

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Anti-Blackness and Conditional Belonging: Black and Afro-Latiné Student Experiences in Predominantly Latiné Elementary Schools

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6v11b20q>

ISBN

9798190926774

Author

Rotwein, Abigail

Publication Date

2026-09-09

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Anti-Blackness and Conditional Belonging:

Black and Afro-Latiné Student Experiences in Predominantly Latiné Elementary Schools

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the Doctor of Education

by

Abigail Rotwein

2026

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Anti-Blackness and Conditional Belonging:

Black and Afro-Latiné Student Experiences in Predominantly Latiné Elementary Schools

by

Abigail Rotwein

Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2026

Professor Julissa Muñiz, Chair

While there is extensive research on Black student experiences in predominantly white institutions, most Black students attend schools where they are surrounded by other students of color but remain the racial minority. Anti-Blackness and white supremacy culture are not limited to white spaces; they are also embedded within communities of color. In Los Angeles, many schools are majority Latiné, and both historical and contemporary research demonstrate that anti-Blackness is present in these contexts.

At the same time, educational research and practice often group “Black and Brown” students together, with “Brown” serving as a proxy for Latiné. This framing erases Afro-Latiné identities and overlooks the distinct histories, cultures, and internal diversity of both Black and Latiné communities. Despite the importance of early schooling, there is limited research on

students' racialized experiences in elementary school, even though belonging at this stage has long-term implications. Schools are a primary site where children learn about race through both explicit instruction and implicit messaging. To date, no studies have centered the voices of Black and Afro-Latiné elementary students in predominantly Latiné schools.

This qualitative study addresses this gap by examining the experiences of 3rd–6th grade Black and Afro-Latiné students who participated in their school's Black Student Union. Through individual interviews, students shared their experiences of racial harm, belonging, and identity development. Findings indicate that anti-Black racism was a frequent and normalized part of students' experiences, often occurring through peer interactions and inconsistent institutional responses. Belonging was uneven, positively shaped by relationships with select peers and staff while also disrupted by racialized interactions. Engagement with race in curriculum and school discourse was limited, with Afro-Latiné identities largely absent. In contrast, the Black Student Union functioned as a critical third space that provided consistent belonging, racial affirmation, and opportunities for dialogue about race and racism.

Findings point to the need for robust professional development focused on instruction around race and identity with elementary school students, as well as deeper staff learning about anti-Blackness and white supremacy culture in spaces where educators are predominantly non-Black people of color. Additionally, this study highlights the importance and impact of racial affinity spaces in elementary schools and underscores the need for their expansion, as such spaces remain rare.

The dissertation of Abigail Lauren Rotwein is approved.

John Rogers

Michael Singh

Julissa Muñoz, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2026

DEDICATION

This is for my Black and Afro-Latiné students, past, present, and future. You are brilliant, hilarious, thoughtful, and capable of anything you set your mind to.

To the students who I interviewed, thank you for entrusting me with your stories. I am so fortunate to know you. You give me faith that the world will be okay.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION	iii
DEDICATION	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xv
VITA	xvii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	4
A Note About Language	5
Language About Racial and Ethnic Identity	6
Latiné People	6
Latinidad	7
Brown People	7
Black People	8
Afro-Latiné People	8
Language About Systems of Racial Oppression	9
White Supremacy and White Supremacy Culture	10
Anti-Blackness and Anti-Black Racism	11
American Schools: A Pervasive Culture of Anti-Blackness	12
The Context: South Los Angeles	17
Study Overview	18
Research Questions	18

Study Design, Location, and Participants	19
Study Significance	20
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	28
Racial Schemas	30
The Americas: A Story of Colonization, White Supremacy, and Anti-Blackness	31
Racial Schemas in Latin America	34
Historical Racial Schemas in Latin America	34
Contemporary Racial Schemas in Latin America	35
Contemporary Racial Schemas in Mexico	37
Contemporary Racial Schemas in El Salvador	40
Racial Schemas in the United States	42
Contemporary Racial Schemas in the United States	42
Race in Los Angeles	43
Are Black Americans Anti-Latiné?	46
Black and Latiné Solidarity.....	48
White Supremacy and Anti-Blackness in Contemporary Latiné American Schools	51
Hispanic Serving Institutions as Sites of Anti-Blackness	54
Black and Afro-Latiné Students—Seen and Unseen	56
The Trope of “The Good Latiné Student versus the Bad Black Student”	58
Anti-Blackness and White Supremacy Among Non-Black Latiné Staff	60
Conclusion	63

CHAPTER 3: METHODS.....	66
Research Design and Rationale	66
Research Questions	69
Data Collection Methods	70
Semi-Structured, Individual Interviews	71
Participant Recruitment	72
Rationale for Site and Participant Selection	74
Data Analysis	76
Process Notes	76
Analytic Memos	77
Coding and Analysis	78
Positionality, Credibility, and Validity	79
Ethical Considerations	83
Limitations	84
Conclusion	84
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	86
Overview of Findings	86
Finding One: Frequent Anti-Blackness and Varied, Reactive Staff Responses	87
Everyday Anti-Black Racism	88
Racialized Language and Harm to Black and Afro-Latiné Students	88
Emotional Impact of Peer Anti-Blackness	91
Institutional Non-Response and Student Burden	92
Inconsistent Staff Responses	93

Minimal and Ineffective Responses	95
Reactive Systems	99
Finding Two: Racialized and Uneven Belonging	102
Peer Based Belonging	102
Positive Connections with Individual Staff	103
Student Experiences of Non-Belonging and Hypervisibility	106
Institutional Factors Related to Belonging	107
Uneven Discipline Practices	109
Finding Three: Silence and Avoidance Around Race and Constrained Racial Identity	
Development	111
Limited Representation in Curriculum and Risk of Student Harm in Curricular	
Conversations	111
Student Descriptions of Race	116
Rarity of School-Based Dialogue About Race and Student Perceptions of Staff	
Discomfort	119
Finding Four: The BSU as a Third Space	122
Safety, Authenticity, Community, and Belonging	123
Racial Dialogue	125
Identity Affirmation	128
Conclusion	130
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION	133
Study Purpose	134
Discussion and Significance of Key Findings	135

Finding One: Patterns Suggesting Institutional Failure	136
Frequent Racial Harm and Inconsistent Staff Responses	137
Student Experiences of Uneven Discipline Practices and Hypervisibility	138
A Limited Portrayal of Blackness	140
Exposure to Racial Diversity Without Addressing Race	142
Finding Two: Racial Congruence	144
“People of Color” Colorblindness	144
The Positive Impact of Black Staff	146
Finding Three: Conditional Belonging	148
Non-Instructional Staff as Cultivators of Belonging	148
The Black Student Union	150
Summary of Findings	152
Study Limitations	153
Recommendations	153
Recommendations for Majority Latiné Schools	153
Recommendations for Researchers	159
Personal Reflection and Conclusion	162
APPENDICES	164
Appendix A: Black Student Union Recruitment Presentation Parent Information Sheet, <i>English</i>	164

Appendix B: Black Student Union Recruitment Presentation Parent Information Sheet, <i>Spanish</i>	165
Appendix C: Student Interview Consent and Assent Forms, <i>English</i>	166
Appendix D: Student Interview Consent and Assent Forms, <i>Spanish</i>	175
Appendix E: Interview Protocol	184
Appendix F: Non-Verbal Behaviors Interview Protocol	191
Appendix G: Units of Observation Chart	194
Appendix H: Data Use Agreement	199
REFERENCES	206

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1. *Comparison of Staff Demographics and Student-Identified Connected Staff*

TABLE 2. *Black and Afro-Latiné Student Experiences Across School Spaces*

Whether conscious or implicit, the Latino alignment with whiteness that discriminates against Blackness, all while denying that Latinos are even capable of harboring bias, makes Latinos not only victims of racism themselves, but also part of the problem of white supremacy.

—Tanya Katerí Hernández, *Racial Innocence*

Bridging is about the emerging story of moving toward *us and us*, not *us versus them*.

—john a. powell, *The Power of Bridging*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

From my birth through 5th grade, my mom read aloud to my sisters and I nearly every night. We would snuggle around her as she acted out the characters' voices, begging for "just one more chapter" before bed. On long road trips to visit family, we listened to audiobooks and read in the car with little lamps around our necks for light. My dad could often be found in the hallway chair from 9 p.m. to 2 a.m., making his way through a stack of library books beside him.

At my grandparents' house, there were piles of *National Geographic*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. Books were constantly passed around upon completion—from my grandma Connie, to my mom, my sisters, my aunts, and my cousins. There was a small bookstore near their home where Connie and my grandpa Brad would take us, letting us pick out a book or two to keep.

Reading was a family passion, passed down through generations and one that exposed me to places and stories beyond my own. This love of reading nurtured both a vivid imagination and a deep appreciation for writing. Perhaps unsurprisingly, two of my sisters went on to become writers and editors, while the third, like me, became an elementary educator.

My parents prioritized our education and learning above all else, something I did not fully grasp until young adulthood. They did not spend money on material things for themselves, instead ensuring we had opportunities to pursue our passions. With four daughters, this was no easy feat. My mom and dad modeled, and continue to model, a love of lifelong learning, and I am eternally grateful for the sacrifices they made to ensure their daughters attended schools where they felt seen and could thrive.

There is no greater privilege than being born with sisters. Kelsey, Kate, and Hannah are my role models, confidants, cheerleaders, necessary critics, and best friends. I would be lost

without them. A special thank you to my baby sister Hannah, who generously helped edit all 163 pages of this manuscript.

Working in K–12 public education is, at its core, heart work. Over the past 17 years, I have been mentored, supported, and inspired by countless fellow educators. Being an elementary educator requires a level of patience, intelligence, passion, and responsibility that those outside the field can never fully understand. But the kids, the kids! The kids are the best. They bring such joy and hope, and it is a profound privilege to play a role in guiding them into the people they will become. I feel lucky to have been part of their lives.

A doctoral dissertation is a labor of love, and I entered UCLA with a clear intention to study the topic at the center of this research. In the spring of my second year, I began experiencing debilitating health symptoms, which ultimately led to chemotherapy in March of the following year. While I had planned to use that time to conduct observations, my study had to shift accordingly. I am not entirely sure how I completed this degree just two months after finishing chemotherapy, but I know it was largely because of the love and support of my family and my closest friends—Elissa, Julia, and Katie. I would not have made it without you.

I am deeply grateful to my committee chair, Dr. Julissa Muñoz, who spent countless hours discussing my ideas, research, and writing with me. Thank you for your guidance and friendship. To Dr. John Rogers and Dr. Michael Singh, thank you for your feedback and support. I am incredibly fortunate to have had such a thoughtful committee cheering me on.

I am so thankful for my UCLA cohort crew, who understood better than anyone the reality of balancing a full-time job in a school while completing a doctoral program. Hey Shani, we did it!

VITA

2003–2005	B.A., Literatures of the World, African American Studies University of California, San Diego La Jolla, California (transferred in 2005)
2008	B.A. Honors, English and American Literature University of East Anglia Norwich, United Kingdom
2009–2011	Playworks Program Coordinator Portland Public Schools Portland, Oregon
2009	Rookie of the Year Award Playworks Oregon
2012	M.A.T., Early Childhood and Elementary Education Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education Portland, Oregon
2012	Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential, Middle Grades Social Science and English Language Arts Endorsement Oregon Standards and Practices Commission
2012–2018	Teacher, Equity Lead Portland Public Schools Portland, Oregon
2017	Oregon Elementary Social Studies Teacher of the Year Oregon Council for the Social Studies Oregon
2018–2021	Teacher, Curriculum Developer, Equity Lead Evergreen Public Schools Vancouver, Washington
2019	Alumni Teacher of the Year Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education Portland, Oregon
2019	Minidoka Pilgrimage Fellowship Japanese American Citizens League
2020	Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality Summer Institute

	African American Policy Forum
2021	Heart Mountain Fellowship National Endowment for the Humanities
2021–2023	Director of Equity and Inclusion Riverdale School District Portland, Oregon
2025–2026	Assistant Principal, Regional Equity Lead Aspire Public Schools Los Angeles, California
2026–present	Principal Citizens of the World Charter Schools Los Angeles, California

PRESENTATIONS

- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Teaching Japanese American Incarceration in the Elementary Classroom*. Northwest Teachers for Social Justice Annual Conference, October 2017, Seattle, WA.
- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Teaching Japanese American Incarceration in the Elementary Classroom*. Oregon Council for Social Studies Annual Conference, October 2018, Monmouth, OR.
- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Teaching Japanese American Incarceration in the Elementary Classroom*. Northwest Teachers for Social Justice Annual Conference, October 2018, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Social Justice in the Elementary Classroom*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, April 2018, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Teaching in the Time of Trump*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, May 2018, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Social Justice in the Elementary Classroom*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, June 2018, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. & Dingus, E. *Social Justice in the Elementary Classroom*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, January 2019, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. *Talking About Racial Incidents in Schools*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, July 2020, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. *Black Lives Matter in Schools*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, February 2021, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. *Education and Activism*. Lewis and Clark Graduate School of Education, November 2022, Portland, OR.
- Rotwein, A. *Student Engagement and Community Partnerships*. Towards Just Histories Project, November 2024, Philadelphia, PA.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

I met Ava on the first day of school in August, 2023. She was tall for a 6-year-old, and her playful humor and easy affection meant that I could not help but smile in her presence, even when she was being a little naughty. While educators are not supposed to have favorites, Ava was a staff favorite. You could not help but love her.

In March of that school year, I received a text from Ava's 1st-grade teacher, saying an incident occurred and she needed my support. When I stepped into the classroom and saw Ava's face, with one slow tear rolling down it, I knew something serious had happened. I guided her into the hallway, and she reached for my hand as we walked to a private space to talk.

Ava, who is Black, told me that she had stepped in front of a Latiné boy to get her math supplies. He responded by saying, "Don't touch the clock, N-word."

I felt a surge of shock but knew I had to compose myself in order to support Ava. Later that day, after conversations with both students, I called the boy's mother. She was upset and apologetic, and she explained that her son had likely learned the language from his older cousins in middle and high school, who used the word frequently.

I moved to Los Angeles in the summer of 2023 after 14 years working in public schools in the Portland, Oregon, metropolitan area. Over that time, I had taught in a range of settings, including majority Latiné schools, majority white schools, and racially diverse schools—at my first site, more than 20 languages were spoken among the student population.

When I began my role as assistant principal at a school in South Central Los Angeles, it was the first time I had worked in a setting where the student population was overwhelmingly from one ethnoracial group, in this case, 90% Latiné (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April 2026). In my previous schools, the majority population typically ranged from 60–70%. It was also my first experience working in a district where the staff were predominantly people of color; at my new site, approximately 94% of staff identified as such (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April 2026).

In many ways, the school felt familiar. Kindergartners, for example, are always lost little ducklings during the first few weeks of school. What I had not anticipated, however, was how different the racial dynamics would feel in Los Angeles compared to Portland. While both cities share histories of redlining and de facto segregation, Los Angeles felt distinct in the way that crossing a single street could dramatically shift the racial makeup of a space. Demographic data from the 2020 Census indicated that the neighborhood in which I worked was 81% Latiné and 16% Black, with 40% of adults born outside of the United States, 99% of whom were from Latin America (Census Reporter, 2026).

Similarly, at my school, the racial dynamics felt markedly different from those I had previously experienced. In the 14 years prior, I could recall only two instances of non-Black elementary students using the N-word, and in both cases, the term was used in conversation rather than directed at or about Black individuals. I was therefore unprepared when, in September, I learned that two separate groups of non-Black Latiné sixth graders were using the word daily, both casually and in reference to the only two Black boys in their grade.

In the months that followed, additional incidents occurred. As mentioned above, Ava was called the N-word. Shortly after, a group of second-grade Latiné boys began using the word with one another and toward a staff member. The frequency and normalization of this language was striking. While my godson Diroke, who is Black, had been called the N-word by Latiné opponents at soccer games, those incidents occurred at the high school level. I had, perhaps mistakenly, presumed this was because teenagers were exposed to Hate Speech online. Experiencing this behavior among such young children was both unexpected and deeply concerning.

For the three years prior to my move, I served as the inaugural Director of Equity and Inclusion in a public school district. I chose to work in my current district, Achieve Los Angeles (pseudonym), in part because of its stated commitment to dismantling structural inequities and uplifting historically marginalized communities. If I was going to leave a role explicitly focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion, I wanted to be in a system where those values were embedded in the broader mission.

As assistant principal, I oversaw student climate and culture, including identifying patterns in absenteeism, behavior, and student sense of belonging. In response to the frequency of anti-Black language, I conducted a small case study in the spring of 2024 at Achieve South Central Campus, the site where I worked. Achieve South Central Campus encompassed multiple Achieve elementary schools. I interviewed two Black students, one Afro-Latiné student, and one Black staff member about their experiences.

The findings were clear. Black and Afro-Latiné students and Black staff were routinely exposed to racial harm. Students experienced anti-Blackness from peers, while staff encountered

it from both students and colleagues. Efforts to support Black and Afro-Latiné students' racial identities were largely reactive rather than proactive. The staff member described support for his own racial identity as inconsistent, highly dependent on the individuals present at a given site and in a given year.

These experiences were not isolated incidents. They pointed to a broader pattern, one this study seeks to name, center, and disrupt.

Statement of the Problem

This qualitative study explored 3rd–6th grade Black and Afro-Latiné student experiences in predominantly Latiné public schools in South Central Los Angeles. Research by Gamez (2023), Hernández (2022), Shange (2019), and Zamora (2022) indicates that anti-Blackness is pervasive in predominantly Latiné schools and is negatively impacting students of all racial backgrounds. While racism in the United States is often framed solely as white people causing harm to people of color, this narrative ignores the ways in which white supremacy functions and results in complicity in anti-Blackness among non-Black people of color (Aronson & Stohry, 2023). As Singh (2023) points out, a great deal of research has focused on supporting Black students in majority white institutions, while very little research has gone into understanding their educational experiences in school settings that are majority Latiné. Additionally, there is a deep denial among many people of Latin American descent about the extent to which anti-Blackness is embedded in contemporary *Latinidad* (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014; Hernández, 2022; Roth, 2012).

Research indicates that student sense of belonging in elementary school impacts academic growth, behavior, and sense of self-worth, both in the short- and long-term (Allen et al., 2016; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Finn, 1989; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hawkins et al.,

1999–2003). When a student experiences racial harm at school, it negatively impacts their sense of belonging, which in turn impacts their academics, behavior, and confidence (Cook et al., 2012). There is a crucial need to center research on the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students in majority Latiné schools in order to shift current practices and improve outcomes for students. Using a *relational race framework* (Lipsitz et al., 2019), powell and Galloway-Popotas (2024) theory of *bridging and belonging*, and the framework of anti-Blackness (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Sexton, 2010), this study will provide information about the real experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students in predominantly Latiné elementary schools and share ideas for ways to improve student sense of belonging and racial identity affirmation.

A Note About Language

Language, and the way it is used, can be highly effective in both maintaining and disrupting systems of power and oppression. For example, referring to people who enter the United States through unsanctioned border crossings as “illegal aliens” conjures up very different images than referring to those same people as “climate or violence refugees.” The phrase “illegal aliens” implies people who are “alien,” that is, not human, and “illegal” implies law-breaking, which connotes immorality, violence, and a disregard for following rules. In contrast, “climate or violence refugee” implies someone who has been impacted by an environmental disaster or unsafe situation and had to flee their home country. The phrase invokes sympathy and sadness. In reality, these terms are referring to the same people—people who entered the United States through channels that are not legal, due to factors in their home country that are out of their control. Yet the intentional choice to use one phrase or another will directly impact people’s views towards and treatment of the aforementioned individuals.

In education, we use many acronyms and catchphrases. There always seems to be a new initiative with a clever name or slogan promising to be the silver bullet that fixes broken systems and pervasive inequality. Often, we are not specific enough or intentional enough with the language we use. In this paper, I aim to be as specific as possible with language in order to highlight and give power to groups whose identities are rarely centered. I also hope that in providing these definitions, we begin to think more about the meaning of words and the history behind them.

Language About Racial and Ethnic Identity

This section defines common racial and ethnic terms and the ways they will be used in this paper.

Latiné People

There are many terms historically used to describe people whose ancestors are from Latin America—including Latino, Latina, Hispanic, Latinx, and Latiné. The word “Latinx” is a gender-inclusive term that originated in the United States in the 2000s. The use of the word Latinx has been criticized by many native Spanish speakers because the “x” does not align with the Spanish language in terms of speaking or meaning (T. Garcia, 2022). When an “x” is placed at the end of a word in Spanish, it means “not,” so the word is essentially saying “not Latino/a.” Additionally, although it is unclear who coined the word, it originated in the Global North. In a bilingual study by Pew Research Center in 2019, “only 23% of U.S. adults who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino have heard of the term Latinx, and just 3% say they use it to describe themselves” (Pew Research Center, 2019). The word “Latiné ” is a recent gender-neutral term that originated in Latin America (T. Garcia, 2022). The term Latiné will be used in this paper in order to be gender-inclusive and to center language that comes from native Spanish speakers.

You will note that cited texts may use the words Latino, Latina, Hispanic, Latinx, and Latiné, and that individuals may use these words to describe themselves. The words can be understood as referring to the same population.

Many organizations and individuals use the terms Latino, Latina, Hispanic, Latinx, and Latiné to describe *racial identity*. However, Latiné is an *ethnic identity* label, and people who are Latiné can be of any racial identity or identities (Nuñez et al., 2024).

Latinidad

The ethnic category of “Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent” was first added to the U.S. Census in 1980 (Nuñez et al., 2024). Prior to that, the majority of Latiné individuals in the United States self-identified their ethnicity based on country of origin (Roth 2012; Zamora, 2022). The construction of this category in the U.S. Census led to the popularization of the term *Latinidad*, that is, the idea of a shared Latin American culture, whether in Latin America itself or in diasporic communities (Zamora, 2022). It is important to note that the idea of *Latinidad* falls within a uniquely United States racial and ethnic schema (Roth, 2012; Zamora 2022). The majority of individuals living in Latin America still identify by country of origin, rather than a shared Latiné identity, prior to their arrival in the United States (Roth, 2012; Zamora 2022). These *racial schemas* will be discussed at length in Chapter 2.

Brown People

The term “Brown” is often used in education, research, and the media as a broad label for a number of non-Black and non-white racial identities. It is not a stagnant definition, and in my research and life experience, there are a wide range of views about who is “considered” to be “Brown.” In research and literature, the term “Brown” has been used to describe all of the following groups of people: Indigenous people, Latiné people, Middle Eastern people,

multiracial people, North African people, Pacific Islanders, South Asian people, and Southeast Asian people (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Silva, 2016). This does not mean there is unanimous consensus on who is considered “Brown” (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Silva, 2016). There are researchers who only include some of the groups listed above in their definition of “Brown” identity (Gonzalez et al., 2022; Silva, 2016). The term “Brown” is not a synonym for the phrase “people of color,” because “people of color” also includes individuals of East Asian and Black descent (Silva, 2016).

Black People

“Black” is an umbrella term that refers to anyone of African ancestry (Burke, 2024). In the United States, this can include people who are African American, African, Caribbean, Afro-Latiné, or of mixed ancestry (Burke, 2024). Race in the United States is seen through a Black-white binary, where “one-drop” of Black blood, or any Black ancestry, means that a person is considered Black (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Roth, 2012; Wilkerson, 2020). This narrative dates back to chattel slavery and is due to the frequent raping of enslaved Black women by white enslavers, as well as white women’s obsession with keeping those offspring enslaved and in positions of subservience (Wilkerson, 2020). Within this racial schema, “anyone with any degree of discernable African ancestry is Black” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023, p. 176). The term Black is not a synonym for African American (Burke, 2024). African American is a term that refers to Americans whose ancestors were enslaved in the United States (Burke, 2024).

Afro-Latiné People

The term “Afro-Latiné” refers to people who are of both African and Latin American descent (Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010). Similar to the term Black, it is an umbrella term (Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010). For example, someone who is descended from enslaved

African people in Latin America is Afro-Latiné. Someone who has an African American parent and a Mexican American parent is Afro-Latiné. Someone who has a Nigerian parent and a Puerto Rican parent is Afro-Latiné. Afro-Latiné people are rarely included in research, history, discourse, or media about Black Americans *or* Latiné Americans (Busey & Cruz, 2015, Hernández, 2022; Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010). In contemporary settings, “Afro-Latinos in the United States consistently report racist treatment at the hands of other Latinos in addition to being perceived as outsiders to the construction of Latino identity” (Hernández, 2021). This denial of Afro-Latiné identity both historically and today has resulted in near unanimous rejection of the phrase “Black and Brown” among Afro-Latiné individuals, as it renders them invisible (V. Garcia, 2022; Hernández, 2022). There are only a handful of studies that even mention their experiences in K–12 schools (Alicia, 2023; V. Garcia, 2022). The majority of higher education research on Latiné students has treated them as a monolithic group that exists in between the racial categories of Black and white in terms of privilege and oppression (Dache et al., 2019). This again results in the erasure of Afro-Latiné students who experience less privilege and more oppression than their non-Black Latiné peers (Gamez, 2023; Hernández, 2022; Telles, 2014). In this paper, in order to highlight the differences between various Black communities in the United States and center the experiences of those who are of both African and Latin American descent, Afro-Latiné people will be highlighted as a distinct group, rather than placed under the umbrella terms of Black or Latiné.

Language About Systems of Racial Oppression

This section defines racial systems and structures that result in hierarchies, privilege, oppression, and marginalization.

