinx authors and artists sits in uneasy relation to settler-colonial thought as Latinx land reclamation projects always simultaneously serve and disturb settler-colonial logics. A "Latinx environmental" focus reveals new possibilities from the tensions within decolonial approaches. Latinxs inherit genealogies of both colonizer and colonized, so the Latinx experience positions this community to develop what Chela Sandoval calls a "differential

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consciousness,” a capacity to enter into a “‘third meaning,’ which is that which always haunts any other two meanings in binary opposition” (Sandoval 141). In this volume, we argue that the discourse surrounding environmental issues and the material realities that shape the human relation to the earth offer an especially unique and powerful opportunity to show the Latinx differential consciousness in action. We remain committed to the possibilities for interethnic, antiracist coalitions as a form of decolonial environmentalist practice. Part of what we find compelling about the essays and interviews included in this volume are the ways decolonial thought reveals that antiracism and critical environmentalism are not necessarily at odds. As the essays we include indicate, we take seriously the contribution of cultural analysis and production to the decolonial, even as we take seriously the idea that such work is always partial and incomplete if not accompanied by material changes and may even reinforce “settler moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang 3).

Race and Ethnicity in the Environmental Humanities

Like mainstream environmentalism broadly, subfields within the environmental humanities (e.g., ecocriticism, environmental history, environmental anthropology) have grappled with legacies of exclusion and racialization. We can look to the development of ecocriticism as a particular example, but similar dynamics have occurred in the other relevant subfields. Early literature-and-environment studies, or what Lawrence Buell calls “first wave” ecocriticism, privileged descriptions of the pastoral wilderness retreat in nature writing, which reflected the political aims of the early environmental movement: to preserve pristine nature for aesthetic appreciation and transcendence. Like environmentalism, ecocriticism has largely ignored myriad environmental identities that did not fit into this narrow politics. “Waves” of ecocriticism since its inception have taken race much more seriously, drawing on ethnic studies, postcolonial studies, environmental justice, and critical race theory to interrogate environmentalism’s “possessive investment in whiteness,” to use Lipsitz’s concept. At a minimum, these more recent waves bring more voices to the environmental table by showing how many communities appreciate nature and articulate traditional environmentalist values.

However, simply including nondominant writers who express traditional environmental values ignores how those traditional environmental values rest on what Denis Cosgrove calls “hidden attachments” (36) to white supremacy and colonialism. That is, if environmental values are inherently based on an ideology of exclusion that preserves beautiful landscapes for certain communities deemed to be desirable citizens, then what does it mean when the abject, subaltern, or colonized performs those traditional environmental forms? Put another way, does including more voices, simply because they reference existing environmental ideology, undermine the radical work

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these authors do outside of environmentalism, such as negotiating sovereignty, articulating an “active subjectivity,” or decolonizing cultural production? In *Writing the Goodlife*, Priscilla Solis Ybarra goes as far as to say that the word *environment* itself reinforces the separation between humans and nature, even as, ironically, “environmentalism struggles to reunite humans with our natural environment,” and that many writers ignored by the ecocritical canon are disregarded precisely because they do not see their work as primarily about the politics of preserving nature because “they never needed to become environmentalists in the first place” (28). As Ybarra asks, does the word *environment* remain relevant when different communities “may understand nature in a different way as to merit a different term” (25)? Even calling non-Western, nondominant works “environmental” holds the potential to ignore the intersections of social justice, identity, national belonging, and cultural tradition that shape different communities’ environmentalisms.

