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## **Black matters are spatial matters: Black geographies for the twenty-first century**

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### **Abstract**

Katherine McKittrick famously wrote in *Demonic Grounds* that “black lives are necessarily geographic, but also struggle with discourses that erase and despatialize their sense of place” (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiii). From analyses of diaspora to the plantation, from studies of urban segregation to anticolonial circuits of resistance, Black thought has long been concerned with questions of space, place, and power. Yet these interventions, which span centuries and continents, have not always been recognized as “properly” geographical and have thus been systematically excluded from the formal canon of disciplinary geography. Within the last five years, however, Black Geographies as a field of inquiry has gained increasing institutional recognition—thanks to the tireless labor of Black scholars to carve out spaces for their work within the discipline. This article reflects on the state of the field of Black Geographies, with an emphasis on the radically interdisciplinary interventions this body of scholarship has made into the mainstream of disciplinary geography. I review some of the most prominent thematic areas within Black Geographies, including space-making and the Black geographic imagination; racial capitalism; cities, policing, and carceral geographies; and racism and plantation futures. I conclude with a consideration of avenues for future research, including the need for more studies that provincialize North America and connect with Latinx and Native/ Indigenous geographies.

“Indeed, black matters are spatial matters.” -Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* (2006)

### **INTRODUCTION**

The complex spatialities of Black life, oppression, resistance, and radical imagination have long been recognized by Black scholars (and those committed to dismantling interlocking systems of racial oppression), but they have only relatively recently begun to enter the mainstream of disciplinary geography. The growing institutional recognition of Black Geographies over the last 5 years, including the founding of the Black Geographies Specialty Group of the American Association of Geographers in 2016 by Dr. LaToya Eaves, has been the product of tireless organizing by Black intellectuals—especially Black women—to carve out spaces for their scholarship and political commitments within the discipline of geography.

Our current political moment has made this work all the more urgent (Smith & Vasudevan, 2017). The pressing need for Black Geographies is evinced in the disproportionate impacts of climate change on Black communities; the surveillance and policing of Black neighborhoods; and the new configurations of anti-Black racism, nationalism, and xenophobia represented by the global resurgence of the far-right. The deadly entanglements of White supremacy, capitalism, settler colonialism, patriarchy, and heteronormativity today call for careful attention to the connections between space, place, and power. The emergence of new Black social movements that (in the internationalist spirit of the Black Radical Tradition) defy national borders also requires geographically attuned tools of analysis.

This review article reflects on the state of the field of Black Geographies. I begin with an overview of Black Geographies: What are the interventions Black Geographies pose to the discipline of geography? What are some of the intellectual and political lineages of Black geographic thought? I then review some of the most prominent thematic lines of inquiry within Black Geographies, including space-making and the Black geographic imagination; racial capitalism; cities, policing, and carceral geographies; and racism and plantation futures. In documenting these themes, it is important to note that these are not neatly compartmentalized “boxes” of scholarship; rather, these concerns are very much interconnected. I conclude with a consideration of avenues for future research, including the need for more studies that provincialize North America and connect with Latinx and Native/Indigenous geographies.

## **SITUATING BLACK GEOGRAPHIES**

Questions of praxis—in other words, the idea that theory and political practice are inextricably intertwined—are central to Black geographic scholarship. For that reason, any account of the field of Black Geographies must also take into consideration the history of the discipline of geography, as well as the material conditions of possibility that shape intellectual labor in the academy (Hawthorne & Heitz, 2018). Darden & Terra's 2003 report on the under-representation of Black geographers in institutions of higher education (Darden & Terra, 2003), as well as Pulido's powerful reflections on the study of race within a “white discipline” (Pulido, 2002), point to the structural context into which Black Geographies intervenes.<sup>1</sup>

Although the discipline of anthropology is often called the “handmaiden of colonialism” (D. Lewis, 1973; Trouillot, 2003), the emergence of geography as a discipline was also intertwined with colonialism, enslavement, and imperialism (Kobayashi, 2014; Livingstone, 1993). This history continues to shape the limited ways in which mainstream geography has engaged with questions of racism and race (Gilmore, 2007; Pulido, 2002). Although racism—and “scientific racism” in particular—is popularly understood to be rooted in (erroneous) understandings of biological difference, geography in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also contributed to the production of racial essentialisms based on place. Since the Enlightenment, race has been understood in spatial terms, through “sedentary metaphysics” (Malkki, 1992) that bound individuals and groups in place, classify them according to their geographical locations, and arrange them in a spatio-temporal hierarchy (Massey, 2005). The discipline of geography is thus implicated in the elaboration of the racial theories that animate colonialism, fascism, and violent nationalisms (Bassin, 1987; Godlewska & Smith, 1994). In other words, the production of space is tied to the production of difference.