White Supremacy and White Supremacy Culture

White supremacy is the belief in the inherent superiority of white people (Okun, 2023). White supremacy can be a conscious belief, as shown by the neo-Nazis who marched in Charlottesville in August of 2017 to protest the removal of a Confederate statue, open in their hatred of anyone who they deemed “not white” and resulting in the brutal murder of counter-protester Heather Heyer (Elliott, 2022). More often, however, white supremacy and white supremacy culture are an unconscious belief (Delgado & Stefania, 2023). White supremacy culture functions as a set of norms and practices where whiteness is seen as the default, “where white culture is normalized and universalized, while cultures of color are demonized, exoticized, or erased” (Oluo, 2020). It is the belief that white people hold power because of merit, because they “pulled themselves up by their bootstraps,” which is a convenient way to deny the history of colonialism and enslavement while also blaming people of color for not holding power (Saini, 2019). It is the way that white men, such as Abraham Lincoln, are celebrated in history books because of his *Emancipation Proclamation*, which “freed the slaves,” despite the fact he believed that Black people were of an inferior race (Saini, 2019). It is the way in which Charles Darwin’s scientific theory of evolution was proof to him, and to others, of the superiority of the white race over all other racial groups (Saini, 2019). Tema Okun (2023) describes white supremacy culture as:

[T]he widespread ideology baked into the beliefs, values, norms, and standards of our groups (many if not most of them), our communities, our towns, our states, our nation, teaching us both overtly and covertly that whiteness holds value, whiteness is value. (p. 4)

White supremacy culture is pervasive, embedded in every system—beauty standards, citizenship, criminal justice and criminalization, education, housing, jobs, media, policing, voting, and so on (Okun, 2023). White supremacy culture exists in all communities, even those in which no white people live. It offers a racial bribe to people of color, as it “promises to reward BIPOC communities and people who collude in an effort to survive; the encouragement to assimilate and adapt to these characteristics often promises the illusion of safety while in reality rarely doing so” (Okun, 2023, p. 5). White supremacy culture effectively pits communities of color against each other, which will be expanded upon further in Chapter 2.

Anti-Blackness and Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Blackness refers to the systemic devaluation and marginalization of Black people within racialized social, political, and economic structures (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Sexton, 2010). Black people are positioned at the bottom of these hierarchies, where institutional practices and social structures systematically deny full humanity and produce persistent inequality (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Sexton, 2010). Anti-Blackness emphasizes a historical and contemporary throughline from enslavement to the treatment of Black people today, demonstrating how past systems of racial domination continue to shape present-day social, political, and economic conditions (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021).

This throughline is evident in the way Blackness is associated by many with a predilection towards violence, a lack of intelligence, and inherent criminality (Delgado & Stefania, 2023; Okun, 2023; Wilkerson, 2020). Frantz Fanon’s seminal 1952 book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, uses the term “Negrophobia” to describe what we refer to as anti-Blackness today—fear, hatred, and avoidance of association with Blackness. Much like white supremacy

culture, anti-Blackness is pervasive, embedded in every system, and manifests as ideological, institutional, interpersonal, and internalized oppression (Bell, 2013; Wilkerson, 2020).

While anti-Blackness shows up in beliefs, systems, and structures, anti-Black racism is the way those beliefs result in actions or inactions. For example, a 2016 study examined factors that contribute to elementary school students being identified as “gifted,” a term which refers to students who receive accelerated academic opportunities due to their high scores on intellectual assessments (Grissom & Redding, 2016). The study was expansive and included 14,280 students across schools throughout the United States (Grissom & Redding, 2016). The study revealed that even when Black students had identical high scores in the “gifted” range as their non-Black peers, they were referred by teachers to gifted programming at significantly lower rates (Grissom & Redding, 2016). This was the case when the teachers self-identified as white, Latiné, or Asian, the only exception was when the teacher identified as Black (Grissom & Redding, 2016). When that was the case, Black students were referred at nearly an equal rate to their non-Black classmates (Grissom & Redding, 2016). The stereotype that Black people are less intelligent than non-Black people is part of anti-Blackness and has historical roots in enslavement and scientific racism (Saini, 2019; Wilkerson, 2020). The underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programming, even when their test scores indicate they should be identified as such, is an indication of this stereotype, and thus anti-Black racism, in action. Furthermore, when it is evident across such a large swath of school sites, it displays the systemic and structural nature of this problem.

American Schools: A Pervasive Culture of Anti-Blackness

White supremacy and anti-Blackness are built into the fabric of American schools (Dumas, 2014, 2016). Since desegregation, Black students and staff have attended and worked in

schools that are the sites of marginalization, harm, and oppression (Dumas, 2014, 2016). This has resulted in high exclusion rates, low graduation rates, and association with the school to prison pipeline for Black students (Singh, 2023). This has furthered the narrative of Blackness being a problem, rather than the system itself (Berry & Stovall, 2013). The Black-white binary of the U.S. racial schema leaves non-Black people of color in the middle and having to choose which space to occupy (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Roth, 2012). As whiteness is affirmed and Blackness is demonized, it is unsurprising that this results in non-Black people of color replicating these same dynamics: aligning with whiteness while distancing themselves from Blackness (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Gamez, 2023; Roth, 2012).

White supremacy in schools has also created systems of oppression for Latiné students. As a result, research has focused on shifting outcomes for Black and Latiné students, particularly boys (Pearman et al., 2019). Researchers and practitioners frequently lump “Black and Brown” students together in their approaches to school improvement (Jenkins, 2023; Singh, 2024). While the intent is good, the merging of these groups results in both an erasure of Afro-Latiné student identities and an ignoring of the reality that these two communities are both deeply diverse and have profoundly different cultures and histories (V. Garcia, 2022).

The conflation of these two groups is particularly problematic for Black and Afro-Latiné students who attend majority Latiné schools. There is little empirical research on the experiences of Black students in such school settings (Jenkins, 2023). Overwhelmingly, studies have focused on supporting Black students in predominantly white institutions, while very little research has gone into understanding their educational experiences among other non-Black people of color (Pearman et al., 2019).

Many Latiné people living in the United States claim that they learned anti-Blackness from white Americans and from wider American culture (Hernández, 2022; Zamora, 2022). Extensive research, historical data, and contemporary data about Latin American and Caribbean countries indicate that anti-Blackness is entrenched in *Latinidad*, and is not “learned” upon moving to the United States (Hernández, 2022; Telles, 2014; Zamora, 2022). Colonialism and enslavement led to similar racial hierarchies in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014; Hernández, 2022; Schmidt-Nowara, 2011; Telles, 2014). Scholarship “attributes anti-Black attitudes to the historical entrenchment of anti-Blackness in Latin American societies since colonization” (Zamora, 2022, p. 15). Chapter 2 will dig into this history in depth, and connect it to contemporary racial views among Latiné communities in Los Angeles. Anti-Blackness is certainly not minimized by the racial dynamics of the United States, but to claim that being a person of color means you cannot be racist or to claim that anti-Blackness is “learned” upon arriving in the United States is a denial of the racial history and present day racial systems that exist throughout *Latinidad* (Hernández, 2022; Zamora, 2022).

The majority of Latiné students in the United States attend schools where 75% of their classmates are people of color, and 55% of Latiné students attend schools where they are the majority (Contreras, 2024; NCES, 2024). In such settings, where there are few or no white students, being Latiné functions as a *constrained credential*, giving non-Black Latiné students access and privileges not afforded to their Afro-Latiné and Black peers due to their closer proximity to whiteness (Gamez, 2023). This form of *conditional whiteness* results in a replication of white supremacy and anti-Blackness among non-Black people of color (Jenkins, 2023). This replication is not limited to non-Black students of color (Gamez, 2023). While teachers of color are often seen as the solution to improving outcomes and experiences for

students of color (whether from the same racial and ethnic community or not), research has revealed that Latiné teachers perpetuate anti-Black beliefs (Jenkins, 2023; Singh, 2023). Studies have shown that Latiné educators deny that Afro-Latiné students belong to “their community,” even when told that the students speak Spanish and are from the same country of origin (Jenkins, 2023; Gamez, 2023). When taken alone, these stories can be ignored as “one offs,” or as one Latiné educator told me, “that’s just something uneducated Latinos do.” In reality, these stories, and the stories shared by Black and Afro-Latiné students and staff about Latiné staff perpetuating racial harm, speak to the broader systemic nature of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in schools. One place that this is evident is in discipline data. A 2023 study showed that Black students are disciplined at higher rates than other students for similar behaviors, and that these rates remain nearly the same whether they have white, Latiné, or Asian teachers (Hayes et al., 2023). When Black students have a Black teacher, this disproportionate discipline rate is significantly lower (Hayes et al., 2023).

This study will use a *relational race framework* to analyze the positionality of Latiné students, Afro-Latiné students, and Black students in relation to one another (Lipsitz et al., 2019; Singh, 2024). This framework differs from traditional Critical Race Theory because “a relational conception of race takes into account the way racialization happens not just in relation to whiteness but in relation to other subordinated groups” (Singh, 2024, p. 178). The focus on comparing the experiences and outcomes of white students to “students of color” as a group not only ignores the differences between and within racial and ethnic communities, but also ignores the way *conditional whiteness* exists in schools where there are no white students present (Singh, 2024; Hernández, 2022).

This study will also use anti-Blackness as a framework to examine race and racial structures within majority Latiné schools. Anti-Blackness, like *relational race theory*, is rooted in *Critical Race Theory* and emphasizes the ways racial hierarchies are organized through the systemic devaluation of Blackness (Jung & Vargas, 2021; Sexton, 2010). Of particular note for the context of this paper, the framework critiques the construct “people of color” as inadequately conflating distinct and unequal group experiences, particularly in ways that obscure the specific structural positioning of Black people (Sexton, 2010). While educational research and practice continues to group “students of color” together, we can, and must, do better.

An additional framework that will be used is *racial identity theory*. *Racial identity theory* suggests that racial identity development begins in early childhood, emerging as children learn to recognize difference and make meaning of race (Winkler, 2009). Although race and racial categories are social constructs, they shape individuals’ everyday experiences and interactions (Nuñez, 2024). Much of this learning takes place in schools, where students are exposed to both explicit and implicit messages about race through curriculum, school practices and systems, social dynamics, and adult actions, whether or not race is directly addressed (Lewis, 2008; Pollock, 2004). Within these contexts, students develop understandings of their own racial identities as well as ideas about the racial identities of others, and these processes occur simultaneously (Nasir, 2011). It is my hope that this study will provide information about ways that elementary school experiences impact racial identity development, in both positive and negative ways.

How can schools create a culture where all students feel that they belong while also genuinely honoring the diversity of their communities? In their book, *The Power of Bridging*, Powell and Galloway-Popotas (2024) outline an approach that can be adopted by schools and

other institutions. Their theory of *bridging and belonging* centers on the idea that belonging is a fundamental human need and is produced through social, structural, and institutional conditions rather than individual attitudes alone (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). *Belonging* refers to being seen and valued within a space, while *bridging* describes intentional processes that connect individuals and groups without requiring assimilation or the erasure of identity (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). *Bridging* requires a systems approach that takes into account historical context and structural inequality, and is most effective when supported by policies, narratives, and institutions that foster inclusion (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). Within this framework, schools can either facilitate belonging through inclusive practices or reinforce exclusion through neglect, colorblindness, or the requirement of assimilation. In the context of this research, powell’s theory of *bridging and belonging* will help with analyzing the way that systems do or do not promote genuine belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students, as well as providing a roadmap for approaches that may work for building more bridging between all members of our school communities (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024).

The Context: South Los Angeles

The county with the largest Latiné population in the United States is Los Angeles County. In the 2020 Census, 4.8 million residents (47.2%) of Los Angeles County identified as “Hispanic” (Pew Research Center, 2022; United States Census Bureau, 2023). In the same Census, 8.5% of residents in Los Angeles County identified as “Black alone” (United States Census Bureau, 2023). In the 2023–24 school year, 72% of students in Los Angeles County were Latiné and 12% were Black (California Department of Education, Data Quest, 2024). Regardless of the racial and ethnic diversity of Los Angeles, neighborhoods remain racially segregated (Census Reporter, 2023). The neighborhoods with the highest concentration of Latiné residents

are in South Los Angeles, Southeast Los Angeles, and the communities Northwest of the city boundary (Census Reporter, 2023). While South Los Angeles was a historically Black community, many neighborhoods have experienced demographic shifts in the last 20 years (Zamora, 2022). Many areas of the city that were previously majority Black are now majority Latiné (Zamora, 2022).

Although Black and Latiné communities live within the same neighborhoods in South Los Angeles, this has not resulted in harmonious interracial relationships (Hernández, 2022; Zamora, 2022). Quite the contrary, in fact. In her book, *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*, Hernández (2022) states, “No other multiracial city has reported Los Angeles’ level of Latino anti-Black assaults” (p. 112). At Los Angeles high schools, there have been a plethora of race-related brawls, often sparked by anti-Black slurs (Hernández, 2022). Despite living in the same communities, stereotypes of Black people as violent and lazy prevail among Latiné residents in wider Los Angeles (Zamora, 2022).

Study Overview

Situated within this backdrop are K–12 public and charter schools. The objective of this study was to learn about and center the experiences of Afro-Latiné and Black students in predominantly Latiné elementary schools, as well as provide strategies to improve student sense of belonging and racial identity affirmation.

Research Questions

These research questions focus on illuminating the experiences and perceptions of Black and Afro-Latiné 3rd–6th grade students through a *relational race framework*.

1. How, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students perceive incidents of anti-Black Hate Speech and anti-Black racism within a predominantly Latiné school?

2. To what extent, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students describe feeling a sense of belonging within a predominantly Latiné school?
3. What factors (e.g. spaces, policies, practices), if any, within the school environment, contribute towards a student's racial identity development?

Study Design, Location, and Participants

This was a phenomenological, qualitative study. This study was phenomenological in that the objective was to understand the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné 3rd–6th grade students in their own words. The phenomena studied were: student experiences of anti-Blackness, student sense of belonging, and student racial identity development.

The qualitative data gathering method in this study was semi-structured, individual interviews. This study sought to address several gaps in educational research: (1) the entrenchment of anti-Blackness in predominantly Latiné schools; (2) the tendency to group “Black and Brown” students together in research and practice; (3) the omission of Afro-Latiné identities and experiences in K–12 scholarship; (4) and the limited focus on racial dynamics within research on elementary schools.

Study participants included students in grades 3rd–6th who self-identified as either Black or Afro-Latiné and were part of their schools Black Student Union. Eleven students participated in this study.

Interviews took place on Achieve South Central Campus, which encompassed more than one Achieve elementary school. Each school had a Black Student Union (BSU), and the BSUs met twice-weekly, once during lunch for 20–40 minutes and once after school for an hour. Once a month, the after school meeting included students from numerous schools. The BSU was composed of students and staff who self-identified as Black and/or Afro-Latiné.

In order to find interview participants, I presented my dissertation topic and goals at one of the monthly BSU meetings. Students who were interested in participating were able to sign up and then proceed through the parent/guardian consent process.

Study Significance

This study differs from previous and existing research in that it centered the voices of Black and Afro-Latiné students attending majority Latiné schools. There were very few existing studies on this topic, and in my review of the literature, I was unable to identify any studies that centered solely on student voices, nor any that contained interviews with elementary school students. This study also differed from existing research because of the focus on Afro-Latiné students, who are rendered invisible in the majority of current studies. García-Louis and Cortes (2023) write:

AfroLatinxs are forced to negotiate multiple cultures, panethnicity, and the U.S. social construction of race and ethnicity, further removing them from the stereotypic Latinx. Higher education researchers have failed to capture these nuances; in part due to their inability to move beyond the monoracial categorization of Latinxs and an obliviousness to AfroLatinidad altogether. The homogenization of racial and ethnic categories in educational research has led to the systematic exclusion of AfroLatinx students. (p. 185)

There are many reasons that elementary-age students' voices have not been centered in current research—valid concerns about protecting young children, the difficulty of gaining approval from Institutional Review Boards, caregiver concerns about discussing such topics, and the misconception that elementary school children do not have the awareness or capacity to talk about and understand race. In reality, there is a great deal of research that demonstrates that race,

and conceptions about race, begin as soon as babies begin to recognize faces (Winkler, 2009). While studies that explicitly interview elementary school students about race are rare, there are studies that focus on conversations about race with this age group through the use of curriculum. Rogers and Mosley (2006) implemented a race-centered literacy curriculum in Rogers' 2nd grade classroom to generate conversations about racism, whiteness, inequality, and difference. They found that students had the capacity to have such discussions and developed "racial literacy," that is, the ability to think critically about race and discuss race, through their use of curriculum (Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

There are a number of similar ethnographic studies that focus on how schools and the actions (and inactions) within them influence students' racial identity development (Delpit, 2002; Delpit, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Shange, 2019). While race, and more specifically, "street race"—the race that people are assumed to be while walking down the street—have a huge impact on our day-to-day lives, we often forget that race and racial categories are a social construct (Nuñez, 2024). For young people, who are learning to navigate and understand the world, much of their learning about these constructs takes place in school (Lewis, 2008; Nasir, 2011). Lewis (2008) writes, "Schools play a role in the production of race as a social category both through implicit and explicit lessons and school practices" (p. 188). In her book, Nasir (2011) investigates how schools impact the racial development, or "racialization," of African American youth. She points out that there are two layers to this, one being the ways that African American youth develop ideas about their own identity, and the other being the ways that non-African American youth learn about African American identity at school (Nasir, 2011). Both are occurring simultaneously, and whether adults choose to explicitly talk about race or not, subtle messages are constantly being conveyed about racial stereotypes and racial hierarchies (Nasir, 2011). In her

two-year ethnographic study at a California high school, Pollock (2004) had similar findings, noting that staff's colorblind approach to discussing race only resulted in a replication and continuation of harmful stereotypes and existing racial hierarchies. McKown and Weinstein (2003) studied at what age children develop stereotype consciousness, that is, the awareness that other individuals and groups believe stereotypes about their racial identity. Their research focused on students aged 6–10, and they found that by age 10, 93% of students across racial groups were able to identify personal stereotypes, that is, when an interaction indicated that an individual held a racial stereotype (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). When it came to an understanding that groups of people hold racial stereotypes about other racial groups, 80% of Black children and Latiné children understood this by age ten, and 63% of white children and Asian children understood this by age ten (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). There were children as young as six who understood these concepts, and across all racial groups understanding increased with age, with Black and Latiné students consistently having awareness of these concepts at a higher rate than their white and Asian peers (McKown & Weinstein, 2003). The choice to interview students in grades 3rd–6th for this study was intentional. Students in this age group are aware of racial dynamics and deserve the opportunity to talk about what they experience. Whether staff choose to address the topic of race with students or not, all of these studies show that racial identity development takes place in schools (Lewis, 2008; McKown & Weinstein, 2003; Nasir, 2011; Pollock, 2004).

Research indicates that giving students the opportunity to share about their school experiences can have a number of positive outcomes. In his interviews with elementary schoolers, Damiani (2014) found that giving students the opportunity to speak about their negative school experiences with site leadership increased their sense of belonging. Inquiry

groups, a form of group interviews, have been used in high schools to center the voices of students of color and provide them an opportunity to help shift wider practices (Jones & Yonezawa, 2002). Additionally, the practice of interviewing marginalized youth can in itself be a means of rehumanizing. Muñiz (2024) spent three years interviewing incarcerated Black and Mexican youth about their experiences. In a space where they had little or no autonomy and power, she found that the pedagogy and act of hearing and sharing their stories served as a way for them to reclaim their humanity. In the case study that I conducted at my school site in 2024, Black and Afro-Latiné students shared with me that this was the first time an adult had asked for their input on how to make their racialized school experiences better. Parents of the students told me how much it meant to them and their children that I took the time to hear their stories.

This study was intentionally conducted with students in grades 3rd–6th because of the significance of these grades on long-term school and life outcomes (Balfanz, 2009; Chang & Romero, 2008; Raffaele Mendez, 2003). In 2009, a literature and research review was conducted by the National Middle School Association to ascertain the impact of the middle grades (grades 5th–8th) on high school graduation rates (Balfanz, 2009). The study determined that between 80% and 90% of 6th grade students who either fail math or reading do not graduate from high school on time (Balfanz, 2009). The study also indicated that students who struggle with behavior in 6th grade or miss more than 20% of the school year due to chronic absenteeism have low on-time graduation rates (Balfanz, 2009). Research on younger age groups is similar. A 2008 study by the National Center for Children in Poverty found that students who are chronically absent in kindergarten are the subset who are furthest behind grade level in math and reading in 5th grade (Chang & Romero, 2008). Raffaele Mendez (2003) conducted a longitudinal study which followed students from kindergarten through 6th grade, with a focus on exclusionary

discipline, which means student suspensions and expulsions. The study revealed that there was a correlation between behavior in 3rd grade and the number of suspensions a student received in 6th grade (Raffaele Mendez, 2003). The study also found that the best predictor of suspensions in middle school and high school was previous suspensions in grades three and four (Raffaele Mendez, 2003). Like many prior studies found, Black males with disabilities were suspended at the highest rate, followed by Black males without a disability (Raffaele Mendez, 2003). Taken together, these three studies indicate how deeply important the elementary school years are for student attendance, academic growth, and behavioral support. When these things are not in place, the long-term outcomes are dire. One way that schools can help combat these issues is by improving student sense of belonging.

While public schools often prioritize academics above all else due to immense pressure to demonstrate student growth, research in the last few decades has shown that if we want students to learn, they must feel that they belong and are cared about in their school environment (Allen et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2012; Finn, 1989; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hawkins et al., 1999–2003). This concept, student sense of belonging, is the degree to which students feel included, supported, and connected to others within their school community (Goodenow & Grady, 1993). As students are intersectional beings, all aspects of their identity, including ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and additional markers contribute to the ways in which they feel that they do or do not belong in any given space. Researchers have found a few key factors that contribute to student sense of belonging, including: culturally responsive practices, student and teacher relationships, and social emotional learning (Allen et al., 2016). While the majority of studies focus on middle school and high

school students, there are a handful of studies that reveal the short and long-term impact of sense of belonging during elementary school.

Finn (1989) conducted a literature review to measure the long term impact of what he calls the “participation-identification” model. This model examines how student sense of belonging, mutual respect, and the feeling of being a valued member of the school community affects high school dropout rates (Finn, 1989). It found a link between students feeling a sense of belonging as early as preschool and kindergarten and their long-term success in staying in school and eventually graduating (Finn, 1989). Furrer and Skinner (2003) studied student “sense of relatedness,” which measures the strength of relationships between students and parents, students and teachers, and students and peers. Their longitudinal study included 641 students in grades 3rd–6th (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). In their discussion, Furrer and Skinner (2003) wrote:

The findings of this study, taken together with other work on relationship representations, lead to the conclusion that children’s sense of relatedness plays an important role in their academic motivation and performance. Consistent with the contention that students’ feelings of connectedness or belonging represent a key self-system process, children who reported a higher sense of relatedness also showed greater emotional and behavioral engagement in school, as captured by both self- and teacher-ratings. (p.158)

Their study also found that of the three categories, the relationship with the biggest impact on emotional engagement with school was the classroom teacher (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Perhaps most notable was a longitudinal study conducted by Hawkins et al. from 1999 to 2003. His team provided three interventions to increase student sense of belonging in high-needs elementary schools (Hawkins et al., 1999–2003). The interventions, which occurred in grades 1st–5th, were:

teacher training to increase student bonding with school, parent training to increase the home to school connection, and social emotional instruction for students (Hawkins et al., 1999–2003). When participating students turned 18, 6 years after the interventions ended, Hawkins and his team compared outcomes for study participants with the control group (Hawkins et al., 1999–2003). They found that participants had decreased high-risk behaviors such as drug use and sexual intercourse and decreased negative outcomes such as incarceration, expulsion, and dropping out (Hawkins et al., 1999–2003).

There is also sense of belonging research specific to African American students. In a two-year longitudinal study with African American middle schoolers, Cook et al. (2012) discovered that students who experience a sense of academic belonging maintain or improve their academic outcomes while students who do not have the opposite outcome. This is of particular importance because of the negative stereotypes around intelligence that African American students already face (Cook et al., 2012). In combination, these studies clearly indicate how deeply important it is for elementary students to feel that they belong in their school community as this impacts their academic growth and their behavior, both in the short- and long-term (Allen et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2012; Finn, 1989; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hawkins et al., 1999–2003).

As the introduction has demonstrated and Chapter 2 will illuminate further, anti-Blackness is endemic in contemporary *Latinidad*, including among those who live in the United States. While there is value in the many studies that examine the experiences of Black students in predominantly white spaces, the reality is that 84% of Black students attend K–12 schools where the majority of students are people of color (NCES, 2024). That does not mean they are attending schools where Black students are the majority—for only 40% of Black

students that is the case (NCES, 2024). In contrast, 55% of Latiné students attend schools where their racial identity is the majority (NCES, 2024). White supremacy and anti-Blackness are ubiquitous in such spaces and must be addressed if we truly want our Black and Afro-Latiné students to attend schools where they feel supported, seen, and loved in their racial identity. This study aimed to do that very thing.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study took place in South Central Los Angeles during the 2025–2026 school year, but anecdotes come from the years 2023–2026 due to my role as assistant principal in the same setting. For my elementary school students, none of whom were born prior to the year 2012, conversations about historical topics and the time periods in which they occurred are hard to grasp. In early February of 2025, I happened to stop by a 4th grade classroom while they were reading about Ruby Bridges. When I made the point that Ruby Bridges is only 70 years old, and thus is younger than both my parents, my students were shocked. Over and over they repeated, “Wait, she’s still alive?!” and “Ruby Bridges is alive?!” For these young people, who were born during or after Barack Obama’s second term as President, the idea that the children who desegregated schools were still alive was mind-blowing.