While an analysis of the critical turns or “waves” ecocriticism has undergone is one useful way to understand how the field has incorporated questions of race, a more expansive genealogy might argue that there are three ways that ecocriticism has dealt with race, all of which radically challenge what counts as ecocriticism. One approach distinguishes mainstream environmental works and ecocriticism from environmental justice activism and scholarship. Where the former privileges wilderness, for example, the latter privileges places where people “live, work, play, and pray.” Some of the key scholars and texts in early environmental justice ecocriticism are Julie Sze, Joni Adamson, Giovanna Di Chiro, Mei Mei Evans, Rachel Stein, Noël Sturgeon, T. V. Reed, and the edited collections *The Environmental Justice Reader* and *New Perspectives on Environmental Justice: Gender, Sexuality, and Activism*. This scholarship identified environmental justice themes in literature and sought to understand how literary criticism could further the aims of the environmental justice social movement. As Sze argues, literature freed representations of environmental injustice from the modes of documentary and statistics. Through experimental forms and figurative language, Sze shows that literature may theorize and communicate the experiences of environmental injustices in ways that social science methodologies typically do not. Building on these earlier scholars, Rob Nixon argues that literature and cultural production may be able to address the representational challenges of what he terms “slow violence,” or violence that is hard to apprehend because it often results from the exponential magnification of multiple harms, or because its scale in time and space is either too large or too small for human forms of knowing. The binary between mainstream environmental works and environmental justice is useful not only in that it includes many previously underrepresented voices in an environmental framework but also for these new frameworks and themes it brings to environmental inquiry.

A second approach centers the epistemological moorings of critical race theory in environmental literary analysis and is exemplified in the works of

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Giovanna Di Chiro, Ian Finseth, Janet Fiskio, John Gamber, Robert Hayashi, Hsuan L. Hsu, Jennifer James, Jeffrey Myers, Paul Outka, Shazia Rahman, Sarah Jaquette Ray, Karen Salt, Noël Sturgeon, Julie Sze, David J. Vázquez, and Sarah D. Wald, to mention only a few. These scholars critique ecocriticism from the perspective of critical race studies, untangling the field's investments in racial hierarchy and focusing on cultural productions that sometimes elude obvious environmental categories. Further, ecocriticism and the environmental humanities have productively engaged disability studies (Chen; Kafer; Ray and Sibara), queer theory (Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson; Seymour), animal studies (Huggan and Tiffin; Gaard; Haraway; Wolfe), and new materialism (Alaimo; Iovino and Oppermann). Although this list of critical works is far from exhaustive, we do want to note that ecocriticism and the environmental humanities have connected with these latter areas in ways that contribute meaningfully to Latinx literary analysis, as this volume highlights.

The social justice turn in ecocriticism and the environmental humanities and the environmental justice turn in critical race theory set the stage for this project. The work herein suggests that environmental justice is not the only useful tool resulting from the synergy between critical race theory and environmental thought, even as environmental justice has proved to be essential to bridging social justice and the environment and to challenging the race and class privilege within the environmental movement, as Phaedra Pezzullo and Ronald Sandler (*Environmental Justice and Environmentalism*) and David Schlosberg (*Environmental Justice and the New Pluralism*) have argued. But the engagement of critical race theory and the social justice direction of environmental studies opens possibilities for a range of new forms of theorizing and cultural production. This volume seeks to chart some of that terrain by advancing a third approach, which might be understood as a recovery model, that neither adds more voices to the existing environmental table without questioning the very terms of that category nor assigns all nonwhite environmental concerns to environmental justice. This recovery mode demonstrates the myriad ways that communities excluded from the dominant environmental and national imaginary have long held environmental values and continue to create new ways of thinking about environmental issues. The question shifts from “How do we get more diversity in environmental humanities?” to “How can environmental humanists recognize the ways that diverse groups have always been ‘environmental’?” Exemplary recovery scholars are Camille T. Dungy, John Claborn, Carolyn Finney, Salma Monani, Kimberly N. Ruffin, Whyte, and Ybarra.

In forwarding a recovery model, this project seeks to correct assumptions that Latinxs do not care about the environment and to serve as a check to environmentalist moralizing, which often positions Latinxs as “ecologi-

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cally other,” to use Ray’s term. In contrast, our approach considers the writers analyzed herein as bearers of environmental knowledge and as practitioners of sustainable cultural praxis with traditions that stretch longer than contemporary U.S. environmental thought. We further argue that these authors, artists, and other cultural workers are minoritarian precisely because of the very processes of colonialism, empire, and the Cartesian will to know that made environmentalism as we now know it necessary in the first place. As is clear in the organization of our book, we do not advance a recovery model as exclusionary of environmental justice concerns or the necessary scholarship of critical race theory. In fact, these other approaches are foundational to the work of a recovery project.