But although the discipline of geography has bequeathed to us a grammar of racial difference, contemporary geographers have more often than not tended to sweep this history under the rug. Textbook accounts of the history of geography emphasize a sharp break between Eurocentric Enlightenment and Victorian geographies (or at least, bracket the racism of geographers like Kant as inconsequential to their philosophical work) and the interventions of radical Marxist geographers studying inequality in the twentieth century (Hawthorne & Meché, 2016). This latter work is undoubtedly important, and provided some of the earlier disciplinary engagements with racial inequality in geography. Yet these interventions are all too often heralded as part of a redemptionist narrative that cleanses geography of its racist history. Indeed, by the mid- to late-twentieth century, geography no longer centered race as a unit of analysis. Geographers had abandoned environmental determinisms in favor of studying the economic structures that produce inequality. In practice, this meant that race was often studied as an *ex post facto* justification for colonial dispossession, exploitation, and a global division of labor—the superstructure to capital's totalizing reach (Chakrabarty, 2000; Oswin, 2018). But in this process, the discipline of geography did not develop the theoretical tools necessary to engage with the ongoing production of race and racisms via the production of space. Pulido described this as the difference between research that documents racial differences and inequalities, and research that is fundamentally grounded in critical race theory (Pulido, 2002).

*Black Geographies* responds powerfully to geography's troubling history with regard to questions of race and Blackness. In their foundational 2007 volume *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, Woods and McKittrick identify three central themes that cut across the study of Black Geographies. Broadly, these interventions examine

1. "... the ways in which essentialism situates black subjects and their geopolitical concerns as being elsewhere (on the margin, the underside, outside the normal), a spatial practice that conveniently props up the mythical norm and erases or obscures the daily struggles of particular communities."
2. "... how the lives of these subjects demonstrate that 'common-sense' workings of modernity and citizenship are worked out, and normalized, though geographies of exclusion ..."
3. "... the situated knowledge of these communities and their contributions to both real and imagined human geographies [as] significant political acts and expressions" (McKittrick & Woods, 2007, p. 4).

Still, geographers must resist the temptation to label *Black Geographies* as something "new." After all, the characterization of *Black Geographies* as "surprising," "trendy," or "novel" works to reinforce the flawed claim that spatial theory only happens within geography departments—which, as noted earlier, have historically posed structural barriers to entry for Black scholars. Black geographic thought has existed (though under other names) for centuries, in formal academic environments, political struggles, and everyday practices of Black space-making. It simply has not always been legible to scholars working within the discipline of geography.

*Black Geographies* research today takes place both within and outside of disciplinary geography. This is, in part, a product of the systemic ways Black scholars have been historically excluded from geography. And the growing florescence of Black geographic scholarship within the

discipline of geography has been nurtured by numerous “spatial turns” in complementary disciplines such as Black studies, anthropology, sociology, history, and American studies. Thus, any attempt to summarize the breadth and depth of Black geographic scholarship must also take into account the inherent plurivocality of the field.

## INFLUENCES

Black Geographies upends the traditional canon of geography. But this does not mean that Black Geographies represents an incommensurable “outside” to White, Western geography. Rather, scholars of Black Geographies emphasize the mutually constitutive relationship between what McKittrick in *Demonic Grounds* describes as Black spatial knowledge, negotiations, and resistances on the one hand, and geographies of domination—colonialism, slavery, imperialism, racial-sexual displacement—on the other (McKittrick, 2006, p. x). As McKittrick argues, this relationship reveals the ways in which Blackness has been central to both the production of space and to the formation of Western, Eurocentric forms of geographic knowledge. At the same time, the modes of Black geographic knowledge that have emerged in resistance to domination provide alternative pathways toward new understandings of space and to the undoing of violent practices of geographic organization (McKittrick, 2006, p. xiv).