The following school year, our Black Student Union led a Ruby Bridges’ march at recess. Staff developed a slideshow of lessons for students about Bridges’ story, and students who wanted to celebrate her impact joined a group walk at recess. As I read through the slides, I thought about the school sites where I am conducting my research, and how there are no white students among the nearly 1,000 pupils. I wondered what our students made of the story, and if they knew that Latiné students (as well as Asian and Indigenous students) also had to fight legal battles for school desegregation. I wondered if they made a connection to the blatant racial segregation in our schools today. Did they know that Latiné students attend schools that are more racially segregated now than they have been since 1968 (Contreras, 2024)? I wondered if the adults at my school knew this information or made these connections, and if they recognized all

of these elements as being a manifestation of continued systems of white supremacy and anti-Blackness in American schools.

I grew up in St. Louis, Missouri and moved to suburban Portland, Oregon during middle school. This meant moving from a majority Black city to an overwhelmingly white one, and the shock I experienced was similar to that of my 4th grade students during our Ruby Bridges conversation. While I was deeply aware that racism still existed, and in fact, wrote in my 6th grade yearbook “About Me” section that something I would like to see changed in the world is “some people’s racism,” the way that my white classmates in Portland talked about people of color shook me to my core. The contrast between the first 12 years of my life and the following 6 left a profound impact on me. I realized that my experience was not the norm—not even close—and that most white people never live with nor are close to people of different racial backgrounds and ethnicities (Loh et al., 2020; Public Religion Research Institute, 2022). This influenced not only my decision to study Literatures of the World and African American Studies as an undergraduate student, but all the subsequent significant decisions I have made in both my personal and professional life.

In our day-to-day lives, history can seem far removed. Yet my childhood in St. Louis was shaped by historical factors that go back to The Missouri Compromise of 1820, which allowed both free Black people and legalized enslavement to exist within the state (City of St. Louis, 2025). After enslavement was abolished in 1865, St. Louis was one of the cities that Black people moved to during the Great Migration from the South (City of St. Louis, 2025; Wilkerson, 2020). While redlining was formally declared illegal with the Fair Housing Act of 1968,

As with many cities, black and white St. Louisans lived in separate parts of town for the most part. African-Americans generally lived north of Delmar by 1970,

white residents in the south and southwestern city, with an integrated strip down the central corridor. (City of St. Louis, 2025)

I grew up in that small corridor, right in the center of the city, three blocks south of Delmar.

All of this is to say that the person I am, as a 41-year-old in 2026, has been directly shaped by the legacy of enslavement in the city in which I grew up. Similarly, while my students may not know the racial history of the places where their families come from, or even of the city in which they live, in reality, the legacies of colonialism and enslavement have a direct throughline to the systems and structures of oppression that still exist in our schools today.

This study examined the ways in which white supremacy and anti-Blackness exist in predominantly Latiné American spaces, and more specifically, within elementary schools. In order to understand a culture, we must go back to the historical factors that shaped that culture. This chapter will begin with a race-focused history of the Americas because this background will give context to racial views that persist today. Then, this chapter will dive into contemporary racial hierarchies in South, Central, and North America. Subsequently, this chapter will discuss racial views among Latiné immigrants in the United States as well as those who were born here, and zoom into the racial history of South Los Angeles. Finally, this chapter will look at the existing research on race in predominantly Latiné schools and expose the gaps in this research, as well as the need to center the perspectives of Black and Afro-Latiné students in such settings.

Racial Schemas

Racial schemas are the ways that people categorize and make sense of racial rules, racial identity markers, and racial hierarchies (Roth, 2012; Flores-González & Salgado, 2022). Racial schemas differ across countries and even within countries (Roth, 2012; Flores-González & Salgado, 2022). They impact the ways that people interact with and treat one another (Roth,

2012; Flores-González & Salgado, 2022). In her research on the ways immigration to the United States changes Latinés conceptions of race, Roth (2012) writes:

Racial schemas, like all cognitive schemas, do not exist just within people's heads. They are shared representations that are partly independent of individual beliefs; that is why there is overlap between those held by different people...Studying how racial schemas are used helps us connect what happens at the individual level to what happens at the macro level, or how individuals share and are influenced by a common culture of race. (p. 13)

There are many other terms that are used to describe the concept of racial schemas. Bonilla-Silva (2015) uses the terms *racial ideology* and *racial social system* to describe the ways that individuals make sense of racial categories and hierarchies. His work focuses on how these schemas shift and change due to the politics, language, and social issues of the time (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Molina's (2014) book uses the terms *racialized groups* and *racialized scripts* to show how groups of people with shared racial, ethnic, and cultural identities are taught and perpetuate beliefs about other racial identities. The first portion of this chapter will dig into the ways racial schemas were developed throughout the Americas, as well as historical and contemporary racial schemas in Latin America and the United States.

The Americas: A Story of Colonization, White Supremacy, and Anti-Blackness

Contrary to the narrative of “unclaimed land” championed by Christopher Columbus and celebrated throughout North America, thriving Indigenous communities and cultures existed prior to European colonization (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). Their story is one of genocide over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, as “nearly all the population areas of the Americas were reduced by 90 percent following the onset of colonizing projects, decreasing the targeted

Indigenous populations of the Americas from one hundred million to ten million” (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014, p. 40). In the United States, white settlers stole land, murdered, pillaged, raped, and abused the Indigenous population, all with the encouragement and endorsement of the various foreign governments that claimed the land during that time period (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014). These actions were justified by colonizers’ deep belief in white supremacy and “Manifest Destiny,” or the doctrine that it was their divine right, as white Christians, to occupy the entirety of North America (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

The transatlantic slave trade began in 1525, and experts estimate that between 388,000 and 450,000 enslaved Africans ended up in the United States (Gates, 2014). The horrors they endured while treated as property, rather than as humans, are summarized by Wilkerson (2020):

The institution of slavery was, for a quarter millennium, the conversion of human beings into currency, into machines who existed solely for the profit of their owners, to be worked as long as the owners desired, who had no rights over their bodies or loved ones, who could be mortgaged, bred, won in a bet, given as wedding presents, bequeathed to heirs, sold away from spouses or children to cover an owner’s debt or to spite a rival or to settle an estate. They were regularly whipped, raped, and branded, subjected to any whim or distemper of the people who owned them. Some were castrated or endured other tortures too grisly for these pages, tortures that the Geneva Conventions would have banned as war crimes had the conventions applied to people of African descent on this soil. (p. 45)

Although the United States government formally abolished enslavement in 1865, policies, laws, institutions, and individuals have intentionally maintained systems of persecution and

subjugation in order to keep Black Americans in the position of second-class citizens (Alexander, 2011).

Within the Dutch, French, Portuguese, and Spanish colonies, which includes the majority of now Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, the story of Indigenous abuse and exploitation is similar to that of the United States (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014). In their study on colorism within Latiné communities, Chavez-Dueñas et al. (2014) state it succinctly: “The conquest was one of the most violent periods in Latin American history resulting in the massacre, domination, and oppression of indigenous people” (p. 5). As the Indigenous population throughout the Americas was decimated, colonizers were in need of inexpensive laborers to work on the land they stole (Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010). They found the solution in the enslavement of West Africans. There is a common misconception that the majority of enslaved Africans were brought to the United States and thus, the stain of chattel slavery is a uniquely North American problem (Gates, 2014). In reality, of the approximately 10.7 million people who survived the Middle Passage, over 90% were taken to South America, Central America, and the Caribbean (Hernández, 2022). This resulted in 250 years of state-sanctioned violence towards people of African descent by both colonial and post-colonial governments (Schmidt-Nowara, 2011). The legacy of enslavement in Latin America continues today in the form of deep-seated anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism. In the wider Latiné diaspora, in cities such as Los Angeles, this is evident in all settings, and particularly in schools (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023; Singh, 2024).

Racial Schemas in Latin America

Historical Racial Schemas in Latin America

The arrival of enslaved Africans and colonizing Spaniards shifted racial dynamics throughout Latin America (Telles, 2014). The intermixing of racial groups posed a threat to colonial, white dominance, as sexual relationships produced mixed-race children (Telles, 2014). This resulted in the development of formal *castas*, or caste systems, throughout the colonies (Telles, 2014). While the details and terms varied between countries and regions, the structures were similar: those of white descent were at the top, and those of Black descent were at the bottom (Telles, 2014). These categories were depicted in *pinturas de castas* that displayed the racial hierarchy, complete with pejorative terms and stereotypes about class, wealth, and intelligence (Telles, 2014; Valdez, 2023). These paintings were hung in public spaces such as churches and government buildings to reinforce the narrative, as well as being collected by white elites for private display to indicate their own racial superiority (Valdez, 2023).

When countries in Latin America and the Caribbean began to declare their independence in the early 19th century, the descendants of white, colonial elites remained in positions of power (Gobat, 2013). These white leaders wrestled with how to create ostensibly democratic governments that simultaneously maintained existing racial hierarchies (Gobat, 2013). At the same time, as scientific racism and its emphasis on white supremacy were challenged in the mid-nineteenth century, governments in Latin America and the Caribbean had to shift away from their more formalized structures of oppression (Telles, 2014). *Castas* were replaced by the concept of *mestizaje*, the idea that all people within the former Spanish colonies are a racial mixture and thus racism does not, and cannot, exist (Zamora, 2022).

The objective of *mestizaje* was assimilation and the eventual dissolution of communities of color through state-sanctioned “whitening policies” (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014). It is important to note that this concept of interracial reproducing in order to “whiten” the race exists within a uniquely Latin American racial schema. In Latin America, being part-white, *mestizo*, is considered to be a different and better racial identity than being solely a person of color (Zamora, 2022). This is in contrast to the *binary racial schema* of the United States, where having any non-white ancestry renders someone as a person of color (Wilkerson, 2020).

There were two different aspects to these whitening policies (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014). The first was to promote white immigration from Europe, especially in countries with large Indigenous and Black populations (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014). In Brazil, European immigrants were encouraged to move through subsidized travel and free land grants; nearly three million white immigrants moved to Brazil between 1884 and 1913 as a result of these efforts (Telles, 2014). The second policy was to send white prostitutes to areas where communities of color lived in the hopes that “they were going to ‘*mejorar la raza*’ [improve the race] and dilute the African and indigenous characteristics from Latin America” (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014, p. 9). These policies were effective in some countries but less so in others, and by the 1930s, such obvious forms of white supremacy were being challenged (Telles, 2014). This forced leaders to pivot to a new definition of *mestizaje*, one that appeared more inclusive, although in reality, still had the same aims: homogeneity and a dissolution of ethnoracial identities (Telles, 2014).

Contemporary Racial Schemas in Latin America

In contemporary Latin America, the concept of *mestizaje* continues to be celebrated (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2014). This provides a convenient way to deny the actuality of pervasive colorism, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness across all contemporary Latiné countries

(Hernández, 2022). In reality, *mestizaje*, and the idea of a shared racial identity “effectively masks racial differences in Mexico and exacerbates the national exclusion of Black and Indigenous groups” (Zamora, 2022, p. 47). This “colorblind” approach, where racial differences are ignored, does not reflect the reality, which is that race and colorism impact opportunities and daily life within Latin American countries (Hernández, 2022; Telles, 2014).

Throughout Latin American, racial identity is viewed through the combination of a *continuum schema* and a *nationality schema* (Roth, 2012). Within the *continuum schema*, race is seen on a spectrum: at one end is whiteness, at the other end, Blackness, and all other racial identities fall somewhere in between (Roth, 2012). These continuums vary by country, but they all echo the *pinturas de castas* in terms of stereotypes and racial hierarchies (Roth, 2012).

If conversations include Latiné people from different places, racial schemas shift to a *nationality schema*, which can include both nationality and ethnic identity (Roth, 2012). In other words, when asked their racial identity, people would share answers such as “Colombian,” or “Guatemalan” (Roth, 2012). Within this schema, race is not actually named, and this indicates an identification and belief in the concept of *mestizaje*. In other words, I am Colombian, which means I am the “same” racially as all Colombians. While race is not explicitly mentioned in a *nationality schema*, assumptions about race are still embedded within it. For example, Roth (2012) conducted interviews with Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in New York and in their home countries. She showed them 20 images and asked them to describe the racial identities of the people in the pictures. Respondents often described people with darker skin as being “Dominican” or “Brazilian,” rather than saying “Black” or “Afro-Latiné ” (Roth, 2012) These are countries that have larger Black populations than other places in Latin America, and people of Afro-Latiné descent are often assumed to be from these nations (Roth, 2012).

In conversations with students and their families, I have frequently seen race described through a *nationality schema*. While this allows students to form a connection based on family country of origin, such as, “We’re both Mexican!,” it also avoids any mention of race or skin color. I teach a mini-unit on race to my 5th grade students every year, and I have found that the majority of them are deeply uncomfortable discussing race, and are much more comfortable using a *nationality schema*. The exceptions are my Afro-Latiné and Black students, who often explicitly mention race in our classroom discussions.

Los Angeles County has residents who originated from every country in Central America, South America, and the Caribbean but there are two nationalities that are most represented: 74% of Latiné people in Los Angeles County identify as Mexican or Mexican American, and 9% identify as Salvadoran or Salvadoran American (Los Angeles Almanac, 2023). For purposes of length and the location of this study, the next section will only address contemporary racial schemas in these two countries. It is important to understand these schemas as they do not disappear when immigrants move to the United States. These views are passed on in families and communities and thus show up in classrooms.

Contemporary Racial Schemas in Mexico

In Mexico, the belief in *mestizaje* identity is especially strong, and results in an outright denial by politicians and ordinary people alike of the existence of racial discrimination in their country (Zamora, 2022). The concept of a mixed racial identity is so ingrained that national surveys did not include the racial option of Indigenous identity until the year 2000, and did not include the racial option of African/Black identity until the year 2015 (Telles, 2014; Zamora, 2022). Similarly, acknowledgements of race and the need for protections against racism were not added to the Mexican Constitution until 2001 (Zamora, 2022). Notably, African and Black

identities were not explicitly mentioned, although the right for Indigenous peoples to speak their languages *was* explicitly listed in the revised articles (Zamora, 2022).

While Mexican individuals and government organizations may ignore differences in racial identity and deny that racism exists, the reality is that race, and more specifically, skin color, does play a factor in every aspect of daily life for Mexicans (Roth 2012; Telles, 2014; Zamora, 2022). Zamora (2022) spent a decade doing ethnographic research about racial identity development in Mexico and among Mexican and Mexican Americans in the United States. She found that stereotypes about people with darker skin as being less intelligent, of a lower class, and fundamentally inferior to lighter skinned people were deeply ingrained, even among those with darker skin themselves (Zamora, 2022). This internalized oppression was especially striking in interviews where participants who presented as Afro-Latiné made derogatory comments about *moreno* (Black) people (Zamora, 2022). Similarly, in his research on the relationship between skin color and ethnoracial self-identification in Mexico, Telles (2014) found that 58% of respondents who referred to themselves as white had skin tones that ranged from light brown to dark brown. In Zamora's (2022) interviews in Mexico, people shared stories of skin color discrimination in restaurants, schools, and the workplace. While participants' responses revealed significant racial stereotypes and rampant discrimination, Zamora (2022) noted that, "the Mexicans I interviewed who claimed that Mexico is not racist often justified it by looking to bigoted attitudes and practices in the U.S., such as racial segregation, as a foil" (p. 44). Hernández (2022) found this in her research as well. Throughout Latin America, there is a perspective that racism and anti-Blackness are a "North American construct learned only once in the United States when 'racially innocent' Latinos encounter racist thinking for the first time" (Hernández, 2022, p. 7). As the previous pages demonstrate, this is clearly not the case.

In April of 2025, I travelled to Mexico City, and one of the reasons for my trip was to see how the racial history of the country was portrayed in contemporary Mexican museums. After doing some research, I headed to the *Museo de Historia Natural* to see the sole *pintura de casta* painting they had on display. The painting was not complete, only including categories 1-9, 11, 13, and 16. I found the imagery even more shocking in person, as the first 3 images were of genteel-looking people smiling in domestic settings, whereas image 16 showed a woman aggressively pulling a man's hair while beating him with a bowl. Her facial expression was both violent and happy, as if she enjoyed what she was doing. There was also a baby in the image, falling out of a wrap on the woman's back, presumably because she was prioritizing beating the man. I decided to spend a portion of time seeing how other museum-goers reacted to the imagery. The first group of people glanced at the pictures, then pointed to frame 16 and laughed. The second group of people reacted in much the same manner, and based on their conversation, they also found frame 16 amusing. The third group stopped and read through the names for the various castes before pointing out the names "sambaloo" and "coyote" to each other and laughing. "Sambaloo" and "coyote" are pejorative terms in Spanish for Black and multiracial people. I found this quite upsetting, and as I travelled through the museum, which told the "story of Mexico" in chronological order, I became progressively more distressed. I went through the entire museum and enslavement was not mentioned a single time. Africans and Afro-Mexicans were also not mentioned or depicted a single time other than in the aforementioned caste painting. In the numerous murals about historical events, there were no distinctly African people present. The museum's choice to ignore a huge part of history could not have been an accident, and again indicates deliberate attempts by the Mexican government (who sponsored this museum) to erase and deny the existence of Afro-Mexicans.

This echoes an interaction I had with a Mexican American parent at dismissal one day. When I reminded her that we do not allow parents to leave their cars during student pick-up, she said “Well I’m not a racist, but I see you let all the Black parents do it and not the Latino parents” gesturing towards the car in front of her. After I got over my initial surprise, I replied “Oh, that family is Mexican American.” This parent assumed that a person who “looked Black” could not be of the same nationality as her, much like the narrative put forth by the Mexican government.

Contemporary Racial Schemas in El Salvador

While the countries of Mexico and El Salvador have vastly different histories and cultures, there are strong parallels in the ways they deny that racial oppression exists. In 2006, Guillermo Meléndez, Director-General for Foreign Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, presented a report to the *United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009). The report stated the following:

El Salvador’s population is a homogeneous, mestizo (racially mixed) society.

Consequently there cannot be said to be racial discrimination in El Salvador. There is no black population in El Salvador. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009).

The report also stated that no Black population exists because there is no Atlantic coastline—meaning no slaves were taken to the country—that there have been no incidents of racial or ethnic discrimination in El Salvador, and that while three Supreme Court cases about racial discrimination had occurred since 1998, two had been rejected and one had been dismissed (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009). In regards to the

Indigenous population, while they were mentioned in the report, they were not identified as being of a separate racial identity or of needing protections under the law (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009).

The report and its “findings” are alarming for a number of reasons. Firstly, in 2006, there were no questions about race or ethnicity on the national census, so it is impossible to know how people self-identified (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009). Secondly, the first enslaved people arrived in El Salvador in 1546 and enslavement was not abolished there until the 1830s, meaning there have historically been and continue to be people of African descent in the country (Cabrera Rajo, 2017). Thirdly, to state that racism does not exist simply because there are no Black people present in a place is an intentional oversimplification of what racism means. Colorism is an aspect of racism, and racism does not only occur towards Black individuals.

It was incredibly hard to find research and information about race in El Salvador, especially in English. The denial of historic racism and oppression appears to be part of a deliberate effort by the government, as the 2006 United Nations report shows. Afro-Salvadorans do exist, even if their government denies this is the case. In interviews with Afro-Salvadorans in Los Angeles in 2023, Ingrid Cruz heard stories about people refusing to patronize Black businesses in El Salvador and racial bullying in schools. In 2022, the United States Department of State issued a report on human rights practices in El Salvador (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The report found that there was “systemic racial or ethnic violence and discrimination,” especially towards people of Indigenous and/or African descent (U.S. Department of State, 2023). Further, the report found that despite changes to the constitution, legal protection does not actually extend to these groups (U.S. Department of State, 2023).

In both Mexico and El Salvador, there is a collective belief that racism does not exist, in large part because of the emphasis on *mestizaje* (Cruz, 2023; Hernández, 2022; Telles, 2014; Zamora, 2022). Data and contemporary research critique this narrative and demonstrate the realities of anti-Indigenous racism and deep-rooted anti-Blackness in both countries (Cruz, 2023; Hernández, 2022; Telles, 2014; Zamora, 2022). This next section will dig further into current racial schemas in the United States, and more specifically, the ways Latiné immigrants navigate these spaces.

Racial Schemas in the United States

Contemporary Racial Schemas in the United States

In contrast to the common *continuum racial schemas* in Latin America, the United States has a distinctly *binary racial schema* (Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Roth, 2012; Wilkerson, 2020). In this schema, you are either white or Black. Where does this leave those whose racial identity or “street race”—the race people assume them to be when walking down the street—is distinctly neither white nor Black (Nuñez, 2024)? This in-between space is occupied by what Wilkerson (2020) describes as the “middle castes,” that is, those who occupy a racial identity somewhere on the hierarchy of caste below white but above Black. Falling in this middle group on the scale of racial hierarchies in the United States are both Asian Americans and Latiné Americans, who have sought to distinguish and separate themselves from Blackness historically and today (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Kim, 2023). This intentional action by communities of color is referred to as “interracial distancing” (Carbado & Gulati, 2013). While we must address and call out the ways that communities of color participate in and perpetuate racism, it is important to remember that this is a function of white supremacy, which encourages and rewards racial separation from Blackness.

Some scholars have argued that interracial distancing has resulted in a new racial schema within the United States, which Roth (2012) refers to as a “Hispanicized U.S. schema.” In this schema, being Latiné is no longer viewed as an ethnicity, but rather, as a racial identity (Roth, 2012). In my personal experience, I would agree with this, as the overwhelming majority of Latiné Americans I know say they are some variation of Latino/a, Latinx, or Hispanic when asked about their racial identity. When “Hispanic or Latino” is not listed as an option for self-identifying, as in the 2018 U.S. Census, the majority of Latiné Americans chose “white” as their racial identity, rather than selecting multiple racial categories, which would more closely align with the idea of *mestizaje* (Hernández, 2021). As Hernández (2021) notes:

For example, on the Census Bureau’s 2018 annual American Community Survey, 68.61 percent of Latinos still elected to choose a single racial category apart from the Some Other Race response, and the single race chosen 65 percent of the time was white. Moreover, when Latino census respondents alter their choice of racial categories from one census decade to another, they do so primarily by moving from Some Other Race to white. For instance, 2.5 million respondents who said they were Hispanic and Some Other Race on the 2000 census later told the census in 2010 that they were Hispanic and white (Cohn 2014). In their pursuit of whiteness, Latinos are the largest race or ethnic group to alter their selection of racial categories from one census year to another. (pp. 284–285)

For many Latiné individuals, choosing whiteness on forms like the census reflects an attempt to fit into a racial schema that rewards proximity to whiteness and distance from Blackness. This is especially evident in Los Angeles, both historically and today.

Race in Los Angeles

In Los Angeles, anti-Blackness within Latiné communities is shaped by deeply entrenched social, political, and institutional structures (Feliciano et al., 2011; Hernández, 2007; Hernández, 2021). “Social distance” is a sociological term that measures the discomfort that an ethnic or racial group has with another ethnic or racial group (Hernández, 2022). This is often measured through surveys that ask questions about stereotypes, but it also can be measured by data about where people choose to live and the ways that they socialize (Hernández, 2022). Charles (2006) dug into the racial history of Los Angeles based on a number of surveys and disaggregated her data into the following categories: “Whites, Blacks, Native-Born Latinos, Foreign-Born Latinos, Native-Born Asians, and Foreign-Born Asians” (Table 4.2). She found that “Foreign-Born Latinos” held the most negative stereotypes about Black people out of any of these groups, followed by “Native-Born Latinos” (Charles, 2006). This includes stereotypes about being associated with drugs and gangs, preferring welfare to having a job, and being unintelligent (Charles, 2006).

While much of this happens behind closed doors, in the fall of 2022, audio recordings were leaked of a conversation between three Latiné Los Angeles City Council Members and one Latiné labor leader. In their deeply disturbing discussion, the City Council President calls a not-present council member’s Black son a “monkey” in Spanish. She goes on to say that she would like to beat the two-year old child, stating, “...I was like, this kid needs a beatdown. Like, let me take him around the corner, and then I will bring him back” (Brangham, 2022). The intended topic of their meeting was boundary redistricting, and in many respects, the discussion was an hour-long planning session about how to remove as much power as possible from Black constituents and communities (Times Staff, 2022). These highly educated elected officials are

open in their stereotypes about Black people, as well as in their goals of limiting the power of Black communities and forcing them out of Los Angeles.

Elected officials often mirror the desires of their constituents. Over the course of the past three decades in Los Angeles, there has been “an increasingly common trend: Latino ethnic cleansing of African Americans from multiracial neighborhoods” (Hernández, 2007, para. 2). For many Latiné gangs in Los Angeles, the requirement for membership is the murder of a random Black person (not someone gang-affiliated) (Hernández, 2007; Hernández, 2021). This has been the case in multiple neighborhoods and among multiple, distinct gangs, all of which have been clear in their aims to remove Black people from their communities (Hernández, 2007). While gang violence is not necessarily indicative of a wider pattern of Latiné anti-Black violence, there is research that tracked Hate Crimes from 2022–2023 that indicates this pattern is present more broadly (Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 2023):

Anti-Black crimes increased 8% from 297 to 320. Blacks comprised 49% of racial hate crime victims. Black persons constitute 9% of the total population of Los Angeles County but are grossly over-represented every year as victims of racial hate crime. For the third year in a row, Latino/as suspects were the most frequent suspects (52%) for these crimes, followed by Whites (41%).