Recovery efforts have proved to be somewhat uneven in relation to the cultures and populations they engage. For example, there are built-in incommensurabilities between African American environmentalisms and Asian American environmentalisms related to differences in histories of enslavement and immigration, cultural influences, and U.S. racial formation. Similarly, indigenous cultures that inscribed their environmental ethics within vernacular culture might not be commensurate with the literary articulations of Chicanxs. Incommensurabilities also exist among the varieties of groups and individuals homogenized within any identity category. For example, the different histories and experiences of Chinese immigrants in the 1880s, Nisei with U.S. citizenship interned in U.S. concentration camps during World War II, and Vietnamese refugees entering the United States in the 1980s are gathered under a singular subject position (Asian American), problematically implying a common cultural heritage and historical experience in the United States. Moreover, and as Laura Pulido points out in the foreword to this volume, not all Latinxs agree with or ascribe to progressive environmental values. One need only look to lowriders or Latinx climate-change deniers to perceive that Latinx cultures are far from a monolithic environmental group. It thus bears repeating that as yet another panethnic identifier, Latinx is as complicated a subject identity as any. Rather than eliding these differences, we choose to highlight the uneven and sometimes incommensurate aspects of Latinx environmentalisms. We embrace Latinx as a politically efficacious category as well as a useful one for literary and cultural analysis given the ways we see aesthetic and formal choices as always and inherently political.⁸

Indeed, almost all of the essays engage with form and prioritize aesthetic questions. Yet they do so in ways that foreground social and historical contexts. In many of the essays we have included, form and context are coconstitutive. Such essays appear in their methodological approaches to refuse a dichotomy between surface and paranoid readings or between formalism and new historicism. As such, they fit broadly within the socio-formal reading methodology that Paula Moya outlines in *The Social Imperative: Race,*

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Close Reading, and Contemporary Literary Criticism. As Moya explains her methodology, “I attend to the social dimensions of literary form by describing how the thematic and formal features of a text mediate the historically-situated cultural and political tensions expressed in a work of literature” (10). The scholarship included in this anthology is far less engaged with the social and cultural psychology that most shapes Moya’s thinking. Yet many of our essays share an investment in the role of aesthetic form as mediating or navigating historical context and social condition.

The usefulness of Moya’s framework for our project of Latinx environmental literary thought is perhaps unsurprising when seen in the context of two of Moya’s major influences: the postpositivist realism of the Future of Minority Studies Project (which Moya cofounded) and new materialism and agential realism as detailed, for example, in the work of environmental humanities scholar Stacy Alaimo and philosopher and physicist Karen Barad. As Moya explains, postpositivist realism contends “that identities are better understood as socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that refer in mediated but non-arbitrary ways to verifiable aspects of the social world” (28). New materialists view nature and matter itself as agents contributing to the construction of reality and see human bodies as permeable, incapable of being disentangled from larger flows of matter and energy. Both projects see a more-than-human world that stands aside and yet remains inseparable from the social construction of identity, culture, and even matter. Moya’s *The Social Imperative* suggests the possibility of an alliance between cutting-edge approaches to identity within Latinx studies and innovative approaches to nature within ecocritical studies.

Moya’s socio-formal reading methodology helps explain two other patterns that emerged in the essays solicited for this volume—the focus of the majority of the chapters on a single author or single text and thus on close reading as a primary methodology. We see the predominance of close reading, which often requires attending to a particular text for an extended number of pages, as an important contribution this volume makes, echoing the investment in formalism as part of Moya’s socio-formal methodology. As Ralph E. Rodriguez has so brilliantly outlined in his recent *Latinx Literature Unbound: Undoing Ethnic Expectation*, the rise of new formalism (defined as attention to both the formal and generic qualities that constitute a text) during the past decade has enabled a different window into Latinx literature—one that both challenges our expectations of what texts “do” and helps us see how authors push against formal conventions in order to animate political possibilities.