Black Geographies also stresses the power of Black epistemological decenterings to bring about new ways of understanding the world. In a recent article on diasporic epistemologies and decolonized curricula, Lewis takes on these possibilities by examining the influence of the “colonial curriculum” on deand anti-colonial Caribbean intellectuals such as Stuart Hall and C.L.R. James. Hall and James—to the surprise of many contemporary readers—believed that their colonial education could actually serve as the basis for a radical decolonial intellectual project. This was because the Eurocentric canon did not completely “foreclose freedom and liberation” (J. S. Lewis, 2018, p. 24). Rather, as a complex terrain of struggle, it could also be read against the grain, first to understand how Western European practices and prescriptions have ordered the world, and then to begin to dismantle these modes of European colonial thought and spatial organization. In this way, Hall and James questioned the “centrality of Europe in the European intellectual traditions and disciplines” (J. S. Lewis, 2018, p. 24). Through the work of Hall and James, Lewis foregrounds the multiple traditions that exist within that which is traditionally conceived of as the “European intellectual tradition”—as opposed to categorizing Black disciplinary contributions as secondary, separate, and supplementary. In doing so, he also makes the case for Blackness as an analytic<sup>2</sup> that entails both a Fanonian “stretching” of Western modes of analysis (Fanon, 1961/2007, p. 5) and radically interdisciplinary modes of study.

In this spirit, Black Geographies draws upon the intellectuals of what Robinson famously characterized as the Black Radical Tradition (Robinson, 1983/2005; see also Johnson & Lubin, 2017). This school of political thought and action emphasizes the connections between Black liberation movements and the project of anti-capitalism. It also understands racism and White supremacy to be central organizing principles of capitalism. Black feminist theory and epistemology have also been profoundly influential to the development of Black Geographies. Black women scholars and activists have informed the marked insistence in Black Geographies scholarship on the analytical inseparability of race, gender, sexuality, and capitalism, as well as

the commitment to critically engaging and transforming the power-laden category of “human” (see Combahee River Collective, 1977/1986; Weheliye, 2014).

Black Geographies has also been deeply informed by Black Caribbean intellectual traditions (see, for instance, Glissant, 1990/1997; James, 1938/2001; Wynter, 1995)—scholarship that has radically re-oriented dominant narratives about progress, modernity, and temporality (Thomas, 2016). According to James, for instance, the racial political economy based around the transnational sugar trade thrust enslaved Black folk in the Caribbean into “a life that was in its essence a modern life” (James, 1938/2001, p. 392; see also Mintz, 1986). James' location of modernity in the particular socioeconomic relations of the seventeenth-century West Indies is central to anti-colonial and postcolonial analyses of modernity, and works to reconfigure the relationship of Black life to the West, liberalism, and capitalism. It also represents an injunction to seek out practices of resistance that are not immediately legible according to orthodox Western Marxist modes of analysis—for instance, by looking beyond the factory floor to the plantation.

Finally, Black Geographies draws heavily upon modes of critical geographic thought developed within the field of Black/African diaspora studies. After all, diaspora is a fundamentally spatial relation. Scholars of the Black Atlantic in particular have developed sophisticated analyses of the spatially extended cultural politics of Blackness (for example, Du Bois, 1940/2011; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1990). Theories of diaspora also entail powerful counter-narratives about the origins and conditions of capitalist modernity, by foregrounding the foundational violence of the transatlantic slave trade in their analyses.

## **KEY THEMES**

### ***Space-making and the Black geographic imagination***

Black Geographies asserts the inherent spatiality of Black life—the spatial imaginaries, space-making practices, and senses of place rooted in Black communities. Starting from the understanding that all social relations are grounded in spatial relations, this scholarship privileges Black world-making practices in all of their multiplicities. Such an emphasis counters long-standing trends in the discipline of geography, in which Black people were seen as lacking geography (due to the upheaval of the trans-Atlantic slave trade); or as victims of geography (due to ongoing practices of displacement and spatial segregation). Taken together, these modes of analysis efface a Black sense of place (McKittrick, 2011) and perpetuate a dangerous understanding of space as transparent—of geographies as static, inert, and self-evident, and of current spatial arrangements as natural, innocent, and ahistorical (McKittrick, 2006, pp. 5–6).