Similarly, racial violence has taken place at high schools throughout Los Angeles County (CBS Los Angeles, 2020; Hernández, 2021; Rand, 2016). In May of 2016, a huge physical fight broke out at Sylmar High School, a charter school located within Los Angeles Unified School District (Rand, 2016). The fight was caught on video and appeared to be between a group of Black students and a group of Latiné students (Rand, 2016). While LAUSD officials denied that the fight was related to issues of race, numerous students who spoke at a community meeting shared

that the fight occurred because gang-affiliated Latiné students engaged in targeted violence towards Black students (Rand, 2016). In February of 2020, video footage of a fight at Paramount High School went viral (CBS Los Angeles, 2020). The school, which is located in South Los Angeles County, has a majority Latiné student population and a small Black student population (CBS Los Angeles, 2020). Students reported that the fight was racial in nature, and six months earlier, a similar incident at the school had occurred which also garnered media attention (CBS Los Angeles, 2020). While it is unclear to those of us reading the media reports who started these fights, as well as any details about racial language, what is clear is that racial conflict between Black and Latiné students is occurring in violent and disruptive ways at predominantly Latiné schools.

Are Black Americans Anti-Latiné ?

When I am out and about in Los Angeles, people often ask me what I do for work. Inevitably, this leads to asking about the topic of my doctoral dissertation. While I vary my response given the context, my relationship with the people, and other factors, one comment I have frequently heard from non-Black people is that the dislike and animosity between Latiné Americans and Black Americans “goes both ways.” In other words, Black Americans are anti-Latiné in the same way Latiné Americans are anti-Black. This seems to be used as a justification or excuse for anti-Blackness. I have also been told by Latinés living in the United States that Black Americans dislike Latinés because they believe they are “stealing their jobs.”

These misconceptions are both harmful and incorrect. Studies consistently show that Black Americans feel affinity towards Latiné Americans because of similar experiences of racism, and have overwhelmingly positive views about them (Charles, 2006; Corral, 2020; Hernández, 2022). Additionally, research shows that Black Americans do not hold animosity towards Latinés

around competition for jobs (Charles, 2006). In Charles' (2006) study on racial views in Los Angeles, she found that 52% of Latiné respondents, whether "Native-born" or "Foreign-born," believe that Black people "generally" or "strongly" pose a "competitive job threat." In contrast, among Black respondents, 28% believe that "Native-born Latinos" "generally" or "strongly" pose a "competitive job threat," and 31% believe that "Foreign-born Latinos" "generally" or "strongly" pose a "competitive job threat" (Charles, 2006). In other words, the majority of Latiné Americans believe that Black Americans are in competition with them for jobs, yet the majority of Black Americans do not view Latiné Americans in this way.

Data has shown that Black Americans feel the most affinity towards Latiné Americans out of all racial categories, yet "Black amicability goes largely unrequited by Latinos" (Corral, 2020, p. 433). One way that this is evident is in racial dating preferences and exclusions. Feliciano et al. (2011) researched Latiné racial preferences in online dating in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta. They found that 44% of Latiné men exclude Black people from their dating pool, and 57% of Latiné women exclude Black people from their dating pool (Feliciano et al., 2011). This is not because of a desire to only date within their racial group, as only 17% of Latiné men exclude white people from their dating pool, and only 25% of Latiné women exclude white people from their dating pool (Feliciano et al., 2011). Of note, the city with the highest rate of Black-dating exclusion by Latinés was Los Angeles (Feliciano et al., 2011). Unfortunately, this particular survey did not study Black dating preferences or exclusion of Latinés, but other researchers have done so. Sweeney and Borden (2009) studied racial dating preferences among Black and white online daters. Out of ten possible racial categories listed, they found that Black daters preferred dating other Black people the most (71.3%), and Latiné people the second most (32.5%) (Sweeney & Borden, 2009). In combination, these two studies show that Black people

prefer dating Latiné people at a higher rate than any other out-group, and Latiné people exclude Black people from their dating pool at a higher rate than any other out-group (Feliciano et al., 2011; Sweeney & Borden, 2009).

In summation, the narrative of equivalent animosity between Black and Latiné communities in the United States is incorrect (Charles, 2006; Corral, 2020; Hernández, 2022; Feliciano et al., 2011; Sweeney & Borden, 2009). The animosity largely only goes in one direction, and that is from Latiné people towards Black people (Charles, 2006; Corral, 2020; Hernández, 2022; Feliciano et al., 2011; Sweeney & Borden, 2009). While this may feel like a condemnation of Latiné people, in actuality, it is an indication of the effectiveness of white supremacy culture and deeply-embedded racial systems in *Latinidad* and the United States (Okun, 2023). These systems prioritize individual success over community success, emphasize hoarding power, and present a scarcity mindset (Okun, 2023). In other words, there is not enough room here for everyone to be successful, so you have to step on others to do so (Okun, 2023). You must play by the rules of colorism and white supremacy if you want to make it, which means participating in anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism (Okun, 2023).

Black and Latiné Solidarity

While this chapter refers to many instances of individual, institutional, and ideological Latiné anti-Blackness, it is important to always situate this within the larger framework of white supremacy. Latiné communities in the United States experience significant individual and systemic racism (Roth, 2012; Zamora, 2022). Like Black students, Latiné students also have disparate school outcomes due to harmful policies and practices (The Education Trust-West, 2017). While non-Black Latinés benefit from closer proximity to whiteness than Black and

Afro-Latiné individuals, the system hurts everyone (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Delgado & Stefanic, 2023; Kim, 2023).

Additionally, throughout U.S. history, there have been times where Black and Latiné solidarity has resulted in meaningful social change (Arguello, 2019; Cras, 2025; McCormick, 2019). As non-white soldiers returned to the United States post-World War II, they found that the nation they had risked their lives for, the nation that championed itself as morally righteous in its quest for freedom and equal rights, was not upholding these ideals (McCormick, 2019). These soldiers found that legal racial and ethnic segregation was alive and well, not only in the south, but throughout the country (McCormick, 2019).

In California, Sections 8003 and 8004 of the state's education code allowed segregation in schools on the basis of race (McCormick, 2019). In 1943, Soledad Viduarri went to the local elementary school in Westminster, California, just south of Los Angeles, to enroll her children, nieces, and nephews (McCormick, 2019). While all the children were of Mexican descent, the school said they would enroll her children, who were of lighter coloring and had a "less-Spanish" sounding surname, but not the Méndez children, based on their darker skin color and surname (McCormick, 2019). The family filed a lawsuit and in 1946, the District Court of the United States for the Southern District of California sided with the family that the segregation of students by race violated the 14th Amendment (McCormick, 2019). This landmark case, *Méndez v. Westminster*, was supported in amicus curiae briefs by lawyers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the American Jewish Council. Both organizations believed that segregation on the basis of race or ethnicity was unconstitutional, no matter which group it applied to, and that they must unite in this legal fight (McCormick, 2019).

In many respects, *Méndez* set the stage for *Brown v. Board*, the Supreme Court case in 1954 that finally ended legal school segregation throughout the United States (McCormick, 2019).

These legal fights set the groundwork for much of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (McCormick, 2019). The Black Panther Party was founded in Oakland, California in 1966, with the aim of promoting racial equality by addressing police brutality, improving economic conditions, and empowering Black communities (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.). Founded in the wake of Malcolm X's murder, the Panthers advocated for self-defense and established community programs, such as free breakfast for children, afterschool and liberatory education classes, and healthcare services (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.). Their organization and its initiatives quickly spread, and the Chicago branch was launched in 1968 by Fred Hampton (Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.). At the same time, other marginalized groups were organizing, including the Young Lords Organization (YLO), a Puerto Rican movement in Chicago led by José “Cha Cha” Jiménez (Arguello, 2019). The Young Lords based much of their work on the model developed by the Black Panthers, and, “For many YLO members, if there was one person, they were most influenced by, one person who most politicized them, it was Malcolm X” (Arguello, 2019). Like the Panthers, the Young Lords focused on providing food, rent assistance, and healthcare in their communities (Arguello, 2019; Equal Justice Initiative, n.d.).

In 1969, Hampton founded the Rainbow Coalition, a solidarity movement between the Chicago Black Panther Party, the Young Lords Organization, the Young Patriots and Rising Up Angry, two working-class white organizations (Arguello, 2019). The leaders of these various organizations saw the parallels in their struggles against police brutality, a lack of social services, and political marginalization (Arguello, 2019; Cras, 2025). The Rainbow Coalition sought to not only support their own communities, but also to help those of disparate racial groups see the

commonalities in their plights (Arguello, 2019; Cras, 2025). One of the first actions of the Rainbow Coalition in Chicago was to broker a truce between seven racially-segregated gangs that operated in the Lincoln Park neighborhood (Cras, 2025). They united the groups to fight against gentrification efforts that were looking to displace poor residents (Cras, 2025).

While there are many more examples of historical and contemporary solidarity between Black and Latiné communities, the unfortunate reality is that such solidarity is not easy when dominant culture is rooted in racial hierarchies and pervasive white supremacy culture. The next portion of Chapter 2 will analyze existing research on the ways this exists in majority Latiné schools, both in K–12 settings and in higher education.

White Supremacy and Anti-Blackness in Contemporary Latiné American Schools

Schools function as both a replication of the racial dynamics in the communities they serve and as race-making institutions (Lewis, 2008). Students enter kindergarten with ideas about race that they learned from their families, their culture, and the world around them (Tatum, 2003). Studies demonstrate that young people in the United States of all racial identities have been exposed to and internalized ideas of white supremacy and anti-Blackness prior to elementary school (Cole & Verwayne, 2018; Tatum, 2003; Winkler, 2009).

Schools can maintain and reinforce racial inequality, stereotypes, and disproportionate outcomes, or they can disrupt and challenge these systems. In this sense, “Schools potentially have a special role in both challenging and reproducing the contemporary racial formation” (Lewis, 2008, p. 190). Whether schools do the former or the latter, they are places where students learn and make sense of their ideas about race (Hagerman, 2018; Lewis, 2008; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2024). Part of this learning is influenced by the school as an institution, through factors such as policy, curriculum, instructional practices, and of course, the actions and behaviors of the

educators and staff (Hagerman, 2018; Lewis, 2008; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2024). Yet this learning is not limited to classrooms, and often occurs in the social, “unstructured” parts of the school day among interactions with peers—during recess, in the hallways, and at the lunch tables (Shange, 2019; Singh, 2024).

As noted in Chapter 1, the majority of educational research about the experiences of Black students has either focused on predominantly white schools or has lumped “Black and Brown” students together; in this context, “Brown” is generally a euphemism for Latiné (Jenkins, 2023; Pearman et al., 2019; Singh, 2024). This leaves significant gaps in research about the experiences of Black students given that 84% of Black students attend K–12 schools where the majority of students are people of color, but only 40% of Black students attend majority Black schools (NCES, 2024). This means that most Black students in the United States attend schools where they are surrounded by people of color but where they are still among the racial minority. Additionally, the way that research continues to group Black and Latiné students together is illogical given the historic, linguistic, and cultural differences both between and within these communities (V. Garcia, 2022). Jenkins (2023) describes this as “people of color color-blindness in research analysis” (p. 259). It is also problematic in the way it erases students with Afro-Latiné identities.

While there is limited research on the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students in predominantly Latiné schools, the studies that do exist reveal patterns of harm, stereotypes, deep-seated anti-Blackness, and anti-Black racism (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023; Singh, 2024). There were a few common themes found in the current research. First, negative stereotypes about Black and Afro-Latiné students are embedded in such school settings (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023;

Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). Black and Afro-Latiné students are seen as a monolith who disrupt classrooms, disrespect teachers, and misbehave (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). Black and Afro-Latiné students are simultaneously highly visible, due to their minority status, and highly invisible, due to being viewed as indistinguishable from one another (Gamez, 2023; Jenkins, 2023; Singh, 2024).

A second common theme in existing research is that non-Black Latiné students and Black-/Afro-Latiné students are framed in opposition to one another by adults in school (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). Non-Black Latiné students are framed as “good” and positive intent is assumed in regards to their behavior (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023; Singh, 2024). In contrast, Black and Afro-Latiné students are framed as “bad” and negative intent is assumed in regards to their behavior (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). This harm is not only caused by white staff members. Existing research indicates that non-Black Latiné K–12 school staff participate in white supremacy culture and perpetuate anti-Black beliefs in their places of work (Gamez, 2023; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). These same themes were found in research on the experiences of Black students in higher education (Abrica et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2018; Pirtle et al., 2024; Ray, 2019). This is important as most of the current research about the experiences of Black students attending majority Latiné institutions takes place at Historically Hispanic Serving colleges and universities.

Hispanic Serving Institutions as Sites of Anti-Blackness

Research conducted at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) reveals that Black students face institutional oppression both from the university at large and in personal interactions with their peers and professors (Abrica et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2018; Pirtle et al., 2024). Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities, which were founded to serve Black students, Hispanic Serving Institutions are a more recent designation, which began in the 1990s (Abrica et al., 2020). Such institutions were rarely founded to serve Latiné students but rather, adopted that designation to reflect the population of their students and receive the accompanying extra funding (Abrica et al., 2020). This is important because “The HSI designation and accompanying federal funding are tied to Latina/o/x enrollment, but HSIs’ organizational structure and compositional diversity of faculty and staff most often mirror that of Predominantly White Institutions” (Abrica et al., 2020, p. 56). While HSI’s are indeed majority-minority institutions, the policies and practices are often steeped in white supremacy culture and anti-Blackness (Abrica et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2018; Pirtle et al., 2024).

Pirtle et al. (2024) used interviews to understand the experiences of Black students at a large HSI in central California. The population of the university is 5% Black students and 62% Latiné students, with other racial identities not listed in the study (Pirtle et al., 2024). Although the school is technically an HSI, study participants reported that they felt the school functioned as a predominantly white institution, due to the large population of white staff and the replication of white supremacy culture and anti-Blackness among Latiné staff and students (Pirtle et al., 2024). They reported that the only spaces that did not perpetuate these systems were within Black organizations that were founded by Black students (Pirtle et al., 2024). The university did not put forth efforts to foster belonging for Black students (Pirtle et al., 2024).

Additionally, when major incidents of anti-Black racism occurred, the university did not take action, though it did when anti-Latiné incidents occurred (Pirtle et al., 2024). Beyond the university as an institution, Black students shared stories of microaggressions and exclusion from Latiné students (Pirtle et al., 2024).

There were similar findings among Black students attending a Hispanic Serving community college in Southern California (Abrica et al., 2020). Abrica et al. (2020) interviewed 15 male college students who identified as Black or African American about their experiences at the school. All participants described that they were assumed to be unintelligent by staff and peers, even when their work and grades indicated otherwise (Abrica et al., 2020). When Black students tried to mobilize to confront anti-Blackness on campus, such as putting up “Black Lives Matter” posters, they were repeatedly torn down, defaced, or replaced with “All Lives Matter” posters (Abrica et al., 2020). While it is certainly positive to have universities that center the cultural identity of historically marginalized populations, Abrica et al. (2020) caution: “If racial progress is thought to mean culturally inclusive practices for Latina/o/x students, then researchers and practitioners should cautiously interpret racial progress on the basis of culture and think about how this serves antiblackness” (p. 68).

Haywood’s (2017) study differed from those cited above in that her participants were all Afro-Latiné and all attended predominantly white universities. Many of her participants shared that when they arrived at college, they sought out Latiné spaces and organizations in order to find community (Haywood, 2017). Consistently, they felt that they were not welcome in Latiné spaces due to their Blackness, and frequently felt they had to “prove” that they were Latiné in such settings (Haywood, 2017). Across the board, the Afro-Latiné students ended up spending more time in African American spaces, even though none of the participants identified as

African-American (Haywood, 2017). Racial and ethnic affinity spaces, especially those in majority white institutions, are meant to serve as a safe space for people who are marginalized and minoritized. Unfortunately for these Afro-Latiné students, they were not welcomed by their own Latiné communities because of their Black racial identity (Haywood, 2017).

Black and Afro-Latiné Students—Seen and Unseen

Black and Afro-Latiné students in predominantly Latiné K–12 schools are simultaneously “seen and unseen” (Jenkins, 2023, pp. 239–240). Black and Afro-Latiné students are distinctly visible due to their skin tone and minority status (often being the only student of their racial identity in a class), as well as wholly invisible because they are seen as a monolith, without individual personalities, interests, and needs (Jenkins, 2023). Howard (2016) refers to this heightened visibility of Black students as “scrutiny,” which not only contributes to their daily school experiences, but also to the perpetuation of the school to prison pipeline.

Jenkins (2023) conducted an ethnographic study on the experiences of Black students at a majority Latiné high school in the Southwest. During his two years at the site, he interviewed 20 Black students, and conducted observations throughout structured and unstructured portions of the school day (Jenkins, 2023). The school site is different from the sites where I conducted my research in that the majority of staff in Jenkins’ study were white. Black students shared that they felt the school was “highly racialized” (Jenkins, 2023, p. 250). They described the isolation and visibility they often felt as the only Black student in a class, and the questions and comments made to them by peers who saw them as an outsider in that space (Jenkins, 2023).

Shange (2019) conducted a seven-year ethnographic study at a majority Latiné high school in San Francisco. Prior to her study, she spent six years working at the school, which provided her with in-depth knowledge about the systems and structures in place, as well as about

the school's "social justice" mission (Shange, 2019). This also meant she had strong relationships with students and staff ahead of stepping into her role as an observer and interviewer (Shange, 2019). In a particularly candid interview, Simone, a Black math teacher, shared, "It's not every teacher, but I feel like sometimes people assume negative intent when they see a Black kid" (Shange, 2019, p. 83). She and Zahra, another Black educator, go on to talk about how many of their Black students are loud, and that other staff "assume that just cause a kid is being loud that they are doing something wrong!" (Shange, 2019, p. 83). In this sense, Black students are conspicuous because of their minoritized racial identity and cultural speech patterns, but also are indistinct from one another because of the assumption that loud Black students equals trouble.

At the previously mentioned Hispanic Serving Institution in Southern California, researchers found that Black students felt both hyper-visible and invisible (Abrica et al., 2020). Students described being actively ignored by professors, even when they had their hands raised, shared the right answer, or had the highest grade in the class (Abrica et al., 2020). At the same time, Black students experienced hypervisibility when they were the only Black student in a course and were accused of cheating by their peers when they earned high grades (Abrica et al., 2020).

The experiences of invisibility and hypervisibility for Black students in majority Latiné schools are evident at the sites mentioned above (Abrica et al., 2020; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019). At the same time, Afro-Latiné students continue to be erased from the research completely. As García-Louis and Cortes (2023) note, "the constant comparison between Latinx and black students' matriculation, academic success, and graduation rates pins one against the other; systematically isolating their identity – either black or Latinx but never both" (p. 187).

Beyond this frequent comparison in research, this dichotomy plays out daily for Black and Afro-Latiné students attending majority Latiné schools (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023; Singh, 2024).

The Trope of “The Good Latiné Student versus the Bad Black Student”

In majority Latiné schools, staff often create divisions between Black and Afro-Latiné students and their Latiné peers, reinforcing limiting and stereotypical narratives (Gamez, 2023; Singh, 2024). Gamez (2023) spent a year and a half researching the experiences of Black students at a majority Latiné middle school. She found that the narrative of “the good Latiné student versus the bad Black student” was pervasive among staff of all racial and ethnic backgrounds—white, Black, and Latiné—and that Afro-Latiné students fell under the latter category simply because of their racial identity (Gamez, 2023). Gamez (2023) compiled her research from interviews with students, staff, and from observations on site at the school. She found that when Latiné students broke a rule, such as getting out of their seat during lunch, there were no ramifications, yet when Black or Afro-Latiné students did the same, they were chided and often faced disciplinary consequences (Gamez, 2023). Gamez (2023) noted that teachers often pitted the two communities against each other; one example is particularly telling of the way teacher stereotypes about student identity played out in the classroom:

After giving students time to work on the assignment independently, Ms. Meeker began reviewing the worksheet by asking students to raise their hands and explain their answers. I observed her repeatedly call on Latinx-identified youths even though many Black-identified youths had also raised their hands. When some Black-identified youths expressed frustration at not being called upon, Ms. Meeker stopped the activity and pointed at them, “Stop with the hissing, the

sucking of teeth, the eye rolling, and the disrespect. If I'm not calling on you, it's because you're doing all this extra stuff. Always so extra." She then pointed at several Latinx-identified youth and said, "Take a look around. Do you see Carlos doing that? Do you see Gilmer doing this? Do you see Clara? No, you don't. They just sit patiently and wait their turn. They listen." (p. 9)

The Black students were ignored until they began to react, and then, they were seen only as a problem.

The dichotomy in the way Black students versus non-Black Latiné students were treated played out in all school spaces—hallways, the cafeteria, clubs and organizations, and of course, in classrooms (Gamez, 2023). Black students were acutely aware of their secondary status in the school and how that impacted their academic opportunities (Gamez, 2023). When reflecting on the "Student of the Month" awards, one Black student stated, "These are all Latinos. I never seen one Black on that list. The teachers think they the smart ones 'cause they always be calling on them, but never give us a chance" (Gamez, 2023, p. 10). The dynamic displayed here mirrors the broader education system of institutionalized oppression of Black students. Not only does this hinder the learning of Black students, but it also causes them to internalize narratives of their own inadequacy.

Singh (2024) had similar findings in the two-year ethnographic study he conducted about Latino Male Success (LMS), a non-profit organization that works with Latiné males in 10 middle and high schools in a large city in California. LMS aimed to provide students with mentorship and support around academics and character building, and the model was set up so that enrolled students took a LMS course as part of their normal school day (Singh, 2024). Singh (2024) found that anti-Blackness, and an "us vs. them" mentality towards Black students

undergirded much of the philosophy of LMS. Mr. Javier, one of the mentors who attempted to confront the anti-Blackness in LMS, shared that he felt the program consistently tried to “pathologize Blackness” and framed the characteristics of Black students and culture as something to avoid (Singh, 2024, 182).

For Latiné students, this dichotomy is also harmful. Rather than seeing their Black peers as friends and scholars, they see them in limited tropes of troublemaker and failure. And thus the cycle of anti-Blackness and stereotypes continues.

Anti-Blackness and White Supremacy Among Non-Black Latiné Staff

One common approach to disrupting white supremacy in schools, improving academic outcomes, and improving sense of belonging for students of color is to bring more staff of color into the teaching force. In the 2022–23 school year, over half of public school students in the United States identified as a person of color, at 54%, while 80% of K–12 public school teachers identified as white (Pew Research Center, 2024). In California, in 2025, 80% of public school students identified as a person of color, and 60% of K–12 public school teachers in the state identified as white (California Department of Education, 2026). Research has shown positive outcomes for Black and Latiné students when they are taught by a teacher of their same race or ethnoracial identity (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). However, the assumption that being a person of color makes you an expert in teaching *all students of color* is highly problematic. This assumption—and the lack of emphasis on acknowledging anti-Blackness among other communities of color—harms both students and the teachers that are brought in to “fix” the problem (Singh, 2023).

There is limited empirical research to show the impact of teachers of color on students of *all* racial identities. One of the few studies on this topic was published by Blazar in 2021. He

focused on student outcomes as measured by end of year test scores, chronic absenteeism, and a student-completed survey on the topics of “*Self-Efficacy, Engagement and Happiness in Class, and Self-Regulation*” (Blazar, 2021, p. 14). He compared “teachers of color” as a group to white teachers (Blazar, 2021). The study found that students of all racial identities had a higher increase in academic growth, a higher decrease in chronic absenteeism, and a higher increase in “*Self-Efficacy, Engagement and Happiness in Class, and Self-Regulation*” when taught by a teacher of color rather than by a white teacher (Blazar, 2021, p. 14). This is a positive result, to be sure, but what this study does not address or examine is the impact of a racial or ethnoracial match or mismatch between the teacher and student. In other words, does the outcome differ if a Latiné teacher is teaching a Latiné student or Black student? And while the academic outcomes in this study are clear, how does teacher and student race and ethnicity impact how a student feels that they “belong” or “do not belong” at their school site?

Two studies mentioned in Chapter 1 demonstrate that having a teacher of color alone does not mitigate anti-Blackness. Firstly, a 2016 study of 14,280 U.S. elementary schoolers found that Black students were less likely than their peers to be referred for gifted programs, even with equally high test scores (Grissom & Redding, 2016). This disparity occurred when teachers were white, Latiné, or Asian, but Black students were referred at nearly equal rates when their teacher was Black (Grissom & Redding, 2016). Secondly, a 2023 study found that Black students are disciplined more often than other students for similar behaviors, regardless of whether their teachers are white, Latiné, or Asian, but this difference is significantly reduced when the teacher is Black (Hayes et al., 2023).

In Achieve Los Angeles, the overwhelming majority of staff identify as Latiné (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). At Achieve South Central Campus during the

2025–26 school year, the racial/ethnic demographics of staff were as follows: 114 Latiné staff members (79%), 16 Black staff members (11%), 9 white staff members (6%), 5 Asian American Pacific Islander staff members (4%), and 1 multiracial staff member (less than 1%) (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). No staff at Achieve South Central Campus identified as Afro-Latiné.

Research shows that non-Black Latiné school staff contribute to white supremacy culture and reinforce anti-Black beliefs within their workplaces (Gamez, 2023; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023; Singh, 2024). In Gamez’s (2023) previously mentioned study, she discovered that teachers of all racial backgrounds reinforced stereotypes of “the good Latiné student and the bad Black student.” Her research also highlights that Latiné staff not only upheld these stereotypes about Black students but also applied them to Afro-Latiné students, even when it was pointed out that the students were Latin American (Gamez, 2023). After one staff member was corrected for assuming a student was a Black American, rather than Afro-Latiné, she responded in a way that was particularly telling:

I told her that several youths in the middle school had Dominican roots and identified as both Black and Latinx. Ms. Maria replied, “I know that there are Blacks in the Dominican Republic. There are even some in Mexico, in those parts, like Veracruz. I tell my son Julio if he ever starts acting up like that, I’ll send him to another school.” While Ms. Maria acknowledges the presence of Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean, she continued to mobilize anti-Black tropes.