Our contention in this volume is that forms of cultural representation matter. The stories that we tell to and about ourselves are key to how we understand and interpret the world. We hold that understanding the different environmental stories that Latinxs tell is crucial to developing decolonial

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environmental imaginaries. For us, the predominance of close reading is a critical strategy for understanding the formal, political, and sociological aspects of Latinx environmentalisms. As the essays included in this volume attest, close attention to textual form and analysis is a key strategy for understanding the innovative qualities of these complex environmental ideas.

Organization of the Book: Place, Justice, and the Decolonial

The foreword and afterword of this book speak to how this project intervenes in the two fields we are seeking to bring together in new ways: Latinx studies and the environmental humanities. Laura Pulido's foreword explores the contributions and remaining questions of *Latinx Environmentalism's* intervention in Latinx studies, while Stacy Alaimo's afterword, "What Is Absent: Fields, Futures, and Latinx Environmentalisms," maps the book's extension of race and ethnic studies into the environmental humanities. In addition to a shared commitment to various forms of decolonial thought, the essays herein develop three persistent themes around which we organized the volume: racial capital and the production of place, an expansion of environmentalism around justice, and an engagement with alternative kinships and decolonial epistemologies.

The collection opens with a series of essays that engage the theme of place, specifically the role of racial capital in the production of place. These essays cumulatively expose the processes of racial capital (the idea that race is a structuring logic of capitalism), which produces the expendability of certain people and landscapes. In using the term *racial capital*, we draw from its original usage in Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, as well as ideas in the longer tradition of Black radical thought going back to W.E.B. DuBois that Robinson identifies. Racial capitalism is a phrase that marks the ways that racism infuses the social structures of capitalist development and is fundamental to the way that capitalism operates. As literary scholar Jodi Melamed explains, "Capital can only be capital when it is accumulating, and it can only accumulate by producing and moving through relations of severe inequality among human groups" (77). Racism produces the relations of inequality through which capital accumulation occurs. As Melamed highlights, these relations of inequality include facets of white supremacy such as slavery, genocide, incarceration, and exploitation of migrants as well as contemporary modes of multicultural liberalism and colorblind racism, which value some forms of humanity and devalue others.

The essays in this first section, following the work of Laura Pulido, echo the centrality of place and the environment to the workings of racial capitalism. Multiple essays return to Pulido's insight that "studying environmental

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racism is important for an additional reason: it helps us understand racism” (“Rethinking Environmental Racism” 12) and affirm her contention that environmental racism is “fundamental to contemporary racial capitalism” (“Geographies of Race and Ethnicity II” 525). The essays emphasize, moreover, the importance of literary and cultural approaches to environmental racism, using cultural critique to expose the ways neoliberalism or earlier forms of racial capitalism obscure the production of environmental privilege and environmental racism, often through narratives of individual attainment and multicultural inclusion.

In this section’s first essay, “Greenwashing the White Savior: Cancer Clusters, Supercrises, and *McFarland, USA*,” Julie A. Minich examines the erasure of environmental racism in the production of the Disney film *McFarland, USA* (2015). Minich is interested in “the narrative elements that permit stories about environmental racism to be told (or that facilitate their silencing)” (Minich). While, in Disney’s narrative, *McFarland* is the story of a town where a white track coach leads a group of impoverished Latino track stars to victory, Latinx studies and environmental studies scholars may recognize *McFarland* as the site of cancer clusters featured in the United Farm Workers’ film about pesticides, *The Wrath of Grapes* (1986), and fictionalized in Cherríe Moraga’s play *Heroes and Saints* (1994). Minich, drawing on disability studies, argues that the film “discursively supplant[s] the *McFarland* children disabled by cancer” with the victorious bodies of the track team. Minich’s essay reveals how neoliberal narratives of uplift and inclusion rely on a decontextualization, an erasure of history that obscures the disabling effects of racial capitalism and environmental racism. As Minich argues, *McFarland, USA* erases the structural inequalities that produce disability with an inspiring story of individual accomplishment and spectacular able-bodiedness, prioritizing emotional appeal over justice and substituting empathy for social change (Minich). Tropes of perseverance and hard work obscure the real landscapes of pesticides and prisons that present actual barriers to *McFarland*’s residents.