The lens of transparent space elides the relationship between racism, racialization, or race-making, and the production of space. In response, Black Geographies scholarship asserts that racism is also a spatial practice—space is not just a blank canvas upon which racist activity unfolds. As Lipsitz argues in his classic text *How Racism Takes Place*, space both reflects and (re)produces racisms (Lipsitz, 2011). Indeed, one of the primary ways in which anti-Blackness functions is by positing Blackness as perpetually “out of place” or as placeless (Domosh, 2017).

Central to this argument is an understanding that Blackness and Black knowledge, while embodied, are not rooted solely in the biocentric body. As McKittrick explains, an over-emphasis on the Black body (even in the form of well-intentioned critiques of scientific racism) detracts from the study of Black life by “singularizing” and “flattening it” into mere biology (McKittrick, 2016, p. 6). Similarly, an understanding of Black knowledge as necessarily tethered to such a “violated body” denies the existence of multiple forms of Black knowledge—including spatial knowledge. The idea that Blackness emanates from the body is central to the current “ontological turn” in Black studies (Warren, 2018; Chari, 2017, 170 - see note 4), rooted in a particular reading of Fanon’s “zone of nonbeing” (Fanon, 1952/ 2008). Shifting the lens of analysis from the body to space and place (after all, Fanon was also deeply concerned with the spatialities of colonial racial hierarchies [Sekyi-Otu, 2009]) allows for a reading of Black life as not reducible to racism, violence, and death (Woods, 2002). By de-centering the body as the primary unit of analysis, *Black Geographies* in turn opens up new avenues for the study of racism and Black resistance.

Food has been a particularly generative site of engagement, bringing traditional geographical concerns with nature, agrarian production, and political economy together with questions of Black space-making. This work studies Black spatial knowledges as they relate to food production, as well as the ways Black communities past and present craft food security and sovereignty in the face of racialized dispossession (Carney, 2001; McCutcheon, 2015; Ramírez, 2014; Reese, 2019; Walker, 2015). Finney similarly takes up questions of Black space-making in relation to ideas of “nature,” upending dominant narratives about Black alienation from the environment (Finney, 2014). Scholars have also brought geographical analytics to bear on questions of diaspora, examining how Black subjectivities operate both within and against hegemonic understandings of nation, race, place, and membership (Brown, 2005; Walcott, 1997). And, influenced by Black feminist and queer theory, a growing number of researchers have foregrounded the rich spatial imaginaries and space-making practices of Black queer communities (Bailey & Shabazz, 2014; Eaves, 2017; Ellison, 2019; Hamilton, 2018).

### ***Geographies of racial capitalism***

*Black Geographies* has also contributed important insights to political economic analysis. Specifically, *Black Geographies* emphasizes the mutual significance of the material and the symbolic, rejecting simplistic economic determinisms and base/superstructure binaries in which racism is understood as being of secondary importance to the means and relations of production. Robinson famously argued that capitalism and racism coevolved, such that capitalism had been thoroughly suffused with race and practices of racial differentiation since its emergence out of feudalism (Robinson, 1983/2005). As Kelley argues, Robinson’s intervention was to transform the concept of “racial capitalism” from the description of a specific system (i.e., apartheid South Africa) to the characterization of capitalism as a whole (Kelley, 2017)—a shift that in turn centered slavery and colonialism in the history of capitalism. For geographers, then, the task is to study how capitalism’s tendency to racially differentiate takes spatial form.

Gilmore argues that while there has been a range of approaches within geography for contending with racism and race, they generally share two assumptions: “(1) social formations are structured in dominance within and across scales; and (2) race is in some way determinate of sociospatial

location” (Gilmore, 2002, p. 17). As she explains, once scholars recognize the interdependency of power and structure, it subsequently becomes necessary to untangle the ways power is distributed within a structure (Gilmore, 2007, p. 17). This in turn requires a finely grained, spatial analysis of the relationship between racism and capitalism.