(Gamez, 2023, p. 11)

As this example reveals, hiring more staff of color does not automatically resolve the problem of anti-Black racism in schools.

Singh (2023) examined the ways in which non-Black Latino male teachers “contend with their relationality to antiblackness in urban education” (p. 10). A few key themes emerged. First, it was evident that even within majority Latiné schools, whiteness was centered in policies, practices, and curriculum (Singh, 2023). Second, male teachers of color were often relied on to be disciplinarians of boys of color (Singh, 2023). Third, the teachers found that they came from communities that perpetuated anti-Blackness, and that they needed to contend with and dismantle these beliefs in order to truly support all their students (Singh, 2023). Singh (2023) writes:

While clear similarities exist between Black and Latino men and boys, the teachers believed that an innate and effortless solidarity cannot be assumed. This was based on some of their own realizations that they themselves had brought anti-Black stereotypes with them to their classrooms. In part, this was from growing up in Latinx households, communities, and indeed countries, that are starkly anti-Black. Thus, participants felt anti-Black beliefs must be acknowledged and challenged before solidarity and allyship could be achieved and celebrated. (p. 15)

Singh’s (2023) study shows that assuming all male teachers of color are uniquely equipped to support all students of color is a fallacy. Non-Black Latiné male teachers are complicit in anti-Blackness, and they must unlearn this if they hope to disrupt existing patterns of harm in schools (Singh, 2023).

Conclusion

All of the studies referenced in this literature review were conducted in middle schools, high schools, or universities. I was unable to find a single research study focusing on this topic in

elementary schools. That is precisely why this study is so important—it centered the voices and stories of our 3rd–6th grade students, who matter and deserve to be heard.

Elementary school is often the first experience that our students have with the education system. We have a unique opportunity to make school a place of support and belonging or a place of harm and marginalization. Research shows that children begin forming understandings of race as early as infancy (Winkler, 2009). By the time they enter elementary school, they are not only noticing racial dynamics but are also capable of engaging in complex and meaningful conversations about them (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Schools are central sites where racial identities are shaped, through both the formal curriculum and the everyday interactions that convey implicit messages about race and hierarchy (Delpit, 2002, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Nasir, 2011; Pollock, 2004). I want all of our students—Black, Afro-Latiné, and Latiné—to leave our doors and head into middle school with a love of learning, a strong sense of identity, and an upstander mindset, ready to disrupt stereotypes and oppression. In order to do this, we must listen to the experiences of our Black and Afro-Latiné students and use their input to make our schools a better place for all members of our community.

As this chapter has shown, there is a direct throughline from the legacies of colonialism and enslavement in South America, Central America, and the Caribbean to the persistent anti-Blackness and white supremacy found in majority Latiné schools in Los Angeles today (Chavez-Deñás et al., 2014; Hernández, 2022; Roth, 2012). While racial schemas may differ between countries, and may change as Latiné individuals move to the United States, the racial hierarchies remain the same throughout—whiteness at the top, and Blackness at the bottom (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Delgado & Stefanić, 2023; Roth, 2012; Zamora, 2022). Latiné immigrants do not “learn” racism and anti-Blackness in the United States (Hernández, 2022;

Telles, 2014; Zamora, 2022). Rather, it is something they bring from their countries of origin, and it is further magnified by the binary racial schema of this country (Hernández, 2022; Zamora, 2022). This results in the “middle castes,” such as Latinés, attempting to move closer to whiteness and further demonizing Blackness in order to fit within this binary schema (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Delgado & Stefanic, 2023; Kim, 2023). It is important to recognize that while individuals may be complicit, it is the system itself that produces these dynamics, and this same structure exists across all Western communities, regardless of their racial composition (Delgado & Stefanic, 2023; Okun, 2023).

In predominantly Latiné schools, there is a clear culture of anti-Blackness and white supremacy (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). Black and Afro-Latiné students are subject to limiting stereotypes and harm from the institutions they attend, from fellow students, and from staff (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). In Los Angeles, Latiné anti-Black racism is especially prevalent, as indicated by current events and race-centered research (Feliciano et al., 2011; Hernández, 2007, 2021).

The next chapter will focus on the methods and approaches that were used to learn more about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students attending elementary schools in South Los Angeles. I hope that the act of centering their stories will open up a broader dialogue and provide an impetus for change. I believe in young people. I know that if we choose to build schools where all students feel that they belong, where all students are having critical dialogue about race, about whiteness, about history, and about identity, then we can start to shift not only schools, but society as a whole.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Design and Rationale

This phenomenological, qualitative study focused on understanding the elementary school experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students in majority Latiné elementary schools. Phenomenological research “is a qualitative design in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2023, p. 267). This research examined three key phenomena: students’ sense of belonging, their experiences with anti-Black racism, and sense-making pertaining to their racial identity. Aligned with this phenomenological approach, the study sought to explore how Black and Afro-Latiné students described their schooling in their own words.

The qualitative data gathering method in this study was individual, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with 11 students in grades 3rd–6th across Achieve South Central Campus. Five students identified as Afro-Latiné, and six identified as African American or Black, either solely or as part of a non-Latiné multiracial identity.

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study was distinct in that it centered the voices of elementary age Black and Afro-Latiné students in majority Latiné schools, a population rarely highlighted in research, particularly at the elementary level (García-Louis & Cortes, 2023). While concerns about ethics, Institutional Review Board approval, and assumptions about children’s awareness have limited the centering of elementary student’s voices, evidence shows that children develop racial conceptions from infancy (Winkler, 2009) and are capable of engaging in discussions about race (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Ethnographic research has further demonstrated that schools play a critical role in shaping racial identity (Delpit, 2002, 2008;

Lewis, 2008; Shange, 2019). Studies have shown that providing opportunities for students to share their experiences can strengthen belonging, rehumanize marginalized youth, and even shift institutional practices (Damiani, 2014; Jones & Yonezawa, 2002; Muñiz, 2024).

This study's focus on grades 3rd–6th was intentional, as research consistently demonstrates that attendance, academic performance, and disciplinary practices during these years are strong predictors of later school success (Balfanz, 2009; Chang & Romero, 2008; Raffaele Mendez, 2003). A number of studies have shown that students' sense of belonging—the feeling of being included, supported, and connected—is essential to academic success, behavior, and long-term outcomes (Allen et al., 2016; Cook et al., 2012; Finn, 1989; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Hawkins et al., 1999–2003). Studies with African American students emphasize the power of belonging to counter negative stereotypes and support achievement (Cook et al., 2012). Collectively, the literature highlights the significance of elementary school as a critical site for fostering belonging, affirming racial identity, and improving long-term educational trajectories for Black and Afro-Latiné students.

This study also highlighted the importance of examining Black and Brown communities as distinct groups within educational research. Educational programs and studies frequently collapse these communities together, overlooking both the significant differences between them and the diversity that exists within each group (Jenkins, 2023; Singh, 2024). This framing renders Afro-Latiné students as invisible, despite their identities existing simultaneously within both categories (Alicia, 2023; V. Garcia, 2022).

To examine these dynamics, this study utilized Powell and Galloway-Popotas's (2024) theory of *bridging and belonging*, which frames belonging as an outcome of social, structural, and institutional arrangements rather than individual attitudes or behaviors alone. *Belonging* is

experienced when individuals are affirmed and valued as their full selves within a community, while *bridging* refers to deliberate efforts to build relationships across difference without demanding conformity or the loss of cultural identity (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). As I listened to students' stories, this framework guided my analysis of how school systems shape belonging, exclusion, and racial identity formation for Black and Afro-Latiné students.

A *relational race framework* was used as a theoretical framework in this study because it provided a structure to examine the ways that students of color related and interacted with one another when white students were not present (Lipsitz et al., 2019; Singh, 2024). Singh (2024) masterfully explains why this framework is useful, as well as the existing gaps in this area of research:

Relational theories of race are rare in race research and even rarer in educational ethnographies (see Gamez and Monreal 2021; Museus 2022). For the most part, studies of race and schools take a one-at-a-time approach, where the experience of a single marginalized group is studied in relation to white supremacy in schools. However, these approaches often encourage conceptualizations of race that exist as independent and isolated constituencies. In other instances, racial groups are coupled to demonstrate the shared experiences of racism, as in the popular study of boys of color, who are often framed as having nearly identical racial experiences in schools. However, racialization is a dynamic and ongoing process (Omi and Winant 2014). (p. 178)

This study used a *relational race framework* in order to provide a counternarrative to the studies Singh describes. Schools do not exist in isolation, separate from the racial dynamics of the communities in which they reside. Students of color are not a homogeneous group, and students

of all racial identities perpetuate and participate in white supremacy and anti-Blackness (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Cole & Verwayne, 2018; Singh, 2024; Tatum, 2003; Winkler, 2009). This framework was useful in providing a lens from which to analyze the experiences that students described in their interviews.

This study was also informed by the theory of anti-Blackness, which understands racial hierarchies as being organized through the systemic and institutional devaluation of Blackness across social contexts (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Sexton, 2010). I examined the ways anti-Blackness appeared in the institutional elements of the school, as well as the ways students described their experiences with anti-Black racism, predominantly within interpersonal interactions. I attended to how these incidents eroded the humanity and individual identities of these young people.

Given that this study centered Black and Afro-Latiné students and explored the harm they experienced, it was imperative that my practices were grounded in a humanizing research framework (Paris & Winn, 2014). This framework, as outlined in Paris and Winn's (2014) *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities*, informed both the study's design and the analytical lens used to interpret participants' experiences. Chapter 2 of the book discusses how critical and dialogic listening during interviews can disrupt power dynamics between the researcher and subject (Kinloch et al., 2014). I hope that the students who participated in this study found that the process was humanizing and empowering.

Research Questions

1. How, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students perceive incidents of anti-Black Hate Speech and anti-Black racism within a predominantly Latiné school?

2. To what extent, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students describe feeling a sense of belonging within a predominantly Latiné school?
3. What factors (e.g. spaces, policies, practices), if any, within the school environment, contribute towards a student's racial identity development?

Data Collection Methods

My data collection method was semi-structured, individual interviews. The use of student interviews was an intentional choice because, “The daunting truth throughout America’s dark history and present practice of American research is deeply rooted in anti-Black racism” (Baptiste et al., 2022, p. 2236). The well-being of my Black and Afro-Latiné students was the most important consideration in this research, since the aim of this entire study was to share their stories in order to improve their racialized school experiences. While people who are far removed from elementary schools do not think young students understand such topics, they do, and it is a huge oversight and disservice to assume that we, the adults, know better than those we serve (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). To me, that reeks of the same attitude of white supremacy that has dominated research since always: the researcher is the “expert” and the participant, who actually lives the experience, is not. No matter how many degrees I accumulate or how many research studies I facilitate, my students are always the real experts on their own lived experiences. Similarly, participant research originated as a response to historic practices of harm (Green et al., 2014). Participant research “is a collaborative process to be engaged in by both the researcher and participants; it is emancipatory, or, in other words, used to liberate people and communities, rather than further oppress, marginalize, essentialize, or exploit” (Green et al., 2014, p. 156). It is my hope that these practices, which center the humanity of my students, have shown how powerful and impactful it can be to interview elementary age students.

Semi-Structured, Individual Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted from February–March 2026. They took place after school, in person, at Achieve South Central Campus, which encompassed multiple Achieve elementary schools. Each school taught grades TK-6th and served students from the same racial, cultural, and economic demographics. I used a sample size of multiple schools to highlight a wider range of student experiences, enhance generalizability, and increase research validity.

Achieve South Central Campus was located in the Vermont-Slauson neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles and had the largest population of Black and Afro-Latiné students in the Achieve Los Angeles network. Each of the schools had a Black Student Union (BSU). The BSUs met twice weekly at their individual school sites, once during lunch for 20-40 minutes and once after school for one hour. The BSUs also came together once a month after school in place of their site-only meetings, and collectively went on 3–5 annual field trips. Membership included students and staff who self-identified as Black and/or Afro-Latiné, and all interviewees were members of the BSU. The BSU was for students in grades 3rd–6th, and interview participants were between the ages of 8–12 years old.

Interviews were recorded on a recording device and were uploaded to my personal computer as soon as I returned home. The interviews were subsequently deleted from the recording device. My personal computer is password protected, and I am the only person who has access to it. My computer automatically uploads all materials to my personal Apple Cloud account daily, which is also password protected.

After I recorded interviews and uploaded them into digital files, I used MAXQDA software to transcribe each interview. Next, I listened to each interview and corrected any mistakes on the transcripts, as well as removing most filler words, such as “like” or “um.” I also

used MAXQDA for the majority of my coding and data tracking. I used pseudonyms for student's names in interview transcripts, and access to my MAXQDA account is password protected.

This dissertation does not include any information that would allow someone to identify the student participants, staff, or other mentioned students. I used pseudonyms, removed information about the schools that children attended, and removed any other personally identifiable information. This will also be the case if any of this research is used in future articles or presentations. The Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix E, and the accompanying Non-Verbal Behaviors Interview Protocol can be found in Appendix F.

During the study, only the Principal Investigator (myself) had access to the data. Upon the completion of this study, the digital files of interviews will be transferred to an external hard drive, where they will be stored until they are destroyed, five years after the publication of my dissertation.

Participant Recruitment

On September 8, 2025, I entered into a Data Use Agreement with Achieve Los Angeles for the 2025–2026 school year (Appendix J). This allowed me to conduct interviews and observations across all schools on Achieve South Central Campus, as well as providing me with access to various documents and raw data. While I did not end up conducting observations due to time constraints, that was part of the original plan for my dissertation.

It was important that staff at Achieve South Central Campus were aware of my study as I conducted research across all schools. On December 4, 2025, I met with school principals to share information about my study. I asked for permission to briefly share my research topic at each school site during a staff meetings, and we scheduled those for January. On December 15,

2025, I emailed staff across all school sites to introduce them to my research, and on January 6, 2026, I presented additional information about my dissertation topic at each site.

I met with the BSU coordinators a few times during the fall of 2025 in order to introduce them to my research and schedule a time to present to students. On January 7, 2026, I sent home an information page about my upcoming presentation for parents and guardians of all students in the BSU. Additionally, the information page invited parents and guardians to attend the BSU meeting on January 15th if they wanted to learn more about my research topic in person. That document, Black Student Union Recruitment Presentation Information Sheet, can be found in English in Appendix A, and in Spanish in Appendix B.

On January 15, 2026, I presented my dissertation topic and goals to students at an all-site BSU meeting. While students ate snacks, I shared some background information about me, why I chose my topic, and what participation in the study would look like. Then I explained the interview process, and I emphasized to students that the decision to participate in an interview was ultimately up to them, their parents and guardians. I explained to them what the following documents and processes entailed: the Student Interview Form and the Student Interview Oral Assent Protocol. I stepped out of the room to give students time to process and brainstorm questions with the BSU coordinators, then returned and answered their questions.

After my presentation, students who were interested in participating took home a Student Interview Form, which also included a cover letter with more information about the study. The forms were available in both English and Spanish, and can be found in Appendices C and D. Many students expressed interest but it was difficult for them to remember to bring their signed permission slips back to school. In order to help facilitate the returning of permission slips, I called parents/guardians of students in my school who had collected the forms. The BSU

coordinators from the other sites did the same at their schools. I also briefly presented my topic at the “Taste of Soul” event, a Black History Month gathering for all Black families at Achieve South Central Campus. I went table by table and introduced myself to families I did not know.

Once Student Interview Forms were signed and returned to me, I scheduled student interview times over the phone or in person with parents and guardians. All interviews took place from March–February 2026. Interviews took place after school, in person, on Achieve South Central Campus in a small classroom that is shared by all schools and can be reserved for meetings. Only myself and the student being interviewed were present, and I put a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door. Interviews took between 20 minutes and 1 hour.

Interviewees and I began our time together by eating snacks and chatting about the school day. Then, I turned on the recording device and read the Student Interview Oral Assent Form aloud to the student, which is located at the top of the Interview Protocol in Appendix E. During interviews, I used the Non-Verbal Behaviors Interview Protocol to jot down ways that students reacted during different parts of our conversation. That document can be found in Appendix F. I had a planned break time in the interview, which some students used and others did not. A few students took more than one break. While on break, I turned off the recording device, we walked outside, and we ate more snacks. Each student was interviewed one time.

Rationale for Site and Participant Selection

While conducting this research, I lived in Los Angeles, California, and worked for Achieve Los Angeles, the school district in which my study took place.

I selected multiple schools in South Los Angeles for my research because they are representative of the educational environments typically attended by Black and Afro-Latiné students in the area. Los Angeles County is home to the largest Latiné population in the United

States (Pew Research Center, 2022), and during the 2023–24 academic year, Latiné students made up 72% of the student population in Los Angeles County (California Department of Education, 2024). Over the past two decades, South Los Angeles, once a predominantly Black area, has become majority Latiné (Zamora, 2022). Only 12% of students in Los Angeles County identified as Black during the 2023–24 school year (California Department of Education, 2024).

Achieve Los Angeles operated schools in South and Southeast Los Angeles. Across these sites, 85% to 99% of students identified as Latiné, while 0% to 8% identified as Black (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). In comparison, within the larger Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), which served over 398,000 students, 73% identified as Latiné, and 7% as Black or African American (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2025). I conducted my research at Achieve South Central Campus, which was located in the Vermont-Slauson neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles. In 2020, Census data indicated that 81% of residents in South Central identified as Latiné, and 16% identified as Black (Census Reporter, 2026).

I used criterion/purposeful sampling for this project. The inclusion criteria for students was that they self-identified as Black and/or Afro-Latiné, were in grades 3rd–6th, and were part of their school's Black Student Union. Among the schools I worked with, there were a total of around 50 students who fell within these categories. The reason for this racial and ethnic criteria was because the aim of this study was to hear about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students. Students were required to be members of their school's Black Student Union because I partnered with the BSU coordinators to present the study, recruit participants, and connect with students and families. I hoped to interview at least 9 to 12 students in total. I chose this number because it gave me a large enough sample to gather themes, while also being small enough to

manage in the time period required to complete my research. While I was open to having more participants, only 50 students met the criteria, and I anticipated that some students and caregivers would choose not to participate. Given this, it felt reasonable to hope for roughly one quarter of eligible students to take part, and I was satisfied with the final sample of 11 participants.

Data Analysis

Before I conducted my first interviews, I began developing my codebook. My initial codes were deductive, descriptive codes that matched my research questions and units of analysis. I used post-it notes to organize them by color on a wall in my apartment, which I called my code wall. As interviews occurred and I began to notice additional patterns and codes, I added more post-it notes.

Process Notes

I recorded interviews in order to be as present as possible during my time with students. I felt that taking notes during our conversation could be distracting to students, as well as distracting to myself. At the same time, there is rich data that can occur during an interview that cannot be captured on a recording device. This includes breathing patterns, facial expressions, gestures, physical movements, and so on. In order to capture these forms of non-verbal communication but also remain present, I developed a Non-Verbal Behaviors Interview Protocol, which can be found in Appendix F. It is essentially a chart of student behaviors that could occur during an interview. When I saw one of these behaviors occurring, I jotted down the Interview Protocol question number and the recording time next to the behavior on the chart. This allowed me to keep track of these other forms of communication. These non-verbal observations were helpful when it came time to write about my students.

After students left the interview room, I ended up jotting notes on the same Non-Verbal Behaviors document, using bullet points to list things I wanted to remember. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) write about the importance of writing notes directly after an interview in order to transcribe the visual elements of the conversation. I found this to be an important part of my process, especially in regards to shifting the wording of interview questions to elicit deeper answers and improve student understanding of the questions.

Analytic Memos

I wrote the majority of my analytic memos in the form of audio messages to myself as I took long walks around Echo Park Lake. The content of these memos were wide ranging—some were process notes to myself about things I needed to shift in the next interview, others were more pattern and thematic focused, many were quite rambling. After I got home from my walks, I would listen back to what I said and did in vivo, inductive coding in the form of adding more post-it notes to my code wall. Maxwell (2013) writes about the importance of this process and the various forms memos can take:

Memos are one of the most important techniques you have for developing your ideas. You should, therefore, think of memos as a way to help you understand your setting, or study...Memos can be written on methodological issues, ethics, personal reactions, or anything else...Write lots of memos during the course of your research project; remember that in qualitative research, design is something that goes on during the entire study. (20)

While I originally thought that I would write my analytic memos by hand or on the computer, once I began to do them orally, I found that worked for me. This makes sense as I am an oral processor, so even the practice of speaking to myself helped me organize my ideas. Saldaña

(2013) emphasizes that memos can be free-form, and may not always fall into one category or another. These analytic memos not only helped me process during data collection, they also were another piece of data that I was able to analyze as I got further into developing themes and making assertions (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013).

Coding and Analysis

My code wall served as my first round of coding, developed from a combination of my research questions, units of observations, codes that arose as I edited interview transcripts, and codes that arose during my analytic memos.

I used MAXQDA for my second round of coding. I started by transferring codes from my wall into the software. This in itself was a helpful process as it resulted in the merging of some codes and the separation of others that were too broad. I went line by line through each interview, linking codes as well as adding new ones. This helped me identify more theoretical and inductive codes. I ended up doing two rounds of line-by-line coding for each interview because I found that new codes kept arising. It was interesting how this process began to take up space in my brain; at random moments, I would think of something from an interview and have to jot it down so that I would remember to code it.

I spent more time on some interviews than others, due to length and student age. Overall, the younger students, in grades 3rd and 4th, gave shorter answers. In the end, I had 639 coded segments across the 11 interviews. For Research Question 1, which was about incidents of racial harm, the most common subcodes fell under “staff responses to harm.” Research Question 2, which was about student sense of belonging, ended up with the most coded segments, with twice as many as Research Question 3. The most common subcodes in Research Question 2 fell under

“impact of the BSU.” Research Question 3, about racial identity development, had the most subcodes under “student descriptions of race.”

Once I finished coding, I made a giant table on Google Docs and began combining the codes into themes and subthemes by Research Question. Then I pasted in quotes from my codebook and added an assertion to each subtheme. As I went through this process, some of the subthemes merged, and I removed others when I realized there were not enough supporting quotes to form an assertion. There was a lot of movement during this stage, especially in the ways that the assertions were written. Once I felt I had a strong enough analysis, I met with Dr. Muñiz, my Committee Chair, and we talked through each subtheme and analysis. The final step in my table was combining all of this data into findings and subfindings.

Positionality, Credibility, and Validity

My positionality in this study was impacted by two important factors: my whiteness and my role as assistant principal. During the 2025–26 school year, there were 145 staff members at Achieve South Central Campus. The racial/ethnic demographics of staff during this year were as follows: 114 Latiné staff members (79%), 16 Black staff members (11%), 9 white staff members (6%), 5 Asian American Pacific Islander staff members (4%), and 1 multiracial staff member (less than 1%) (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). I was one of the nine white staff members.

During the 2025–26 school year, there were 911 students enrolled at Achieve South Central Campus (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). On student enrollment forms for that year, here is how parents/guardians identified their children’s race and ethnicity: 823 students identified as Latiné (90%), 62 students identified as Black or African American (7%), 3 students identified as multiracial (less than 1%), 3 students identified as white (less than

1%), and 20 students did not identify their race or ethnicity (2%) (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). As I moved through my school and district, I was often the only white person in any given space. While my school community was used to my white presence, that does not change the realities of my privilege, the existence of racial hierarchies, and the ways in which I, and all white people, participate in and benefit from white supremacy culture. Richard Milner (2007) developed a framework for white educators to use when they research students of color. Within this framework are a series of questions for the researcher to use to develop their own racial reflexivity (Milner, 2007). As I went through the questions and thought about my school, I realized how much I had already engaged in the processes he described. I have read extensively about the racial histories and dynamics of the community I serve, and I also spent three years getting to know my students, families, and staff. Again, this does not mitigate my whiteness, but by keeping race at the forefront of my research, I was as prepared as I could be to step back, de-center myself, and give students the space to share. My biggest asset in this was the pre-existing relationships I had with students.

Bourke (2024) conducted a research study on the experiences of students of color at a Predominantly White Institution (PWI). As a white man, he found that his racial positionality was inescapable in all aspects of his study, and he ended up writing an article about reflexivity in the research process (Bourke, 2024). One way that he maintained reflexivity was by writing about his whiteness in his analytic memos, which was a strategy that I used as well (Bourke, 2024). This helped Bourke (2024) mitigate the impact of his positionality on the research process and the ways his whiteness could skew interpretations. His article also made me think deeply about the structure of my study. The first part of this study centered on Black and Afro-Latiné students telling their stories and making meaning of their own experiences. The second involved

me, a white woman, interpreting those stories and inevitably filtering what was shared through my own lens. This was where the theoretical framework of *relational race theory* and more broadly *critical race theory* and *white supremacy culture* helped me to maintain validity.

Similarly, I could not escape my positionality as an assistant principal at one of the school sites. I held significant power, both as the second-highest leader at my site and as part of the broader leadership across Achieve South Central Campus. As an administrator, the decisions I made had real consequences, and both staff and students understood this.

To minimize any potential negative impacts of this dynamic, I took several steps in my interview process with students. During interviews, I explained that I was stepping out of my role as an administrator and into my role as a UCLA researcher. I emphasized to students that what they shared would remain confidential, unless I was required to disclose it as a mandated reporter. I also conducted interviews after school and outside of regular working hours, which I believe helped students see me as a researcher rather than a school site administrator.

When I presented my research at each school site staff meeting in January 2026, I clarified that I would not be operating in my role as an administrator while conducting the study. I explained that I would not report information to site administrators or discuss what students shared with anyone on campus. I also noted that all data would be anonymized, with pseudonyms used and identifying details removed. I shared that the only exception would be any information I was required to act upon in my role as a mandated reporter.