Like Minich, Sarah D. Wald is concerned with the ways narratives of neoliberal multicultural inclusion erase longer histories of place. In “The National Park Foundation’s ‘American Latino Expedition’: Consumer Citizenship as Pathway to Multicultural National Belonging,” Wald examines a contest that granted Latinx bloggers all-expenses-paid outdoor adventures through the National Park Foundation and various sponsors including outdoor retailer REI and park concessionaire Aramark. Like Minich, Wald is interested in ways Latinx individuals are upheld when their achievements reinforce a neoliberal framework. According to Wald, a consumer citizenship is at work in the American Latino Expedition whereby the purchase of gear and participation in particular forms of outdoor adventure serve to write certain Latinx individuals into the nation while obscuring the claims of other less worthy (or less affluent) national subjects. The American Latino Exped-

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ition, Wald argues, fits into the new racial order that Jodi Melamed describes in which “official antiracism,” as state project, replaces older modes of redistributive antiracism to further the expansion of global capitalism, creating new forms of environmental harms experienced by expendable groups unable or unwilling to be productive citizens within the global capitalist order.

In “A Story Is a Physical Space: An Interview with Héctor Tobar,” Shane Hall and Tobar explore how the physical environment and environmental thinking within the community are central to Tobar’s work. The idea of functioning as a “paid witness” is crucial to his environmental imaginary. Part of what emerges from Tobar’s conversation with Hall is that ideas about place and social belonging are intimately related to one’s environment. As Hall points out, Tobar’s work “stands out for vivifying how history and power relations forge environmental and social landscapes.” This is apparent as Tobar describes his changing perceptions of Los Angeles in ways that illustrate that the various environments he captures in his writing are manifestations of capitalist inequality. The attention to environmental violence, individual experience, power, and privilege manifest as Tobar discusses his construction of the environment in *The Tattooed Soldier*, *The Barbarian Nurseries*, and *Deep Down Dark*. While Tobar does not use the term *racial capitalism*, his interview describes the ways in which his writing captures the negotiation of race, place, and power under capitalism.

Christopher Perreira builds on the theories of place forwarded by Minich, Wald, and Tobar, with a focus on how place can help reveal the ideological intersections of environmentalism and neoliberalism. In “Speculative Futurity and the Eco-cultural Politics of *Lunar Braceros: 2125–2148*,” Perreira examines the relationship between waste management and population management through the unique genre of the “nanotext” invented by this novel. According to Perreira, *Lunar Braceros: 2125–2148* unearths the “layered story of colonialism and racial capitalism” that remains unseen in *McFarland, USA* and the American Latino Expedition. Telegraphing later chapters in this collection, Perreira scrutinizes the ways the novel “foregrounds revolutionary and radical forms of kinship that insist on imagining futures otherwise.” The radical kinships in the novel allow the possibility of futurity in the novel’s trajectory despite what Minich would call the disabling socioeconomic barriers of the landscapes neoliberalism created. Perreira’s critique is that the greening of the nation-state produces enclosures of people and environments and, through the logic of neoliberalism, elides racial capitalism and the production of place. One solution, he concludes, is alternative kinship epistemologies, which are taken up further by essays in the last section.