In the spirit of Robinson and the aforementioned Black Radical Tradition, scholars of Black Geographies insist that racism and capitalism are fundamentally intertwined and that this relationship is both structured by and structuring of space (Bledsoe & Wright, 2018a). In *Bankers and Empire*, for instance, Hudson shows that the rise of finance capital was bound up with U.S. imperialism and that bankers from the United States actively “instrumentalized” White racism in the Caribbean when experimenting with new banking projects (Hudson, 2017). Hudson's work can be situated within a broader body of literature that approaches slavery and anti-Black racism as ongoing conditions of possibility for worldwide capitalist accumulation (see Boyce Davies, 2007; C. V. Hamilton & Ture, 1967/2011; Rodney, 1972/2018; X, 1965/2015). At a different scale of analysis, other scholars have focused on the ways identities and political struggles are mediated by experiences of racialized economic dispossession stemming from slavery, colonialism, and imperialism (see, for instance, Heynen, 2009; Lewis, 2015; Tyner, 2013).

Black Geographic political economy has also engaged with the question of “natural disasters.” This work denaturalizes “nature” without falling back upon economic determinisms to understand the unevenly distributed causes and effects of climate change, earthquakes, and hurricanes. Vergès has powerfully critiqued the notion of the “anthropocene,” arguing that scholars must “write a history of the environment that includes slavery, colonialism, imperialism and racial capitalism, from the standpoint of those who were made into ‘cheap’ objects of commerce ... fabricated as disposable people, whose lives do not matter” (Vergès, 2017). This was the task Woods took up in his studies of economic development in the U.S. South. He argued, for instance, that the abandonment of New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina can only be understood as part of a longer historical trajectory stretching back to the overthrow of Radical Reconstruction—a history in which processes of economic development, racialized dispossession, environmental destruction, and White supremacy were inseparable (Woods, 2017b). This mode of analysis has also shaped an abiding concern in the Black Geographies literature with questions of environmental racism and environmental justice (for example, Brand, 2018; Purifoy, 2018; Vasudevan, 2019; White, 2012).

### *Cities, policing, and carceral geographies*

There has also been a proliferation of research at the nexus of urban geography and critical surveillance/prison studies. By engaging with questions of gentrification, displacement, uneven development, and spatial segregation via the mutual production of race and space, scholars have challenged the naturalization of Black life to underserved urban spaces (see, for instance, Corbin, 2017; Dillon & Sze, 2016; Rose, 1970; Summers, 2019; Taylor, 2012). Because of its emphasis on historically and geographically situated analyses of urban formations, this broad body of literature demonstrates that Black urban life is not wholly defined by or determined by racism. Instead, by engaging with insurgent practices of Black political ecology, community formation,



political action, and artistic reappropriation, these scholars also show the richness of Black urban spatial imaginaries.

Scholars of surveillance, policing, and incarceration understand urban segregation as part of a broader, racialized continuum of control that stretches from the ghetto to the prison (see Davis, 2011a; Wacquant, 2000). Wilson, for instance, argues that the spatial confinement of Black communities in the United States is tied to the shifting relationship of capital to Black populations in the wake of Emancipation (Wilson, 2000). But while these processes are shaped by the workings of capitalism, they are not fully determined by them. In *Golden Gulag*, Gilmore critiques attempts to explain the disproportionate imprisonment of Black men and women as a modern plantation system designed for the extraction of unfree labor. Rather than presuming an ontological or naturalized condition of Black abjection, Gilmore presents a nuanced geographical rebuttal to the “new slavery” thesis, one that understands mass incarceration as a spatial fix for the surplus land and labor generated by capitalism. Gilmore's analysis, which links together “money, income, jobs, race and ethnicity, gender, lawmaking, state agencies, and the politics that propel them to act, rural communities, urban neighborhoods, uneven development, migration and globalization, hope and despair” (Gilmore, 2007, p. 26), provides an analytical foundation for a robust abolitionist political program.