During interviews, students were provided with snacks and drinks of their choosing. Afterwards, I gave them each a thank you note that included a \$25 gift card. UCLA provided me with a small stipend in order to fund this.

I believe that the biggest threats to my credibility and the validity of my results are due to concerns about subjectivity and reactivity. Concerns about subjectivity may arise because of my racial identity, and how this could have impacted the ways I interpreted data. Concerns about bias and reactivity may also arise given that this study highlights white supremacy culture and anti-Blackness in majority Latiné school communities, and I am a white woman. This can be interpreted as me, an outsider who has racial privilege, condemning the racial dynamics of a community which I am not a part of.

I was fortunate that I had a strong committee who helped me maintain racial subjectivity. Dr. Muñiz, Dr. Rogers, and Dr. Singh are all scholars with a focus on ethnic studies and racial identity, and their guidance was incredibly helpful.

The credibility of my research was enhanced by my long-term involvement at my school site and across the Achieve South Central Campus more broadly. As a staff member already embedded in the community, I was able to avoid the “one-off” dynamic that can occur when researchers conduct interviews at sites where they are not known. Students at my school were accustomed to my presence: I was in classrooms daily, present at every recess, and did not have a private office, my desk was in the hallway. As a result, student behavior did not shift significantly simply due to my presence. I also engaged in daily check-ins and check-outs with students, and they were accustomed to speaking with me about a wide range of topics. Students at the other schools were similarly familiar with me due to overlapping drop-off, recess, lunch, and dismissal times. When I stood at the front gate in the mornings, I greeted all students entering campus, not just those enrolled at my school.

Two other ways I addressed concerns about credibility were by having detailed transcripts and notes, as well as using standardized coding methods. As much as possible, I used direct quotes from students to illuminate my findings.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of this study was to center the voices of Black and Afro-Latiné students in order to improve their school experiences, so their well being was the most important consideration in this study. I did everything in my power to make students feel comfortable and safe during interviews, but the reality is that sharing past or current racial harm can be a traumatic experience. The topic of race and racism can cause many people, even adults, to feel uncomfortable and emotional. I had to be intentional in the ways I approached these conversations and always prioritize the needs of my students.

During interviews I paid close attention to non-verbal cues. For example, one student began to have long pauses after each question, so I asked if he needed a break. He did. Another student was very squirmy, so I got him some fidgets to use, and one student stood during her entire interview as she expressed she preferred it to using a chair. One third grader asked, “Are we done yet?” after only a few questions, so we took a break. She ended up asking the same question more and more frequently so I decided to cut the interview short. At times, I could sense students did not want to answer a question, so I simply moved on. One student cried during her interview, and she and I spent a long time together that day to process all we discussed.

After that interview, she sought me out daily on campus to come chat and give me a hug, as did all the other students who did not attend my school and thus did not see me all the time. One 6th grader kept bragging to peers how he was going to “be in Ms. Abby’s book.” The interviews definitely created a bond between us. This echoed previous studies that have shown

how the process of interviewing marginalized youth can be rehumanizing and empowering (Damiani, 2014; Muñiz, 2024).

Limitations

There were a few limitations to this study; which will be detailed further in Chapter 5. As stated previously, due to the age of interview participants, they may not be aware of racialized experiences when they occur. This could be the case both in relation to incidents of harm and incidents of inclusion or affirmation. Another limitation was the assumption that interviewees were telling the truth. Students may have exaggerated or embellished, either intentionally or unintentionally, due to their young age.

This study did not address the impact of colorism among participants and the ways that this impacted their personal experiences with anti-Blackness. This study also did not dig deeply into the differences in experience between Black and Afro-Latiné identifying respondents. Additionally, this study did not account for differences in experience based on ability and disability, age, country of origin, family dynamics, gender identity, nationality, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status.

While the school sites chosen for this study were representative of schools in the city of Los Angeles and in Los Angeles County more broadly, there were still limitations due to the sample size of a few schools, the number of students interviewed, and the fact that all of the schools were charters within the same network.

Conclusion

Most Black children in the United States attend schools where the majority of students are people of color, yet where Black students are still a racial minority (NCES, 2024). Since anti-Black racism is deeply embedded in school systems and American culture, there is a need to

focus on the experiences of students in such settings. This is especially the case in cities such as Los Angeles, which are majority Latiné, as anti-Blackness and white supremacy are ingrained in Latin American culture and then replicated in schools (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023; Singh, 2024). There are very few studies on the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné school students in predominantly Latiné schools, and I was not able to find a single study that centered on elementary schools. The use of interviews was an intentional choice. The stories and voices of our Black and Afro-Latiné students matter, and they deserve to be heard.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings from a qualitative, phenomenological study centered on the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné elementary school students attending predominantly Latiné schools. In this study, I centered student voices through interviews.

This study focused on incidents of racial harm, student sense of belonging, and racial identity development. These phenomena were examined through a *relational race framework* and the theory of anti-Blackness, as well as Powell and Galloway-Popotas's (2024) theory of *bridging and belonging* (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Lipsitz et al., 2019; Sexton, 2010; Singh, 2024). Study participants were 11 students in grades 3rd–6th, each of whom took part in an individual, semi-structured interview conducted after school during February or March of 2026. Participants self-identified as Black or Afro-Latiné and were members of their school's Black Student Union (BSU). Each student attended one of the elementary schools located on the Achieve South Central Campus in the Vermont-Slauson neighborhood of South Central Los Angeles during the 2025–26 school year.

Overview of Findings

The findings will be organized in this chapter by research question.

RQ1: How, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students perceive incidents of anti-Black Hate Speech and anti-Black racism within a predominantly Latiné school?

RQ1 Findings: Across interviews, anti-Black racism emerged as a frequent and normalized aspect of students' experiences, often occurring through interpersonal peer interactions and exacerbated by insufficient adult responses. Findings suggest that anti-Black racism at Achieve

South Central Campus operated as a systemic pattern that was inconsistently addressed by staff, at times shifting the burden of response onto students themselves.

RQ2: To what extent, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students describe feeling a sense of belonging within a predominantly Latiné school?

RQ2 Findings: Students' sense of belonging was uneven; students were supported by relationships with select peers and staff while simultaneously being harmed by racialized interactions and inconsistent institutional practices.

RQ3: What factors (e.g., spaces, policies, practices), if any, within the school environment contribute to students' racial identity development?

RQ3 Findings: Engagement with race in both school dialogue and curriculum was limited and inconsistent, particularly through the erasure of Afro-Latiné identities and the narrow, historical framing of Blackness.

RQ2 & RQ3

RQ2 & RQ3 Findings: The Black Student Union (BSU) functioned as a critical third space, providing belonging, racial affirmation, and opportunities for dialogue that were largely absent in the broader school environment. As the BSU meetings occurred twice-a-week—once during lunch and once after school—the group was not fully integrated into the school day.

To protect participant confidentiality, all names and identifying details have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Finding One: Frequent Anti-Blackness and Varied, Reactive Staff Responses

Everyday Anti-Black Racism

Anti-Black racism refers to how anti-Blackness operates in practice (Bell, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023; Wilkerson, 2020). In schools, this can be enacted through systems, policies, and interpersonal interactions that disadvantage and cause harm to Black people (Bell, 2013; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Saini, 2019).

Racialized Language and Harm to Black and Afro-Latiné Students

Delgado and Stefancic (2023) define Hate Speech as “Racial slurs and epithets or other harsh language that has no purpose other than to demean and marginalize other people or groups” (p. 176). In this study, anti-Black Hate Speech included usage of the N-word, animalistic dehumanization—especially use of the terms “monkey” and “gorilla”—or derogatory comments about physical features. Anti-Black Hate Speech was a frequent experience for Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus.

Most interviewees had been called the N-word at school. Michael was nine years old; he described his race as Black American and said that his mom was from Belize. He talked at length about instances of being called the N-word: “Somebody wrote to me with the N-word....They say the N-word. Like they would think it’s funny as a joke until I don’t laugh at them. They would know it’s wrong. I would say, if you know the history.” Michael shared that his classmates seemed to think saying the N-word was funny, but he felt it was inappropriate. He believed that if they understood the history of the word and the seriousness of its meaning, they would not use it. Brianna was eleven years old and identified as Black American, Indian, and Samoan. She also discussed that peers frequently used the N-word, noting she heard it used by non-Black students nearly every day. She detailed an episode she witnessed: “Today we were lining up to get the food that Ms. Ramirez was doing. And I hear one of the kids go, ‘Hey I was here first’ and it was

at a Black little boy.” When asked for more information, she shared that the Black boy was called the N-word in that comment, and the race of the student who said it, “was, I think, Mexican.” Brianna’s description suggests that the N-word was used even in minor situations, such as perceived line-cutting, and that its use was not limited to older students. Maya was nine years old and identified as Black American. She shared that her paternal grandmother was Cuban, her Dad was Black, Mexican, and Cuban, and her mom was from Pakistan. She said school was hard in previous years, because “People would call me the N-word, and it makes me feel really uncomfortable and like they would constantly say, ‘Oh, look at that.’” In this account, Maya shared that she was called the N-word and racially othered, experiences that negatively impacted her. Zara identified as Black and Asian, was twelve years old and in the 6th grade. She reflected on past incidents at her school, saying, “Sometimes they call me a ‘monkey.’ The N-word....Really like it happened a lot of the time in 3rd grade. And after that, I really have to go with it, like once in 5th grade, 6th grade and everything else.” While Zara shared that incidents lessened as she got older, the comment “I really have to go with it” implied that Hate Speech was a frequent part of her experience.

Students were also dehumanized by the use of animalistic language, specifically the words monkey and gorilla, which have historically anti-Black connotations. Adrian was nine years old. He described himself as Guatemalan and Salvadorian, his mom as, “mixed, she white and something else,” and his dad as Black. He shared about an episode where he was called a racial slur because he was struggling at a recess game, “Well, one time when I was playing kickball, I always keep on messing up. Julian said, ‘Hurry up, you Black African monkey.’” Not only did Julian use anti-Black animalistic language, but he also explicitly referenced Black and African identities to reinforce the racial nature of his comments. Jayden, who was in 6th grade

and identified as half Mexican, half Black, had a similar encounter during a game: “So we were playing soccer. And the game had ended intensely...And there was this one Colombian kid, he had called me, he had called me a ‘monkey’ and it made me upset. And I got mad.” Both examples suggest that games were spaces where anti-Black language was commonly used. Faith was Michael’s older sister, eleven years old and described herself as Black American and Black Belizean. Faith revealed a time when a classmate said a racial slur in Spanish:

I remember one of my students in line when I was lining back up at lunch, I remember them calling me a ‘monkey’ and saying it in Spanish. And I didn’t know what that means. So when my classmates told me that, what it means, and I was like, ‘oh.’

She commented that this student generally spoke in English, so she felt that the use of Spanish was a conscious choice. She perceived that Spanish was used to conceal the word from her, and this made her feel that the student knew the word was offensive when he chose to say it.

There are some forms of anti-Black language that are not considered Hate Speech but still cause racial harm, including stereotypes (both positive and negative), comparisons to other Black people, comments about skin color and physical features, and racial microaggressions. Jasmine was eleven years old and identified as African American. She shared, “Other people are just being very mean to me about my race. And they just be like, ‘Well, we’re not the same color.’ And then also they’re like, ‘Oh yeah, you’re way darker than me’they just say it out of nowhere.” Jasmine described that these comments were both unexpected and commonplace. While Michael previously shared about his experiences with Hate Speech, he also reported, “They call me mean stuff about my skin color.” While he did not specify what was said, he did make clear that the comments were cruel. His older sister, Faith, shared an episode that occurred

a few weeks prior. Faith was one of two Black students in her grade and the only Black girl. She narrated that students were purchasing Valentine's grams for one another at lunch, a school fundraiser that entailed candy or roses being delivered to students during class. Faith recalled, "We were doing a Valentine thing and nobody wrote me. And I was like, 'Oh, I want to be in it but nobody want me.' And Josue's like, 'Oh yeah. Nobody wants you because you're Black.'" Faith's classmate directly communicated that no one wanted to give her a Valentine specifically because of her race.

All Black and Afro-Latiné students interviewed shared instances of being called anti-Black language at school, whether the N-word, animalistic language, or negative statements about being Black. The casual nature of all these comments by non-Black Latiné youth suggests that students were used to hearing and using anti-Black language. While anti-Blackness refers to the structural devaluation and marginalization of Black people within all elements of society, it shows up as ideological, institutional, and internalized oppression, and in this case interpersonal oppression (Bell, 2013; Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Wilkerson, 2020; Sexton, 2010). As these examples show, interpersonal, peer anti-Blackness was a regular occurrence for Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus.

Emotional Impact of Peer Anti-Blackness

The episodes described above had a significant emotional impact on students, causing them to feel sadness, anger, isolation, and like they did not fundamentally belong. When she reflected on numerous incidents of Hate Speech, Zara stated, "It makes me feel like I'm not, I don't know how to say, like included. Like nobody understands how that make me feel when they say that." As Zara explained, these hurtful comments made her feel isolated and like an outsider in her own school. Similarly, Michael shared that, "Because the people use the N-word

during slavery, they still use it, the people use the N-word to Black people and it just makes me feel sad. It makes me feel angry because why would you do it on purpose or something?” After he described another such instance, he said he felt “Just like I was not welcome here.” Michael wondered about the intent of his peers, and if they knew the historical harm of their comments. Like Zara, these interactions caused him to feel like he did not belong. Valerie was eleven years old and said of her identity, “I say my race is mixed. I’m mixed with Black and Honduran.” While Valerie was now in 6th grade, she recalled that in previous years she was often called the N-word. She expressed, “I didn’t like it. So I told them to stop the first time. But they didn’t stop. And I just went to go tell an adult....It made me feel sad. I actually went crying to my teacher.” Valerie tried to stand up for herself but the harm continued, and it resulted in her being visibly emotional and distressed.

Anti-Black experiences were so harmful that it caused some students to consider attending a different school. As Maya shared, “Like when people called me names, I feel like, not supposed to be in school anymore. I have to go to a Black school to be more comfortable. I would think that.” When asked how often she felt that way, Maya said she felt that way every time there was an anti-Black interaction. This feels especially significant because in many ways, Maya described loving her school during her interview. She shared that she had lots of friends, she named staff she felt seen by and connected to, and she enthusiastically said she would recommend her school to others “Because I just love the school and like, a great school. And, like, I love it. And it’s like good writing, good people.” While Maya was overwhelmingly positive about her school, the episodes of Hate Speech were so impactful that they made her consider leaving.

Staff Non-Response and Student Burden

A reality of working in elementary schools is that children will sometimes say hurtful things to one another. How adults respond in these moments matters. Do staff use restorative practices? Is the focus placed on punishment, or on understanding impact, accountability, and repair? Are students supported in learning about the history and meaning behind harmful language? While these approaches require time and intentionality, staff responses shape the extent of harm, the frequency of future incidents, and how students experience school overall.

While it is normal for all adults to handle such moments in their own words (without a script), in order for there to be consistency and equity for students, schools need to establish procedures for responding to harm. Students are most successful when they know what the expectations are and when those expectations are consistent throughout the school. This includes processes for handling harm, documentation, staff training, and communication with families. The responsibility for this lies within the school as a system, and this is where the institutional, rather than individual, comes into play.

Adults were not interviewed for this study, and observations were not conducted. As a result, all incidents are described through students' perceptions and experiences. This means that we cannot fully know how staff members or institutions responded in every instance of anti-Blackness. However, the focus of this study is not on verifying adult actions, but on understanding how students experienced these incidents and their responses to them. Across interviews, students revealed that staff responses to anti-Blackness were highly varied, and at times, minimal and ineffective. The consistency of these accounts suggests that these were not isolated incidents, but part of a broader institutional problem.

Inconsistent Staff Responses

Staff responses to anti-Black racism were inconsistent. While every student shared that they felt *some adults* knew how to handle such interactions, they also shared that *not all adults* knew how to do so. Zara explained what happened after anti-Black incidents: “They [teachers] bring it up to the more of like behavior teachers. Everything gets sorted out and apologies and they learn more about your race and what I were like, where the racial slurs come from.” In other words, when she told a staff member what occurred, they reported it to administrators or behavior staff. Those adults then ensured that there was historical learning for those who caused harm and that a restorative circle was held. When Zara was asked if she thinks all adults knew how to address incidents of racial harm, she answered, “Some of them just give it to the assistant principal and principal,” adding that if they were not available, other staff would not know what to say or do. This implied that Zara believed only certain staff knew how to respond to anti-Black language.

Relatedly, Maya told a story about a time she felt supported by adults, and another about a time she felt unsupported by adults. She shared that it “depends” on the adult whether they knew how to support Black and Afro-Latiné students, explaining that she turned to trusted adults in order to feel confident that situations would be appropriately addressed. She named those people as the assistant principal and the BSU coordinator. Jasmine also highlighted the inconsistency across staff, reasoning, “When other kids say mean things to us, we’ll go to them and then they’ll handle it. But when we go to other adults, they don’t really do anything about it.” While Jasmine did not specify which adults do to “handle it,” she made it clear that there were adults who acted on student reporting and adults who did not.

Two patterns arose within student comments about who “handles it” and who does not. Students consistently went to Black staff, regardless of role, to address incidents of racial harm.

At one school site, all interviewed students identified the same Black staff member as a consistent responder to incidents of racism. Brianna talked about what he did: "...he would keep them in from recess and talk to them about it. And like really explain what they're saying... Sometimes he do it when other people can't do it." Brianna's words indicated clear trust for this staff member among both Black and Afro-Latiné students; her words also highlighted the invisible, racialized labor that Black educators have to carry in schools.

Another group of staff frequently identified as addressing racism were administrators. While students did not mention all administrators across school sites, it was clear that at each school there were a few school leaders who were trusted by students to respond to racial harm. In one respect, this was a positive, as it signaled that those in charge had the knowledge and ability to both deal with such interactions and make Black and Afro-Latiné students feel supported throughout the process. At the same time, it was problematic in that there appeared to be an overreliance on such staff to "handle racism." Students repeatedly said that they did not think most other adults would correctly address Hate Speech and racial harm.

Minimal and Ineffective Responses

Findings demonstrated the varied responses to anti-Blackness by staff, as well as student perceptions that only some adults—primarily Black staff and administrators—were prepared to deal with such instances. Students also revealed numerous staff responses that were minimal and ineffective. This resulted in even more racial trauma for Black and Afro-Latiné students.

One student, Brianna, shared at length her perception that staff did not do anything when they overheard or were told about anti-Black Hate Speech. She stated that when she reported instances to staff, "They will say 'oh okay, I will handle it.' But when I look around not doing anything about it because they're on the phone or talking to another teacher about nonsense, just

laughing.” This suggests that Brianna felt staff did not take Hate Speech seriously. Jasmine told the story of a Black classmate who she believed left her school because staff did not interrupt racial bullying. She stated:

So basically there was a different student, but she had left in 4th grade. She was getting bullied. And then she didn’t want to go tell the teacher. So I went to go tell the teacher, I went to go tell Ms. Martinez and then she just sat there and she said ‘Okay.’ And then at recess I saw him [the student who caused harm] playing and I was like, ‘Ms. Martinez, you know, you didn’t talk to him?’ And then she was like, ‘No,’ and she just walked away....They were calling her [the student], like burnt things. They were like, oh, you’re a burnt piece of bread and stuff like that.

Jasmine talked about how the girl continued to get bullied for her race, and how she did not see staff do anything about it. Jasmine felt certain that was why her friend eventually left to attend a different school. Brianna also talked at length about the use of the N-word by non-Black students. When asked how adults responded to hearing the N-word, Brianna shared that most adults only seemed to intervene when they felt like it or when a large group of students was involved. She elaborated:

I mean, when we’re outside, like at recess or something, that’s when it usually happens. But yeah, we’re in the classroom, sometimes something gets told to the student, but sometimes they do. So if it’s a bigger group of students, like being bad or something and one of them says it [the N-word]. And, you know, the teacher knows that everybody heard it. He [the teacher] would stand right there and ask who did it. And everybody [the students] doesn’t say who did it. Everybody will lose a class point for that. But if we’re just like there’s three

people. And just us right there and nobody does anything about it....I feel they understand Black students when they want to, like, it's on their time, not on ours....Like how I said, sometimes if it's a big crowd of people that don't do something right, if it's a little crowd of people that will do something about it. So you want to do it when you want to....I feel like they're just watching [the adults]. Like nothing being done.

It appeared to Brianna that adults only acknowledged use of the N-word when they recognized that students were aware they heard it. Tellingly, this narrative also showed that all students were punished for a few students using the N-word, including those harmed, as they collectively “lose a class point.” In elementary schools, class points are generally earned for good group behavior, with collective points resulting in rewards for all students.

At times, staff responses were ineffective and included consequences for the student who was harmed. Xavier, who was twelve years old and identified as Black and Puerto Rican, talked about an event where an Afro-Latiné friend was called a “monkey” by a Latiné classmate: “They fought. With their bodies. They got in trouble.” When asked if he and his Afro-Latiné friend talked about it later that day, he said, “No. He went home.” Xavier was succinct, but it appeared that the Afro-Latiné student was called a racial slur, responded physically, and was possibly sent home from school. While schools certainly do not want to condone fighting, teachers and administrators should bear in mind students’ use of slurs when considering consequences.

Maya, who was in 3rd grade, recalled a time when she was in 2nd grade and was called the N-word by two Latiné students. In this instance, staff also responded ineffectively:

...so two boys said it. So after, I tried to tell. After they told on me because I called them it back after. So they told mister, though they told it to me first. And after mister screamed at me. So I got in trouble and not them....Because I called it back.

In other words, Maya was called the N-word by two non-Black students, and when she called them the N-word back, they went and told an adult. Maya had consequences but the other students did not. This incident demonstrated that staff did not differentiate between the harm experienced by an Afro-Latiné student being called the N-word and a non-Black student being called it. This points to a fundamental lack of understanding of the history of the N-word, how impactful it is when said to Black people, and a lack of knowledge about how to support students when such moments occur. As discussed in the previous section, this also suggests that the students who used the N-word understood it was hurtful and inappropriate, as they immediately reported it to an adult when it was directed back at them.

One bright spot in this was that Maya did not let the incident go, which spoke to her tenacity and strong sense of self. The following day, she returned to school and shared the incident with an adult with whom she felt connected. She recalled, “They made me comfortable. And they said do you want to talk to them, or the next day, or do you just want to go back to class, or just stay here and relax? I said I want to talk to them because I wanted to fix it.” She explained that the adult helped her navigate a restorative conversation, and afterwards, “I feel proud of myself.” This adult gave Maya space to process, choices as to how she wanted the situation handled, and the opportunity to have a restorative discussion. Maya was a student who shared that her family often had conversations about race at home, saying they discussed that, “...being Black is the best thing ever. Who cares what people say. At least you’re you...Because

other people don't have our skin. So that's okay." It is possible that these family conversations about being proud of being Black contributed to Maya's fortitude and her decision to go back to school and address an incident that she knew was unjust.

An additional, problematic way that staff responded to Hate Speech was by minimizing what occurred. Valerie, who was in 6th grade, recalled that after being called the N-word in 3rd grade, she began to cry. When asked how adults responded, she said, "They responded in a very comforting way. They told me 'It's okay, you shouldn't cry about it. You shouldn't let others hurt you. You shouldn't let others make you sick. You shouldn't let others see that they get to you. Don't let others get to you.'"

While Valerie described that this was comforting to her, from an adult perspective, this response not only downplayed the impact of the N-word, but also implied that her sadness and pain were not valid. The appropriate adult response to Hate Speech should never be "do not feel your feelings and be stronger." This again showed that some adults did not understand the history of anti-Black language and how it is different from other forms of student unkindness.

Staff responses described in this section are concerning. They revealed that there were adults who ignored anti-Black racism, adults who responded ineffectively, and adults who minimized Hate Speech. Not only were staff responses inconsistent, they were often inadequate, further contributing to students' racial harm. When taken together, the wide variety of staff responses indicated the institutional nature of this problem.

Reactive Systems

Another pattern that arose in student interviews was that staff responses were largely reactive and often depended on young people reporting incidents themselves. In a school context,

proactive responses involve educating students about identity and Hate Speech to prevent harm before it occurs, whereas reactive responses take place only after harm has already happened.

The majority of students noted that they had to tell staff when anti-Black racism occurred. When asked if staff noticed when such incidents take place, Jasmine said, “Kids have to go.” Michael stated something similar, saying that adults did “not notice” when racial incidents happen. Adrian thinks that staff were aware “sometimes.” These three responses show that the burden was put on students to report when they were subjected to harm. Many interviewees commented that their peers were careful to only use anti-Black Hate Speech when adults were not around, which again implies student intentionality.

The fact that every student shared instances of being called the N-word, monkey, and/or gorilla at school demonstrated the pervasiveness of anti-Black Hate Speech at Achieve South Central Campus. When asked about classroom practices that proactively taught students about the history and harm of this language, most students could not recall lessons of this type. Only 3 out of 11 students had participated in whole group, classroom instruction on contemporary anti-Black language. Zara, who was in 6th grade, reflected on the decrease in racial slurs as she got older, commenting, “...a lot of kids were not as mature as they are now, and they didn’t really understand what they were saying and how it could affect me.” She perceived that her peers now had a better understanding of the impact of racial harm than they did when they were younger. She added, “As we started growing older, we started learning more about each other’s history.” This implied that there had been school instruction about race and racism. Brianna also reported that learning about anti-Black Hate Speech took place schoolwide:

In the beginning of the school year, every time in the beginning, well, not every time. Yeah, but sometimes, Mr. Reyes will talk about it. Let’s say five students

will get in trouble. About doing something to one Black student. Mr. Reyes, like all the detention staff will come to all the classrooms and they will talk about how racism makes them feel....And basically, that's all they would do, talk about how racism is not okay.