A concern for the production of place and its contestation through art is also at the center of Jennifer Garcia Peacock’s contribution to this volume, “Sun Ma(i)d: Art, Activism, and Environment in Ester Hernández’s Central Valley.” In this essay, Garcia Peacock examines Hernández’s iconic *Sun Mad*

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poster and attends to the aesthetic and material context of Hernández's work, including the agricultural landscapes that Minich discusses and that haunt the depictions of labor in *Lunar Braceros: 2125–2148*. She is particularly interested in the ways Hernández's engagement with rural aesthetic traditions contrasts with "the rapidly industrializing countryside that was taking shape around her and her loved ones." The place-making at the heart of Hernández's aesthetic decisions contests the industrial capitalist territorialization taking place around her, a territorialization taken to speculative extremes in *Lunar Braceros*. In this way, Garcia Peacock recuperates *Sun Mad* from a decontextualizing or universalizing reading that renders its critique obvious without accounting for the ways it reflects the particularities of Hernández's lived experiences, including the landscapes she traversed.

Like the other authors in this section and in all of her creative works, Ana Castillo, interviewed here by Ybarra and Wald, seeks to expose the processes through which economic, gender, and racial exploitation occurs. Specifically, Castillo discusses her time as a student at the University of Chicago, where neoliberal economist Milton Friedman taught, and her critique of neoliberalism's effects, including environmental effects, on women of color globally. As Castillo asks, "Who is dispensable on this planet? The poor and needy who must work under whatever circumstances are available to them at whatever equally atrocious pay in order to keep their families alive. Apparently, according to the current administration," and, we would add, many previous administrations, "the planet is also dispensable." Castillo draws connections between the textual politics of her novels and this larger critique shared by Minich, Wald, Tobar, Perreira, and Garcia Peacock that foregrounds the processes through which the expendability and disposability of some communities and landscapes are obscured in prevalent popular narratives. Castillo offers an apt conclusion to this section on the production of place, as she articulates her positionality as one who consistently writes to expose the strategies of racial capital.

A second theme, justice, emerged in relation to two key questions that open this volume: What makes this work environmental, and why give these contributions this explicit label? One way the contributions to this volume seek to answer these questions is by accounting for the complex ways Latinx cultures are environmental but often don't assume the mantle of environmentalism. In considering this question, the essays in this section explore how Latinx environmentalisms intertwine critiques of capitalism, colonialism, and racism with environmental concerns. Within this framework, we argue that some forms of environmental thinking in Latinx literature and culture are misunderstood—or worse, overlooked—because they do not conform to what we have come to expect from environmentalism. Justice is often a core tenet in these forms of Latinx environmentalisms.

The essays and interviews in this section therefore trouble the borders of literature, culture, and environment in order to expand what counts as en-

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vironmental thinking. For these scholars and authors, it is impossible to separate environmental struggles from other social justice concerns. They shift the terrain on which environmentalism takes place, emphasizing instead how racism, colonialism, and environmental racism are manifestations of a larger capitalist logic of power, or again, the “coloniality of power.”

For example, Sarah Jaquette Ray’s chapter dovetails with Castillo’s interview in the previous section in its consideration of Castillo’s novel *So Far from God*. Ray examines *So Far from God* in terms that expand the novel’s reception as an environmental text. With the possible exception of Helena María Viramontes’s novel *Under the Feet of Jesus*, perhaps no other Latinx or Chicana novel has garnered as much attention from environmental studies and ecocritical scholars as *So Far from God*. Yet as Ray points out, Castillo’s novel “indicts not only colonial-capitalist patriarchy but also environmentalism itself,” clearing the way for a new understanding of the novel as demonstrating “how dominant environmentalism is *part of* the colonial-capitalist oppressive systems that environmental justice theory and activism challenge.”

In an interview conducted by David J. Vázquez, Sarah D. Wald, and Paula M. L. Moya, Helena María Viramontes also expands the conventional parameters of “environmental.” She acknowledges that environmental thinking has been a part of her work since she was a fifteen-year-old student at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles. While her conception of environmental thinking is inclusive of such traditional environmental figures as Rachel Carson and ideas such as “spaceship earth” (popularized by Buckminster Fuller in the 1960s), she also expands what it means to do environmental work by suggesting that “we carry our environments within ourselves.” Viramontes’s conception of embodied environmental knowledge shows how labor, culture, and materiality are fundamental to understanding the human-environment relationship.