Beyond the institution of the prison itself, Black Geographies research identifies a spatially extended carceral archipelago of racialized surveillance and control. Scholars of carceral geographies have demonstrated that policing, surveillance, architectural design, and rehabilitation programs all collectively work to reproduce the spatial confinement of Black communities (Gurusami, 2018; Jefferson, 2017; Shabazz, 2015). These forms of capillary surveillance are by no means new, however (Cowen & Lewis, 2016). In *Dark Matters*, for instance, Browne constructs a counter-genealogy of surveillance that effectively dislodges the primacy of Michel Foucault, locating the antecedents of modern surveillance technologies in practices that were developed to control the movements of colonized and enslaved populations (Browne, 2015). But once again, these scholars also show that Black life is not entirely determined by surveillance and control. Black Geographies research has thus directed attention to the ways Black communities resist and creatively subvert surveillance, policing, and mass incarceration.

### ***Racism and plantation futures***

Black Geographies entails the study of the spatialities of Black life and the plurality of Black spatial imaginaries, with the goal of unsettling racist and colonial forms of spatial organization. As such, Black Geographies cannot be reduced to just the study of racism, as this would relegate Black subjects to the condition of being “always already” oppressed. Yet scholars of Black Geographies are still deeply concerned with the sedimentations of racist histories in contemporary landscapes (for example, Alderman, 2010; Davis, 2011b; Inwood, 2011; Williams, 2017). This work is rooted in the Black Studies tradition of approaching the plantation as a central organizing principle through which present-day forms of capital accumulation, spatial organization, and racialization emerged. Clyde Woods' scholarship has been especially influential—specifically, his careful analysis of economic development and social movements in the Mississippi Delta (Woods, 2017a). In addition, the journal *Southeastern Geographer* has long

been a forum for scholarship on the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow in the racial-spatial organization of the U.S. South (see Bledsoe, Eaves, Williams, & Wright, 2018).

But while “the plantation provides the future through which contemporary racial geographies and violences make themselves known” (McKittrick, 2011, p. 950), there are always fissures in these plantation futures. These cracks can be wrenched open to create transgressive spaces of rupture, intervention, and resistance. While historical patterns of socio-spatial organization have shaped the terrain of political struggle in the present, Black spatial imaginaries can never fully be contained by racist geographies. Thus, scholars of Black Geographies also consider what forms of Black life always remain in excess of the logics of racial-spatial violence, foregrounding the multiple and overlapping spatialities of Black struggle.

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

There are many possible new avenues for future Black Geographies research. A sizeable proportion of the Black Geographies scholarship has thus far been carried out in North America and, to a lesser extent, the Caribbean. There is an urgent need for Black Geographies research that considers the spatial politics of race and Blackness in other geographical contexts and draws attention to the “inherent pluralities” of Black Geographies (Bledsoe & Wright, 2018b). This scholarship would also do the necessary work of provincializing North American understandings of race, racism, and Blackness (Wright, 2015). Scholars of Black Geographies are well situated to engage with the global circulation of both racisms and the politics of Blackness, as well as the ways specific racial formations “take place” in different historical-geographic contexts.

In particular, there is much room for an engagement with the African continent, as well as the relationship between Africa and the wider Black diaspora, in Black Geographies. The persistent division between “African Studies” and “Black Studies” in academia—which often rests on the questionable assumption that, with the exception of South Africa, “race” and “Blackness” are not relevant categories on the African continent—has been well documented (Pierre, 2013). This intellectual division of labor, which is far too often taken for granted, could be productively challenged by scholars of Black Geographies. Indeed, many researchers are already beginning to do this necessary work. For instance, Matlon (2014) studies masculinity and racial capitalism in postcolonial Côte d'Ivoire; Hagan (2017) investigates the anti-Blackness experienced by sub-Saharan African migrants in the Maghreb; Merrill (2018) highlights the oft-overlooked “Black spaces” crafted by African migrants and their children in contemporary Italy; and Bledsoe (2017) explores the legacies of African marronage and the idea of the quilombo in Brazil.