In one sense, this incident was reactive, as Brianna explained that multiple students had already caused harm to a Black peer prior to the conversation. However, by speaking to all classrooms, the response also functioned as a proactive effort to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Jasmine shared something similar to Brianna: "...every time someone's being racist, we have this little speech. The whole grade, both classes, we'll have this little speech in one classroom about racism." Jasmine's words described a reactive response to racism, but they also showed an attempt to prevent future harm by educating all students in the grade. Jasmine's use of the phrase "little speech," plus the repeated nature of this speech, signaled it might not have been effective, yet staff did seem to try to make proactive change. The additional eight students could not recall proactive classroom learning about anti-Black language. The lack of collective instruction about the topic raises questions about staff's knowledge of how to broach the topic, their awareness of the issue, and the expectations from the school and district around how to prevent Hate Speech.

All 11 interviewees shared different stories about the anti-Black Hate Speech that they were subjected to at school. In terms of frequency, four students recalled one Hate Speech incident ever, four students said it occurred a few times a year, two students said it occurred once a month, and one student said it occurred daily. Both the frequency of incidents and the inconsistent responses from staff demonstrated a normalization of anti-Black racism at Achieve South Central Campus. Interpersonal harm was perpetuated by peers, both casually and intentionally, as well as by negligent and insufficient staff responses. Staff reactions were highly

varied, often lacking, and at times, contributed to harm. Coupled with a lack of proactive student learning about anti-Blackness, the findings point to an institutional gap in both preventing harm and responding to it when it occurred.

Finding Two: Racialized and Uneven Belonging

The second key finding delves into student sense of belonging. According to powell and Galloway-Popotas' (2024) theory, belonging occurs when people are seen with their full humanity and dignity and have agency in a space. True belonging only exists when *breaking* is absent (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). "*Breaking* is othering in action," and occurs when individuals are treated as less deserving and their full, complex identities are overlooked (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024, p. 39).

Peer-Based Belonging

Students collectively shared that one major aspect of school that made them feel like they belonged were their friends. Zara expressed that "The students make me feel like I belong because they know when something's wrong. They check on me, they make me laugh if I'm sad." Zara felt seen by her peers and experienced joy with them. When discussing what she loved about school most, Zara elaborated, "The best part about attending my school is the students and staff because they all understand me and can help me." This displayed that Zara felt affirmed by both friends and adults at school. Michael said he felt he fits in because "My friends, basically that like to make me feel welcome here." Michael's friends contributed to his sense of belonging. Valerie emphasized her favorite aspects of school:

I think the best part is getting to see my teachers and my friends....Because being able to see my friends, just me. I have more time to spend quality time with them

and seeing our teachers because they teach us things every single day....I'm not afraid to speak my mind and that all my friends understand how I feel. Also that my friends don't mind who I am. And I really like that.

When she was with her friends, Valerie felt she could speak her truth. She also expressed that she enjoyed being with teachers. Adrian said things that made him feel he fits in were "My friends, my family and my teachers." This indicated that Adrian felt belonging among both students and adults. Jayden, who was in 6th grade, reflected on classroom relationships and how they had improved,

I like talking with my friends, getting along with each other. Because, I don't know why, but, just, last year, it was just a certain group, with people talking. And then now, this year, everyone's getting along, all the classes, both classes. But we're all talking to each other, hanging out, playing sports. Even if we're different opposite genders, different races, we're all sticking together. All lifting each other up, helping each other and playing together.

Jayden recognized that in prior years, peers had cliques, but now, there was more harmony and conversation between various student groups.

Every interviewee named friendships as a key reason they experienced belonging at school. In these peer relationships, students felt seen and that they could show up as their authentic selves, reflecting a recognition of their full humanity. This was an important aspect of Black and Afro-Latiné students' sense of belonging at Achieve South Central Campus.

Positive Connections with Individual Staff

In many of the comments cited above, students also mentioned teachers as a reason they experienced belonging. All students interviewed mentioned at least two to four staff members with whom they felt a strong connection. Valerie shared about these adults:

It makes you feel connected to them because they're not afraid to tell me what's what, they're not afraid to ask what's happening. And I'm not afraid to tell them how I feel. They help us calm down. They ask us if we need water or anything. They'll try to help us feel more, feel better. Instead of feeling scared or not safe.

Valerie felt that adults recognized when she was struggling and provided her with a space to process her feelings. Maya also described feeling seen by adults: "Cause you're comfortable and happy. You understand other people. And they like to talk to you and stuff. They have time for you." Maya felt adults made time for her needs. Adrian said, "Because they're kind and they're nice, and they always help me when I need help," indicating that these adults offered him support. Jayden said he felt accepted by certain staff members, "Because I talk to them a lot. And we start conversations about other things, like sports, and having fun and activity and rewards. And sometimes you get breaks." He expressed that he felt connected to these adults because they did not limit their conversations to school-related topics.

Across these comments, themes included adults making time for students, checking in, noticing when support was needed, offering help, and talking with them. Importantly, students were also asked about the staff members' racial and ethnic identities. While some of the students were unable to name the adults' racial and ethnic identities, I was able to access staff demographic data and confirm the staff members' race and ethnicity (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). Students named 36 staff members as individuals whom they felt

most connected to. While Latiné staff made up the majority of the workforce at Achieve South Central Campus at 79%, these staff were underrepresented among those named. In contrast, Black and white adults were named at rates that exceeded their representation among staff overall. This was especially the case for Black staff, who made up 40% of adults whom students felt connected to but comprised only 11% of staff overall (see Table 1).

Table 1

Comparison of Staff Demographics and Student-Identified Connected Staff

Racial/Ethnic Group	% of Total Staff	% of Named Staff
Latiné	79%	40%
Black	11%	40%
White	6%	20%

Note: No staff who identified as Asian American, Pacific Islander, or multiracial were mentioned in student interviews. For that reason, they are not in this table.

The fact that 79% of staff were Latiné yet accounted for only 40% of the staff Black and Afro-Latiné students felt most connected to points to a large disconnect. The three most-mentioned staff members were named four times each, two of whom were Black and one of whom was white. While this does not suggest that Latiné staff were inherently perpetuating anti-Blackness, the size of this discrepancy raises important questions about how belonging was

cultivated for Black and Afro-Latiné students, and by whom. White staff were named as adults who Black and Afro-Latiné students felt connected to at a rate nearly three times their staff population. Most significantly, Black staff were mentioned at a rate nearly four times their staff population.

Student Experiences of Non-Belonging and Hypervisibility

Black and Afro-Latiné students experienced hypervisibility at Aspire South Central Campus. They were highly aware that few students shared their racial identity. Their racial positioning shaped their day-to-day experiences and contributed to feelings of isolation.

Zara felt that she stood out “Because I’ve always been one of the very few Black kids that have been in my class.” Later, she added, “throughout my classes, I’ve been the only African American person. And you don’t have no one around you that’s like you or understands your culture.” Zara experienced an acute sense of disconnection from peers due to her race and culture. Michael shared an example of times he felt left out: “In my classroom we have more math problems. And they mostly talk about stuff in Mexico. And when all my classmates say like, ‘I know that, oh yeah, yeah.’ And I’m the only Black student like that. So I feel like I don’t know about that.” Michael was referring to math lessons that included aspects of a culture to which many students belonged. Since he did not have a frame of reference for the content, he felt isolated.

When discussing the demographics of her class, Maya noted, “I like Jacob and Adrian in my class, we’re the only Black people in the class....Nobody really likes to talk to Jacob but I like to talk to Jacob.” Maya was highly aware of the racial identities in her class, and indicated that a Black peer experienced social isolation. In response to a question about standing out,

Valerie replied, “I feel like I’m one of a few kids that are from Honduras. So that makes you stand out because not everybody at the school are from Honduras...And because I’m also Black at the same time. I’m mixed.” Valerie shared that the combination of her nationality, which was uncommon at her school, and her multiracial Black identity made her feel different from her peers. After turning off the recorder at the end of his interview, Michael shared about a recent incident on the playground. An older Latiné student whom he did not know approached him and said, “You look like LeBron James and Kevin Durant.” Michael explained that he knew the boy said this because of Michael’s race. He emphasized that it made him feel very uncomfortable and like he stood out. The only thing Michael and these men had in common was that they were Black.

All of these instances reflect forms of *breaking*, as students described how their minority status made them feel othered, isolated, and set apart, while also noting that peers often treated Blackness as a monolithic identity. This *breaking* prevented students from experiencing full belonging at Achieve South Central Campus.

Institutional Factors Related to Belonging

As discussed previously, staff responses to harm were inconsistent, and this contributed not only to student trauma, but also impacted belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students. When asked about their perceptions of staff knowledge of Black and Afro-Latiné cultures and whether they felt safe at school, students offered mixed responses.

When asked if staff understood her culture, Maya replied, “Sometimes....It’s because, it’s a lot of Mexican people and...white...they’re not Black, so you don’t know how it feels. I feel like you’re understood just a little bit.” She elaborated, sharing that she thought the Black

Student Union coordinator understood Black students best. Since Maya described her father as Black, Mexican, and Cuban, this quote demonstrates that she felt her Black identity was what set her apart and impacted staff members' understanding of her. Zara felt that because most staff were Latiné, they implicitly understood that culture. She stated:

In a lot of ways, Latinos and Mexican Americans, they grew up differently from African Americans. And how they were taught differently and stuff like that. So some teachers sometimes understand where they're coming from because that's how they were raised.

Zara reflected that staff understood Latiné culture in a way that they did not understand African American culture because of their own upbringings. Faith felt similarly about staff understanding her identity as a Black American and Black Belizean, saying, "Not all of them. A few;" indicating that she did not feel wholly seen. To the same question, Jasmine, who was African American, said, "Just some." As an example of a staff member who did understand, she explained:

I went to Mr. Reyes, and then I was like, "I just learned about someone." He was like, "Who?" I was like, "Mark Dean." He was like, "Oh, yeah, I learned about him too. And he was like, "Isn't that the person that invented the water gun?" I was like, "Oh yeah."

Jasmine felt culturally affirmed by this staff member, who identified as Latiné, because he also had knowledge about a Black inventor.

Other student responses were also positive. In response to a question about staff understanding his culture, Jayden, who identified as Black and Mexican, shared:

I'm pretty sure it was last year. Not too long ago. We were talking about cyber bullying and racism through the internet and like, if you don't know how they look and you're assuming that they're, you're Black based on their profile tag or your profile picture, it's not even a thing because you don't know how they look like and you don't know what they're going through.

Based on Jayden's description, in this conversation, staff discussed racial assumptions and profiling, emphasizing how little you can garner about a person's lived experience based on their social media account. Jayden felt this demonstrated that staff understood his identity. Similarly, Adrian remarked, "Well, it made me feel safe here that, people, they be nice. They protect me. And I got a lot of teachers to be by my side." Here, Adrian highlighted that he felt adults ensured he was safe at school. Ava, who was eight years old, and described herself as Black American and Native American, stated why she felt she fit in most succinctly: "School is my kind of family...Here you safe." Like Adrian, Ava felt that school was a place where she was cared for and shielded from harm. Taken together, student responses were mixed regarding whether adults understood their culture and helped them feel safe at school. Physical and psychological safety are key components of belonging, and findings suggested that not all students experienced these conditions consistently.

Uneven Discipline Practices

Student belonging was also impacted by what interviewees perceived as uneven discipline practices. Brianna shared two accounts in which she observed adults disciplining Black students for behaviors that she felt were permitted among their Latiné peers:

One day it was me, a few other students like John, Gabriel, everybody. So we were kicking the soccer ball, and I didn't know that we weren't supposed to kick the soccer ball....And Mr. Lopez came out and he started yelling at me, and I got in trouble. But really, no one else got in trouble but me and Jayden. And I felt some type of way about it because I didn't just, just the two Black students get in trouble. Why didn't anybody else get in trouble? Because we were all playing soccer.

Brianna highlighted that only Black students received consequences and demonstrated her awareness that adults treated students differently based on race. An additional story from Brianna was similarly clear:

And then one day Mr. Lopez was outside and we were all playing a game on our phones. And Maria and Kaylee, Mr. Lopez had seen them when he was walking up and they had put their phones in their backpack. And when we did the same, he took me and Jasmine's phone and he didn't take anybody else's phone. So I just feel like it's very unfair. And we're getting treated differently.

In this instance, the two Latiné students had no consequences for using their phones, yet the two Black students were disciplined for the identical behavior. In both examples, Brianna recognized the racialized behavior of staff, and felt the injustice of this behavior. Zara also felt that Latiné students did not receive consequences, explaining, "And if they say something like they could

say something wrong to an African American student. They won't get in trouble for it. They will just get told to not do it again. But they keep doing it and it's whatever." Zara perceived that when Latiné peers were unkind to African American students, little to no action was taken in response. Uneven discipline practices were another example of *breaking*, as students' experiences varied based on their racial identity.

When analyzed through Powell and Galloway-Popotas' (2024) theory of *belonging*, Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus felt seen and that they had dignity when they were with their friends and select staff members. While there were some students who felt safe and seen by adults at school, there were also students who expressed that they only felt safe with some adults, and other students experienced uneven discipline. This range of responses again speaks to a lack of consistent practices that ensured belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students.

Finding Three: Silence and Avoidance Around Race and Constrained Racial Identity

Development

Racial identity development refers to the process through which people come to understand, interpret, and make meaning of their racial identity and its relationship to society (Lewis, 2008; Nasir, 2011; Pollock, 2004). In school settings, racial identity development can be influenced by curriculum, peer interactions, staff relationships, representation, discussions about race, and experiences of inclusion or harm (Delpit, 2002, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Nasir, 2011; Pollock, 2004; Shange, 2019).

Limited Representation in Curriculum and Risk of Student Harm in Curricular Conversations

Students were asked if their racial identity was celebrated at school, if they learned about the positive contributions of Black and Afro-Latiné people at school, and if they thought staff knew about the positive contributions of Black and Afro-Latiné people. Valerie answered:

I think they know some. Because it's probably the popular people like Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Muhammad Ali. Yeah, I think they know and that they'll explain to us who they were or what they did, how they helped the Black community. So that's also what I like. They teach us what, who they are, what they did, how what they did became history and made it so important.

In this, Valerie indicated that she believed staff had knowledge about well-known Black people, but perhaps not about those who were lesser-known. Faith thought her racial identity was celebrated at school "A lot." She explained:

..if it's Black History Month, it'll be in the end of the hall. We'll have pictures and seeing who's the Black people. The first Black people who did baseball, the [first] Black people who went on the plane, stuff like that. And then we also do learn about it more. And we also do papers. We do papers, we do activities. And then we also did in the gym. It was all walking around for Ruby Bridges.

Faith described a number of ways that she saw Black people represented and centered during Black History Month (BHM), including through images, student writing, a march, and additional activities. This was echoed by Zara, who stated:

Because when we learn about people that have the same race as me, who speak highly of them and what they've been through and how successful as a person

they are....We were talking about Jackie Robinson and how he grew up in a neighborhood where it was primarily Black people and how he became successful. And, Shirley Chisholm, how she became the first president candidate as a Black woman.

Zara felt Black identities and achievements were portrayed in a positive light. Adrian noted: “So one time when I came to this school, I thought that, when I started was scary. But I realized when I got older and older, we start learning about Black History Month.” He said he learned about “Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Bessie Coleman.” Adrian implied that he felt less scared at school when he learned about Black history.

Two of the five students above explicitly said they learned about Black people during Black History Month. Additional students expressed that this was the only time they learned Black history. Michael said that his school “Always celebrate Black History Month.” When asked if his racial identity was celebrated other times of the year, he replied “No.” Michael felt that Black history and identity were not integrated throughout the school year. When asked the same question, Jayden stated, “Yeah, they still celebrate it....We talk about it, we hang out a lot. We do some activities.” When asked in which spaces this occurred, he explained, “Mostly BSU.” While Jayden felt his identity was honored year-round, he noted that this was not part of the classroom curriculum, but rather, during the twice-weekly BSU meetings. Similarly, Brianna noted:

I only feel like I see us learning about Black people in our, in BSU or in our science class sometimes. In our science class, we only learned about maybe two Black people. Because the times that we learned about Black people a lot is when

everybody has to learn about Black people in Black history you know. But after Black History Month we didn't learn anything about Black people. We were just learning about Claudette Colvin. And that's the only Black person we learned about in our reading class and in our science class. The only class we learned about was I forgot his name, but he made the Super Soaker. And then we wrote something about how the Super Soaker makes us feel, it wasn't really about the Black person. So that just really it.

Brianna felt that Black people and stories were only included in classroom instruction during Black History Month because it was required. Outside of February, she recalled learning about only one other Black person, and noted that the content did not focus on that person's story. She shared that the BSU was the only space where she consistently saw Black people and experiences centered throughout the year. Relatedly, Jasmine expressed, "Today we had a Black History Month parade in the gym. And then also that whole month of February was just all about Black History Month, and we learned about new people." She added that her race was celebrated, "Mostly in February." Like Michael, Jayden, and Brianna, Jasmine remarked that Black content was only taught during Black History Month. Collectively, these responses suggested that learning about Black people was episodic and not integrated into curriculum throughout the school year.

Some students shared that anti-Black Hate Speech occurred during BHM lessons. Brianna described that this also occurred when learning about other racial identities:

Oh well basically in the classroom somebody will say something like, we're learning about the man who made the Super Soaker. Somebody said "monkey,"

“gorilla” or something like that...And then, it’s just every time somebody like, it’s not even just Black people, it’s Chinese people. Anybody that comes up on the screen. Because every day we watch Season Ten in our math class. And we’re watching TV Ten. And somebody will come up maybe a Chinese person or something. And then somebody was trying to sing a song to make everybody laugh: “Everybody was kung fu fighting.” Everybody laugh. Everybody saying, “ching chong ching chong.” And I would just be sitting there and all he [the teacher] would say is “stop.” And it just happened constantly. Constantly every day.

Brianna was then asked if any negative, stereotypical comments were made when the people on the screen were Latiné, and she replied “Oh no.” Brianna felt that racial slurs and stereotypes were used by peers whenever Black or Asian people were represented in the classroom. The repetition of these comments, as well as the minimal teacher response, suggests that some adults did not know how to address these topics while also preventing student harm. While deep in data-gathering, I heard about a similar incident in an intermediate classroom. A teacher told me that during her BHM lesson, students in her class put their hoods on, pulled their ears in front, and began making “monkey noises and gestures.” This illustrates that Black and Afro-Latiné students experienced racialized harm from peers even during lessons intended to center their histories.

Students reported that most instruction on Black people and Black history was confined to February, with a curriculum focused primarily on historical figures rather than contemporary Black experiences or broader contributions. In some instances, these lessons resulted in Hate

Speech, further contributing to harm for Black and Afro-Latiné students. Notably, Afro-Latiné identities and stories were entirely absent from curriculum.

Student Descriptions of Race

The first section of the interview protocol included background questions about each student's age, grade, family, name, race, and school. Several students were unfamiliar with the term "race." When this occurred, I explained the terms "race," "racial identity," "racism," "ethnicity," and "nationality," in developmentally appropriate language.

The following paragraph details the ways that students responded to questions about their own racial identity. When Michael, who was nine, was asked his race, he replied, "Like how? I'm confused." After I explained what the term meant, he said, "I'm Black," and that his mom was from Belize. With some support, Michael was able to share about his race. Ava, who was eight, was similarly confused when asked her racial identity. She asked, "My race?" When I described what the question meant, she said, "I take it, I like it to the skin because we take care of our skin." Then she shared that her race was "very good." While Ava did not understand the meaning of the word "race," she did describe her skin in positive terms. After further discussion, she described herself as "Black American" and "Native American." With some guidance around language, Michael and Ava were both able to describe their racial identities, but neither initially knew what race meant. Faith, Michael's eleven-year-old sister, was also confused when asked about her race, saying "What's that?" I explained the term, and then she said she was "Black American" and also from another place she could not recall. As I knew her family, I asked if she meant Belize, and she affirmingly said she was also "Black Belize." Like her brother, Faith was confused by language about race, but she was eventually able to describe herself.

Students also struggled to describe the racial identities of their peers and of staff. When asked about the race and ethnicity of most students in his school, Michael said “Mostly Mexican? I think some mixed. I don’t know....Some Mexican, some white, I don’t know.” Michael expressed uncertainty about the racial identities of those around him. When asked to share the racial identities of her peers, Faith expressed, “I don’t know what that means.” I explained, and she said, “I don’t know how I say it.” After further conversation, Faith eventually stated that most students and staff came from “Mexico.” During this interaction, I jotted down that Faith seemed worried that she was going to use the wrong words to describe others and that the language she used could somehow be offensive. Adrian was nine and also was uncertain how to answer the question about the racial identity of most classmates, asking, “Like the skin color and how they’re born?” After my explanation, he said, “Mixed, white or Black.” Adrian, who described himself by nationality (Guatemalan and Salvadorian) and his parents by race (mom as mixed and white, dad as Black) frequently described other people as “mixed,” perhaps because that was how he viewed his own identity. Xavier, who was twelve, replied that most of his classmates were “Black, Mexican, and white.” As Xavier identified as Black and Puerto Rican, it was especially interesting that he chose to use the term “Mexican” to describe his Latiné classmates, rather than using a more broad term. Brianna, who was eleven and identified as Black and Indian, shared “Like this school is basically all Mexicans and stuff.” Like Xavier, Brianna used nationality to describe her peers.

Some students who identified as Afro-Latiné described their ethnicity, race, and nationality in nuanced ways. Valerie expressed that “I say my race is mixed. I’m mixed with Black and Honduran because in Honduras there’s Black people and there’s Caribbean.” Valerie’s description positioned the two parts of her identity as separate from one another, suggesting that

she viewed being Black and being “Caribbean” as two distinct categories. By “Caribbean,” she appeared to be referring to Latiné identity, which may indicate that she did not yet conceptualize that someone could be simultaneously ethnically Latiné and racially Black. When discussing staff’s understanding of her race and ethnicity, Valerie stated, “Yeah, I think they do understand that we’re all mixed, and also that we can be who we want to be.” As Valerie identified as “mixed,” she also viewed all peers as being multiracial. Maya, who was nine, described herself as “Black American,” her dad as “Black, Mexican, and Cuban,” and her mom as from Pakistan. Maya explained her mixed identity meant she was seen as “cool” and that she fit in with all students:

Because I have a lot of white friends. I’m a part of them. I’m white and Black.

The same one mixed. It feels like I’m a part of them and they’re very in love with me...And they become friends with me because I’m like, I think I was cool because I was a different skin color.

This was an interesting perspective, as Maya never described herself or her family members as white. Rather, because she viewed herself as multiracial, she felt her racial identity overlapped with those of all her peers. She also suggested that her peers perceived her skin color as unique in a positive way.

Only two students used the terms “Latino/a/é/x, Latin American, or Hispanic” during their interviews. Many students described their school community as being majority “Mexican,” which seemed to be used in place of the word Latino/a/é/x. While there were certainly Mexican and Mexican American students and staff at Achieve South Central Campus, there was also a significant population of people whose families were from Central America. Interestingly, a

number of students said many peers were “white,” although less than 1% of students at Achieve South Central Campus were identified as white by their parents/guardians on 2025–26 school forms (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). In contrast, 90% of students were identified by parents/guardians as “Hispanic or Latino.” This may mean that Black and Afro-Latiné students viewed some of their Latiné classmates as white.

This finding was especially intriguing in light of the ways students viewed my racial identity. I am a blond white woman, and from my lived experience, my street race is read accurately as white. Three of the students commented that they thought my racial identity was “mixed,” and one debated with me that surely I was “a little brown,” a conversation that she and I had also had previously. These four students all attended my school and have known me for three years, yet they did not perceive me as being white. In contrast, three of these students described many of their Latiné classmates as white.

Rarity of School-Based Dialogue About Race and Student Perceptions of Staff Discomfort

Students shared that they learned about Black history during Black History Month. While this suggests that students were exposed to diverse people and histories in classroom content, it does not necessarily mean that race itself was explicitly discussed. In other words, students may have engaged with lessons about Black history without developing a clear understanding of what it means to be Black, or how race operates more broadly. For example, after participating in a Black History Month unit, would students be able to explain who “Black people” are as a racial group?

This distinction reflects what *Beyond Heroes and Holidays* (Lee et al., 2007) describes as a “tourist” approach to multicultural education, in which students are exposed to diversity through holidays, food, and notable figures without engaging in deeper conversations about

identity, power, or inequity. As Lee et al. (2007) argue, the inclusion of diverse content alone does not ensure that students are developing a meaningful or critical understanding of race.

While students expressed that there were representations of Black people and stories in February, at the same time, the majority of interviewees shared that they did not hear staff actually have conversations about race in the classroom, either in reference to content or curriculum. In terms of conversations about racism, they noted it was discussed when incidents of harm occurred or in reference to history. Students perceived that adults at school were uncomfortable discussing race, with the exception consistently being Black staff.

When asked if he heard staff talk about race during classroom lessons, Michael answered, “No, not really.” He added that he “Mostly not hear them talk about it.” In regards to whether he thought staff felt comfortable with the topic, he said “Probably not.” Michael was in 4th grade and his English language arts class had spent the two months prior reading texts about the experiences of enslaved people in the United States. While they ostensibly “learned” about African American history, Michael expressed that race was not explicitly discussed. When Brianna was asked the same question about race being discussed in the classroom, she shared a similar sentiment: “Not really.... they don’t talk about it.” Brianna indicated that there was silence on the topic of race. Maya shook her head “no” when asked if she thought staff were comfortable discussing race. She elaborated:

Because they’re, you’re grown ups where, you don’t really even want to because you’re supposed to do their job. They don’t want to talk about it. You could talk about, you could talk about anything with them. Just you [the adults] don’t feel like talking about skin colors, about them.