Randy Ontiveros’ essay, “‘Between Water and Song’: Maria Melendez and the Contours of Contemporary Latinx Eco-poetry,” continues the thread of discerning environmental knowledges, specifically in the context of lyric poetry and the question of Latinx engagements with nature during a time of ecological crisis. His essay brings an engagement with genre to the discussion, adding to the robust subfield of eco-poetics to argue that the genre of poetry can be looked to for the ways it uniquely articulates a Latinx way of relating with the earth in the contexts of twenty-first century poetics and the social justice imperatives that operate within Latinx literary traditions. Ontiveros engages in close readings of several poems by the Chicana poet Maria Melendez in order to highlight “thematic and formal traditions vital to Latinx poetry” that Ontiveros argues move “Latinx poetry in new directions by imagining those traditions within the generic conventions of eco-poetry.”

Complementing these perspectives are ideas offered by author Lucha Corpi, interviewed for this volume by Gabriela Nuñez. Corpi’s poetry from

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the 1980s inspired other Chicana feminist writers, including Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo, who are also interviewed in this volume (Aldama). Her poetry from the 1980s gave way to an autobiographical novel in 1989, *Delia's Song*, and she now writes one of the most prolific detective series by a Chicana writer, the Gloria Damasco mysteries. Although Corpi rejects the idea that she is an “environmentalist,” she acknowledges that in practice she shares environmental values, including the fact that she finds sustenance in the natural world: “Green makes me focus. If I see green, I feel not only calm, but I feel hopeful. It’s sort of like knowing that the world will go on, even if I’m not in it anymore, that there is that possibility of constant renewal, as there is in nature, and that my children, my grandchildren, my great-grandchildren, will be able to enjoy that and have that sense of calm and focus also.” This writer asserts her relation to life on Earth without recourse to the conventional environmentalist frameworks. In this way, Corpi participates in the various expansions of environmentalisms apparent in Ray’s and Ontiveros’s essays and Viramontes’s interview.

The essays and interviews included in the final section of the volume build on the previous two sections by foregrounding various forms of decolonial environmental imaginaries. Latinx cultural production creates an awareness of how the history of colonization and the ongoing, present-day manifestations of colonialism materially impact any experience of the environment, as we have seen in our discussion of racial capitalism’s production of place. The decolonial analytic also reenvisions what counts as environmentalism, or, in a broader sense, makes “environmentalism” a difficult idea for Latinx ecological thought. In addition to looking at how coloniality (the ongoing impacts of colonization) has shaped our past and present relation to the earth, what if we begin to imagine our future, taking seriously a range of alternative ways to define relations with one another and with the earth? Several of the essays in this collection envision decolonial alternatives to dominant ways of seeing our past in continuity with our present and future and propose counterframeworks of kinship that challenge the ways that neoliberalism, as yet another aspect of coloniality, underscores normative relationality.

It is important to see how the essays and interviews in this section do not necessarily conform to a linear chronology in their expectations for what is possible in human relations with the natural environment; they suggest instead that creative temporalities are key to decolonization and social justice. The contributions in this section push against traditional social relationships by refusing to conform to the categories or power relations of nuclear families or even extended family. Indeed, these essays advocate for reinventing kinship, importantly including the land as a relation. In some cases, they argue that Latinxs have always already been accomplishing these “new” models of relationships and community. Rather than considering these new relations as contradictions in terms, the contributions in this section assert

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that we attend to the ways that Latinx creativities pose a challenge to chronology and to false dichotomies such as indigenous wisdom versus Western knowledge. By acknowledging these false dichotomies, the contributions in this section collectively argue for recognizing how Latinx creativities have always already proposed a wide range of kinship structures. From this standpoint, antichronology itself is a strategy of resistance to modernity that declares the survival of pre-Columbian epistemologies evident in Latinx cultural expression. Thus, in the essays in this section, themes of temporality, futurity, and alternative epistemologies help address the question, “What does Latinx cultural production offer environmental thought?”