The “oceanic” in particular has emerged as a rich site of engagement with global Black geographies, as an analytic frame that necessarily resists methodological nationalism (Goswami, 2002; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). After all, as Bhimull reminds us, “An ocean has many sides” (2017, p. 103). Chari's (2015) work, for instance, looks beyond the Black Atlantic to consider processes of racialization, circuits of extraction, transnational cultural connections, and spatial imaginaries across the Indian Ocean Black diaspora. In addition, Hawthorne (2017) engages with the Black Mediterranean as a capacious analytical framework not only for studying the circumstances of Black diaspora in the Mediterranean region but also for understanding processes of racial criminalization and racialized citizenship in southern Europe more broadly.

There are also exciting possibilities for engagements across Black Geographies, Latinx Geographies, and Native Geographies. Thinking across these fields can trouble longstanding disciplinary silos wherein Black Studies is tasked with questions of racism and the body (see King, 2019); Latinx studies engages with questions of borders and immigration (see Cahuas, 2019); and Native Studies is preoccupied with questions of land and settler colonialism (see Coulthard, 2014). These diverse fields share a commitment to radical interdisciplinarity and anticolonial scholarship. Together, they can help to diagnose the insidious rearrangements of race and racism taking place in the twenty-first century and offer creative pathways for undoing these geographies of inequality (Kent & McKittrick, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

Black Geographies is not exclusively the study (or rather, positivist description) of Black people, nor does it entail the identification of some sort of reductive, non-relational “Black space.” It is also not simply a matter of adding Black subjects to geography syllabi in a liberal multicultural project of “add diversity and stir.” Rather, the use of “Black” in the phrase “Black Geographies” is intended, at least in part, to serve as a radical provocation to the discipline of geography. It is a call to center those subjects, voices, and experiences that have been systematically excluded from the mainstream spaces of geographical inquiry. It is also an invitation to consider how an analysis of space, place, and power can be fundamentally transformed by foregrounding questions of Blackness and racism. To put it another way, Black Geographies asks how the spatial politics and practices of Blackness, and how an engagement with questions of Blackness can in turn complicate foundational geographical categories such as capital, scale, nation, and empire. By revealing the colonial and racist assumptions that undergird so many key concepts in geographical inquiry, Black Geographies can then point the way to their eventual undoing.

Even after the legal architecture of explicit, biologically based racism has been dismantled, racialized disadvantage and exclusion persist under new guises. Insights from Black Geographies also allow us to trace the many ways that racism was “buried alive” (Goldberg, 2009), embedded into material landscapes and urban planning documents and transnational capital flows. A geographical understanding of racism provides an analytical toolkit for identifying forms of differentiation that do not explicitly invoke blood or biology but nonetheless employ essentializing logics. By shifting the focus away from race as a variable of stratification, Black Geographies approaches racism as a process that undergirds modern socio-spatial organization and produces the ever-shifting “objective reality” of race (Gilmore, 2007; Visweswaran, 2010). But at the same time, by steadfastly refusing to equate Blackness (and specifically, the Black body) with racism, oppression, and dehumanization, Black Geographies opens up possibilities for alternative, anticolonial, and liberatory forms of geographic knowledge and world-making (Madera, 2015; McKittrick, 2013).

Finally, a key aspect of the Black Geographies project is recognizing that theories of space are not the exclusive domain or property of disciplinary geography. Rather, there are many overlapping and intertwined genealogies of spatial thought, ways of knowing, and modes of knowledge production. These have in turn emerged from diverse disciplines, intellectual and political traditions, and geographical contexts. From Africana feminism to anticolonial philosophy to queer of color critique, holding geography accountable to this multivocality will

strengthen the discipline's ability to respond to the urgent challenges of our time. After all, the goal of Black Geographies should never be its full institutionalization or “disciplining” to conform to the normative parameters of traditional geography. The power of Black Geographies research lies in its capacious interdisciplinary reach and liminal position on both the inside and the outside of geography. Its radical political potential hinges on this transgressive “unruliness.”

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For an historical perspective on the representation of both Black scholars and issues pertaining to Black America in the field of geography, see, for instance, Dwyer, 1997; Horvath, Deskins, & Larimore, 1969; Larimore, Scott, & Jr, 1969.

<sup>2</sup> Like McKittrick (2016), Lewis is critical of the incorporation of Blackness as a mere descriptive project or as a solely experiential/biologic epistemology.

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