Vázquez opens this section by identifying decolonial themes in a contemporary urban context. He considers Ernesto Quiñonez’s novel *Bodega Dreams* (2000) and its critique of gentrification, and he argues that the environmental nature of this critique is inseparable from its decolonial possibilities. The vector of this consideration of gentrification relies on the ways that Latinx communities (in this case the Puerto Rican community in New York’s Spanish Harlem) lay claim to urban spaces by memorializing resistant histories. Vázquez thus suggests that “the novel offers an alternative ethos of preservation that memorializes the Puerto Rican Movement, especially the environmental activism of the Young Lords, and valorizes Latinx cultural and historical ties to Spanish Harlem.” Taken together, these examples suggest the richness of Latinx environmental thought and the potential they hold for continuing to revise how we engage with environmental ideas.

Ylce Irizarry’s essay, “Postcards from the Edges of Haiti: The Latinx Ecocriticism of Mayra Montero’s *In the Palm of Darkness*,” argues that Montero refuses to see ecological and social extinction in Haiti as purely a result of the Duvalier regimes and invokes an alternative sense of time to showcase colonial violence and neocolonial interference as examples of what Nixon calls “slow violence.” Irizarry explicitly foregrounds the decolonial by arguing that the novel prefigures the “postcolonial, feminist, and decolonial ecocritical approaches” of contemporary ecocritical thought. She aligns Montero’s novel with Ybarra’s approach to decoloniality, specifically Montero’s prioritization of nonhuman bodies and non-Western epistemologies.

The decolonial epistemology that Paula M. L. Moya’s essay engages relates to lived experience and kinship. In “Against the Sorrowful and Infinite Solitude: Environmental Consciousness and Streetwalker Theorizing in Helena María Viramontes’s *Their Dogs Came with Them*,” Moya reads the novel using a combination of Nixon’s theory of slow violence and María Lugones’s “streetwalker theory” to argue that an embodied, countergeographical (or even eco-phenomenological) philosophy of “streetwalking” demonstrates how an alliance of young women who inhabit a marginalized space together—East Los Angeles of the 1960s—gather more strength and resilience from one another than they do in relation to their nuclear families.

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Through “streetwalking,” they inhabit public space in a way that rejects the domesticity that Western modernity expects of women and develops a “decolonial imaginary” in response to the slow violence of infrastructure creep. This practice of public alliance invents an experience of the outdoors that operates far afield from conventional environmental expectations and enhances the complexity of Latinx decolonial environmentalism.

“Oedipal Wrecks: Queer Animal Ecologies in Justin Torres’s *We the Animals*,” by Richard T. Rodríguez, imagines alternative kinships in ways that center a decolonial vision. His reading of the novel integrates childhood, masculinity, filial relations, and human-animal identifications in order to argue for a language and sense of belonging required for environmental justice. The essay considers animal symbolism and sexual diversity as they complicate notions of nature and family bonds, which we see as extrapolating on the decolonial insight that the atomistic family unit is a product of empire. Rodríguez brings together posthumanism, queer theory, and eco-criticism to read this novel as offering an “alternative language of belonging that refuses the often interlocking heteronormative tenets of environment and kinship,” which links it importantly to the decolonial Latinx environmentalisms that animate our volume.

This section ends with Priscilla Solis Ybarra’s interview with Cherríe Moraga. In “The Body Knows and the Land Has Memory,” Moraga elaborates on her long experience writing about colonization’s disruption of the human relation with the natural environment. She sees humanity’s relation with the earth as fundamental to achieving justice and thus challenges readers to recognize the body politics of knowledge and the way that a reciprocally respectful relation with land must include regard for land’s memory—a memory that takes place outside of Western conceptions of time. As such, by looking to the past, Moraga suggests that we build toward a more just future. Together, these essays punctuate the volume by drawing together our focus on decolonial thinking, environmental justice, and Latinx cultural production in the service of imagining a future where social and environmental justice are in harmony with one another.