She went on to say that “some people” do discuss race, specifying that she meant the Black Student Union coordinator and her Black friends. Maya posited that discussing race was not part of a teacher’s role, and presumed that teachers did not want to talk about it. Maya was in 3rd grade, and in the fall and winter her class had studied Native Americans and immigration. Like Michael, her class had focused on content that was related to race, but Maya explained that race was not discussed. Faith said “a few” adults talked about race at school, also naming the Black Student Union coordinator. As the Black Student Union coordinator was not a classroom teacher, this suggests that conversations about race were primarily happening outside of the classroom. Xavier said he heard staff discuss race and racism in the classroom “A little bit,” and then named a Black teacher as an example. This again indicated that Black staff play a crucial role for Black and Afro-Latiné students. Valerie reflected, “I haven’t seen many teachers but we don’t, I don’t want to assume that not all teachers talking about it. I don’t really see anybody talk about racism unless they’re being rude to others.” Valerie was in 6th grade and had been at her school since kindergarten, but she was not able to recall conversations about race taking place in the classroom. While she reported that conversations about racism had occurred, she noted that those generally took place in response to incidents of harm.

Zara was the only student interviewed who shared that she heard many staff members discuss race and racism in the classroom and believed they were comfortable with the topics. She explained:

They talk about right from wrong....Because they want to make sure that when they talk about it...they want to make sure that we don’t do it. So everybody can be united in one big happy family....Ms. Sanchez, when all the ICE stuff was going. The stuff was going on and she was talking about because it was a couple

of incidents where people calling each other stuff. Like don't say it.... I've heard from a lot of teachers and people that Mexican heritage people and African American are some of the closest friends you can have. So instead of trying to worsen the friendship or make things that, you just don't cause any problems because it always affects someone more than affect the other person.

Based on Zara's description, the teacher handled this conversation well: she discussed impact as well as the importance of racial solidarity. This was still a reactive response to incidences of harm, but it did indicate a comfortability in discussing contemporary racism.

Exposure to diverse stories and identities is not the same as engaging in explicit conversations about race, racial identity, and racism. The majority of students shared that they did not hear staff discuss race in the classroom, even when lessons focused on the histories of racialized groups, leading students to perceive staff discomfort around the topic. The notable exception to this was Black staff. Additionally, a few students mentioned that they heard adults talk about racism after incidents occurred, which aligned with what interviewees shared when reflecting on Hate Speech.

Students had complicated understandings of race; many did not initially know what the word meant, and they were uncertain how to describe their peers. While classroom content was ostensibly about racial identity groups, it appeared that race itself was not explicitly discussed. Students described a lack of integrated, year-long content on Black people as well as a limited historical framing. Afro-Latiné identities were not represented. Taken together, this indicates that students were not being equipped with racial literacy at Achieve South Central Campus.

Finding Four: The BSU as a Third Space

The concept of the third space was first introduced by Bhabha (1994) in relation to postcolonial India. He wrote about how in spaces of oppression, new spaces can emerge where marginalized people blend cultures and resist their subjugation (Bhabha, 1994; Perlego, 2024). Third spaces exist both within and outside of traditional structures, such as schools, and function as a safe zone for marginalized identities (Gutiérrez, et al., 1999). For example, Gutiérrez et al. (1999) researched language development in a Spanish, bilingual, elementary school classroom. They found evidence of a third space in the classroom, reflected in student conversations and in their use of Spanish to make sense of the English language (Gutiérrez et al., 1999). Other common third spaces in schools are clubs and identity-based affinity groups, where like-minded individuals with shared experiences can gather.

At Achieve South Central Campus, each school site had their own Black Student Union and the BSU coordinator. School site BSUs met twice weekly, one during lunchtime for 20–40 minutes and once after school for one hour. Once a month, all the BSUs on campus got together for a joint meeting, and field trips and family gatherings were also joint celebrations. Across Achieve South Central Campus, the BSU functioned as an important third space for Black and Afro-Latiné students.

Safety, Authenticity, Community and Belonging

Students repeatedly shared that the Black Student Union was a place where they could show up as their full selves. In contrast to other school spaces where students only felt safe “sometimes” and with certain individuals, the BSU provided consistent psychological and cultural safety. Belonging was most fully realized in the BSU.

Students felt safe and like they fit in at the BSU. In answer to a question about where she belonged most, Faith said, “The BSU. Just that I don’t feel like I’m the only Black student in the

school.” This suggested the positive impact of being in a space where she did not feel hypervisible. Similarly, Ava replied, “I love BSU. I feel like it’s going to be a safe place.” When asked who she felt safe with at the BSU, she emphasized, “Everybody of course! Everyone in BSU.” Ava made it clear that the BSU was a space where she experienced belonging with all students and adults. Adrian explained that when he first came to school, he did not feel welcome, but that changed “When Ms. Williams buy Black people donuts to celebrate the other people. And when we have BSU and when we had a meeting.” This indicated that participation in the BSU increased his sense of belonging at school. Zara emphasized, “I feel like I really fit in when I’m in my BSU meeting with all the academics.” In contrast to other spaces where Zara said she fit in “sometimes,” in the BSU, belonging was fully realized.

Students noted that being in a space with only Black and Afro-Latiné people was distinctly different from other school settings. This space allowed them to feel comfortable expressing themselves. Maya shared she fit in at the BSU because, “It’s a whole new Black person thing and I’m so happy. And I have a Black teacher. Black students.... that’s a comfortable space. I can be.” When asked what makes it comfortable, she answered, “You’re not shy to nobody. I feel like that’s you right there.” Maya felt that being with other Black students and staff allowed her to be her most authentic self. Valerie stated:

I decided to be a part of BSU because I felt like that was a place where I could really, really be who I am. And I also had, I also got to spend more time with my best friend.... I could actually be a part of a Black group, it’s actually really good for me, I think, because it shows that I’m not the only student that’s Black. And that there are more kids who are just like me and who are not afraid to be who they are.

By repeating the word “really,” Valerie emphasized that she felt a deeper sense of belonging in the BSU than in other school spaces. It was a place where she did not experience hypervisibility and where she and her Black peers could express themselves. Jayden said when he was in the BSU, “It feels good,” adding:

How we can, sometimes sit there and not like there’s ever a moment where it just all goes silent. Or where everybody is just arguing. I just feel we’re all able to speak, we’re all able to express ourselves and have fun. And be joyful.”

For Jayden, conversation, laughter, and joy were important aspects of the culture in the BSU.

Jasmine said she experienced belonging in the BSU:

Because everyone in there is kind to each other. We’re all the same skin color. And it’s just, it makes me happy to see how we all just stick together....Because in school we don’t really have that much people that are the same race. And that I think in a [BSU] classroom where all of us together just makes us feel more connected and understanding with each other.

Like many of her peers, Jasmine felt she fit in at the BSU because she was surrounded by peers who shared her racial identity. She signaled that this meant they were all able to implicitly understand one another.

All of these student responses were incredibly positive. Students reflected that during the BSU meetings, they felt safe, they fit in, they could be themselves, they had fun, and it was comforting that everyone looked like them. When sharing which staff they felt most connected to at school, 6 out of 11 students named their BSU coordinator as one of their adults.

Racial Dialogue

While classroom conversations about race were limited or absent and Black stories were primarily told in February, critical conversations about race, identity, and history occurred year-round in the BSU. Jayden reported that one reason the BSU “feels good” was because:

Well, I could talk, we could talk about our culture, our Black culture. What happened in the past and what’s happening currently. I learned that, what’s it called? Back then, they were segregated from using different bathrooms, water fountains, going to different schools. We talk about how some people still believe in racism and some people, most of the people in the world, don’t believe in racism and care for other people, even if they’re different races.

Unlike other school spaces, where racism was often described from a historical perspective, in the BSU, there were contemporary discussions about racism and anti-Blackness. Brianna said that she loved “everything” about the BSU, such as “How we get to talk about our ancestors and have fun and have parties.” Brianna had previously shared that classroom lessons during Black History Month resulted in racial slurs, whereas in her description of the BSU, conversations about ancestors and “fun” were presented together. Adrian decided to be in the BSU “Because BSU about Black people. And I want to learn more about some Black people in the world.” As Adrian was in 3rd grade, this was his first year in the BSU, suggesting that even prior to joining he understood that the Black Student Union was a space where he would learn more about his culture and identity. Faith expressed that her favorite events at school took place at the BSU:

It’s like the Black cultures. All the Black cultures I haven’t heard about or learn about....Because I love learning about different cultures, and I love doing activities...I noticed that BSU would be a community that I would find out if people talk to different people. Cause I don’t talk to a lot of people, only my

friends. I find that I can talk to my people and then I love the activities. We do a lot of activities in there.

For Faith, the BSU was a space where she learned more about the diversity of Blackness and where she cultivated new relationships. Jayden shared that Black culture was celebrated all year long in the BSU.

In the previous section, it was noted that many students felt Black staff were the adults who were most comfortable talking about race and racism. When describing how students at school used the N-word, Brianna shared that her peers discussed it during their BSU meeting with their coordinator Ms. Johnson. Brianna said:

But the Black students, they don't really say it that much. I don't really hear them saying it because Ms. Johnson, she doesn't want us saying it. And we respect Ms. Johnson a lot because we all love Ms. Johnson....So, we don't really say it that much.

This demonstrated that within the BSU, students engaged in discussions about the meaning of the N-word, including its use by both non-Black people and individuals within their own racial community. It also suggests that the relationship with the BSU coordinator was one of mutual respect. Maya mentioned that she talked about race and racism with her BSU coordinator, explaining, "Ms. Williams, because she's Black, so she would understand." Maya felt that their shared racial identity translated to an understanding of lived experiences.

The BSU was a space where conversations about Blackness and race were normalized. It is important to note that no students mentioned discussions of Afro-Latiné identity within the BSU. All of the BSU coordinators at Achieve South Central Los Angeles during this study identified as Black alone.

Identity Affirmation

Students reflected that the BSU was a space that supported their school success and helped them feel pride in who they were. All students recommended that other schools should have a BSU. Participation in the BSU actively supported positive racial identity development for Black and Afro-Latiné students.

One of the final interview questions asked students if being in the BSU had changed how they felt about school. Maya answered “Yes. Ms. Williams pushes me up to be more grateful, kind and, get my scores up and that’s why I got my scores up.” Maya felt that her relationship with her BSU coordinator positively impacted her academics and her character. Valerie explained: “Yeah. In very positive ways. I’m really happy that my school made a group for Black students and that we get to express who we are.” This indicated that for Valerie, the BSU had improved school by giving her a space to be her authentic self. Faith replied, “Sometimes....it just helps me. It helps me continue my day. Some days I just don’t like school.” For Faith, being in the BSU helped her navigate negative feelings about school. Brianna expressed:

Yes. It's basically because before I came to this school I wasn't able to have those experiences. And be able to collab with other Black students because well, before I came to this school, it was very little Black people in my school. I was the only Black student in my class. But now I'm glad to see more Black people in my class, and I'm glad that I can go and experience different things that I've never experienced before with my culture.

Brianna also emphasized that “My favorite part about school is BSU. Because, I just love BSU.” At Brianna’s prior school, she was one of a few Black students. While that was still the case at her current school, participation in the BSU gave her a place to connect and have new

experiences with peers of the same racial identity. Adrian stated “Yes. I feel more welcome here,” again displaying the ways that the BSU impacted student sense of belonging. Students overwhelmingly expressed that being in the BSU had a significant positive impact on how they felt about school.

Students thought that all schools should have a BSU, and they would recommend that other Black and Afro-Latiné classmates join. Faith said she would suggest that other schools have a BSU “Because it’s gonna make the kids feel welcome as well....We help the school. We will talk. We will talk about stuff that is going to help us.” This signals that the BSU helped Faith feel welcome and provided her with a supportive space for conversation. Zara said other students like her should join because “It’s a great experience for me. What I experience is connecting with people that are like me and having events with and just sharing it with the school, like the learning about purpose.” In this, Zara illustrated how the BSU events not only foster belonging for students like her, but also provide educational opportunities for non-Black students. Brianna replied, “If there’s BSU at your school, you should really join it because it’s very cool,” which was high praise from a 6th-grader. Jasmine would tell other Black students “I think you should also join because we have this little group and then it’s called BSU and you get to talk about how your day went and your feelings.” Jasmine felt that the BSU was a safe space for processing and reflection. These responses indicated that participation in the BSU improved school experiences for Black and Afro-Latiné students and made them proud of who they were.

At Achieve South Central Campus, the Black Student Union served as a significant third space for Black and Afro-Latiné students. They described it as a place where they felt seen, where their identity was celebrated, and importantly, where they experienced joy. While in other school spaces belonging was dependent on which adults and peers were present, in the BSU,

belonging was always felt. Additionally, in contrast to classrooms, the BSU was a space where conversations about race and racism were normalized, and where Black history and learning occurred year round. Taken together, these findings indicate that the Black Student Union operated as a space of racial affirmation that supported the development of a positive racial identity.

Conclusion

Interviews demonstrated that Black and Afro-Latiné students had a wide range of experiences at Achieve South Central Campus. Those experiences varied greatly depending on which space students were in, as well as which staff and peers were in that space. Table 2 summarizes these findings, organized by research question with sub-questions on the left.

Table 2

Black and Afro-Latiné Student Experiences Across School Spaces

Questions That Informed Findings	Official Spaces (Classrooms, Offices)	Unofficial Spaces (Recess, Afterschool Activities)	Third Space (The BSU)
RQ1: How, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students perceive incidents of anti-Black Hate Speech and anti-Black racism within a predominantly Latiné school?			
How frequently did students experience incidents of anti-Black racism in this space?	Students experienced some incidents of Hate Speech and racial harm.	Students experienced frequent incidents of Hate Speech and racial harm.	Students did not report experiencing Hate Speech or racial harm.
How did staff respond to incidents of anti-Black racism in this space?	Staff responses to racial harm were inconsistent or absent.	Staff responses to racial harm were inconsistent or absent.	Staff responses were consistent, addressed harm, and were experienced as humanizing.
RQ2: To what extent, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students describe feeling a sense of belonging within a predominantly Latiné school?			

Which peers did students experience a sense of belonging with in this space?	Students reported feeling a sense of belonging when they were with friends.	Students reported feeling a sense of belonging when they were with friends.	Students reported feeling a sense of belonging with all students in the space.
Which adults did students feel connected to in this space?	Students felt connected to some adults, particularly Black staff and non-instructional staff.	Students felt connected to some adults, particularly Black staff and non-instructional staff.	Students felt connected to all the BSU coordinators.
How did students experience belonging in this space?	Black and Afro-Latiné students were a numerical minority. Students experienced hypervisibility.	Black and Afro-Latiné students were a numerical minority. Students experienced hypervisibility.	Students did not feel they stood out or were perceived as different.
How did students experience safety in this space? To what extent did students experience belonging in this space?	Students reported feeling safe and that they belonged “sometimes.”	Students reported feeling safe and that they belonged “sometimes.”	Students consistently reported feeling safe and a strong sense of belonging, with the ability to show up as their authentic selves.
RQ3: What factors (e.g., spaces, policies, practices), if any, within the school environment contribute to students’ racial identity development?			
To what extent were the topics of race, racism, and identity discussed in this space? How did students perceive adults’ comfort with discussing these topics?	Conversations about race were largely absent, and when they occurred, were often reactive to incidents of harm. Students perceived most staff as uncomfortable engaging in these topics.	Conversations about race were largely absent, and when they occurred, were often reactive to incidents of harm. Students perceived most staff as uncomfortable engaging in these topics.	Race and racism were normalized topics of conversation. Students perceived staff as comfortable engaging in these discussions.

To what extent did students see Black and Afro-Latiné identities represented in this space?	Curriculum addressing Black experiences was limited, confined to Black History Month, and primarily historical. Afro-Latiné representation was absent.	There was no evidence of curriculum addressing race or Black or Afro-Latiné experiences.	Learning about Black history and Black experiences occurred throughout the year. It was unclear whether Afro-Latiné representation was included.
To what extent did this space support students' positive racial identity development?	Staff silence and limited curriculum contributed to constrained racial identity development and allowed anti-Blackness to persist.	Staff silence contributed to limited racial identity development and allowed anti-Blackness to persist.	Staff engagement and community culture supported positive and affirming racial identity development.

Note: BSU = Black Student Union. Official spaces refers to structured school environments (e.g., classrooms, offices), whereas unofficial spaces refers to less structured settings (e.g., recess, afterschool activities). Third space refers to affinity-based spaces centered on shared identity and community.

As outlined in the table, Anti-Blackness was a normalized school experience for Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus. They experienced racial harm through peer interactions and institutional responses were inconsistent or absent. Students experienced belonging with friends, named staff, and during the BSU. Conversations about race and racism, as well as representations of Black and Afro-Latiné identities, were episodic or missing outside of the BSU. Overall, these findings suggest that belonging, racial identity development, and support for Black and Afro-Latiné students were situational and not fully integrated across the school.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

As I sat with students in a small classroom and listened as they shared their stories, I felt heartbreak, anger, and frustration. I had spent the past three years working as an assistant principal in a place where Black and Afro-Latiné students experienced significant harm. While I was familiar with some of the narratives students shared due to my professional role and prior relationships with them, others were new to me, and striking.

When I moved to Los Angeles three years ago, I knew very little about the public and charter school systems. I applied to jobs through portals and websites, hoping that the various mission and vision statements, which aligned with my own values about the purpose of education, were more than words on paper. To be a white leader in a school where white students are absent and white adults are few is to occupy a position of privilege and power. It is a choice to work in this space, and not something I take lightly. I chose my school district because its mission of disrupting systemic oppression deeply resonated with me. I entered this work hoping to be part of a school community committed to challenging the systems and practices that have historically marginalized Black students and other communities of color. However, the findings from this study raise important questions about the extent to which our intentions and commitments are reflected in the daily experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students, particularly when students continue to describe experiences of racial harm, limited racial dialogue, and inconsistent institutional responses.

Working with young people is fundamentally a joyous experience, so there were also moments of levity and laughter during interviews. Maya wanted me to explain what the word “culture” meant, and subsequently shared her take on Black culture, educating me on the

importance of “cruising.” After I told her I am white, she looked shocked and sad for me, exclaiming, “So you don’t have a culture?” I could not help but laugh and reply, “It’s a pretty boring one.”

I feel a deep well of gratitude that these young people felt brave and open enough to tell me their truths. While the findings contain many painful passages, the existence of the Black Student Union is a spot of brightness and hope. I am immensely grateful to the BSU coordinators for the many ways they have supported and continue to support our Black and Afro-Latiné students.

Study Purpose

This was a qualitative, phenomenological study centered on Black and Afro-Latiné student experiences in predominantly Latiné elementary schools. Anti-Black racism and white supremacy culture are deeply embedded in schools and the U.S. culture more broadly, making it imperative to examine the impact of these systems on students’ experiences. While there is research on Black student experiences in majority white schools, most Black children do not attend majority white institutions (NCES, 2004; Pearman et al., 2019). Black children in the United States overwhelmingly attend schools where most students are youth of color, but Black students are still the racial minority (NCES, 2004). Additionally, educational research has continued to lump “Black and Brown” students together, with “Brown” as a euphemism for “Latiné,” without recognizing the different lived experiences and histories of these two communities or their in-group diversity (Jenkins, 2023; Singh, 2024). This framing leaves out Afro-Latiné students, who are simultaneously “Black” and “Brown” (V. Garcia, 2022; Hernández, 2022).

Anti-Blackness and white supremacy culture are insidious systems that also exist within communities of color (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Gamez, 2023; Roth, 2012). In Los Angeles, many schools are majority Latiné, and historical and contemporary research indicates that anti-Blackness and white supremacy culture can exist in these spaces as well (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2022; Harper et al., 2018; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). While there have been some studies that examine the experiences of Black students in majority Latiné schools, fewer have examined the experiences of Afro-Latiné students in these settings. To my knowledge, there have been no studies at the elementary school level. In an attempt to fill that gap, this study examined the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students at majority Latiné elementary schools.

Research focused on sense of belonging in elementary schools demonstrates that belonging has a significant impact on long-term outcomes in high school and beyond (Balfanz, 2009; Change & Romero, 2008; Raffaele Mendez, 2003). While there are only a few studies on racial identity development in elementary schools, existing research shows that children begin to make sense of race as early as their toddler years (Winkler, 2009). Schools themselves are primary sites where children learn about race, both explicitly and implicitly through content, curriculum, experiences, social dynamics, and silent messaging (Delpit, 2002, 2008; Lewis, 2008; Nasir, 2011; Pollock, 2004; Shange, 2019).

Building on the existing literature, this study examined how Black and Afro-Latiné students in grades 3rd–6th described incidents of racial harm, experienced a sense of belonging, and developed their racial identity at school. Importantly, each youth participant was a member of their respective school’s Black Student Union.

Discussion and Significance of Key Findings

This chapter presents the study's key findings, situates them within the existing literature, and offers recommendations for schools and researchers, along with limitations and personal reflections. Interviews and findings were analyzed using a *relational race framework*, the theory of anti-Blackness, and Powell and Galloway-Popotas's (2024) theory of *bridging and belonging* (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Lipsitz et al., 2019; Sexton, 2010; Singh, 2024).

Three major findings emerged from this study. The first finding suggests that the experiences shared by Black and Afro-Latiné students attending majority Latiné elementary schools point to patterns consistent with institutional anti-Blackness. Four sub-findings further illuminate these patterns: (1) students described repeated racial harm that schools did not always appear to address consistently; (2) students experienced uneven discipline and hypervisibility that they associated with their racial identities; (3) portrayals of Blackness were limited; and (4) explicit conversations about race were largely absent.

The second finding is that "people of color" colorblindness (Jenkins, 2023) contributes to the assumption that all staff of color are equally equipped to support and connect with all students of color. Sub-findings indicate that belonging was primarily cultivated outside of the classroom, that students perceived not all staff understood their identities, and that racial congruence between Black and Afro-Latiné students and Black staff had a positive impact.

The third finding is that Black and Afro-Latiné students experienced conditional belonging in majority Latiné elementary schools. While students reported positive belonging with select peers and staff, and most fully within the BSU, belonging in other school spaces was contingent and uneven.

Finding One: Patterns Suggesting Institutional Failure

Anti-Blackness refers to the systemic devaluation of Black people, where they are positioned at the bottom of racial hierarchies and denied full humanity across social, political, and economic systems (Dumas, 2016; Jung & Vargas, 2021; Sexton, 2010). Anti-Black racism refers to the ways anti-Blackness is enacted through policies, practices, and everyday interactions, including within educational systems (Grissom & Redding, 2016; Saini, 2019).

Relational race theory emphasizes that the experiences of different racial groups are interconnected and shaped through comparison, hierarchy, and proximity to whiteness (Lipsitz et al., 2019; Singh, 2024). In this study, the theory was useful for understanding how Black, Afro-Latiné and Latiné students were differently positioned within the same school environment, and how belonging, marginalization, and supports were uneven (Aronson & Stohry, 2023; Cole & Verwayne, 2018; Singh, 2024; Tatum, 2003; Winkler, 2009).

Frequent Racial Harm and Inconsistent Staff Responses

The findings from this study point to patterns suggesting that Black and Afro-Latiné students attending majority Latiné elementary schools experienced institutional anti-Blackness. Consistent with prior research, students described repeated racial harm, uneven responses from adults, and school conditions that raise questions about the extent to which institutions were equipped to prevent and respond to anti-Blackness (Abrica et al., 2020; Gamez, 2023; Harper et al., 2018; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Pirtle et al., 2024). Studies on Black student experiences at Historically Hispanic Institutions demonstrate institutional anti-Blackness and a continued failure to protect Black students from harm (Abrica et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2018; Pirtle et al., 2024). In K–12 education, Singh (2024), found that a mentorship program for middle and high school Latiné boys pathologized Blackness as an institution, and Shange’s (2019) study revealed

institutional anti-Blackness at a majority Latiné high school, despite the school's social justice mission statement.

In this study, all 11 interviewees experienced anti-Black Hate Speech at school, with the frequency ranging from one-time-ever to daily. Students expressed that they felt most school staff did not know how to disrupt anti-Black Hate Speech. Nine of the 11 students interviewed felt that only “some” staff knew how to respond to Hate Speech, frequently naming administrators and Black staff. Staff responses to anti-Black incidents as described by students were often minimal, ineffective, and at times negligent. Interviewees described four separate incidents in which they felt certain adults heard a student use an anti-Black slur and remained silent. One student expressed that she felt some staff intentionally chose not to disrupt anti-Black Hate Speech. Students described inconsistent staff responses, including being disciplined for reacting to Hate Speech and other situations where all students received consequences rather than solely those responsible. Only three students recalled proactive efforts to address anti-Black Hate Speech, with most staff responses occurring only after harm had already taken place.

What are the implications when anti-Black Hate Speech is not consistently addressed by adults? What message might students receive when there is little proactive learning about anti-Blackness and responses to incidents vary from one adult to another? The findings from this study raise questions about whether these conditions contributed to repeated racial harm experienced by Black and Afro-Latiné students. Rather than pointing to isolated incidents, these patterns suggest the possibility of an institutional failure to prevent and meaningfully respond to anti-Blackness.

Student Experiences of Uneven Discipline Practices and Hypervisibility

Interviewees shared instances of non-Black Latiné students and Black or Afro-Latiné students engaging in the same behavior, but seemingly only the Black or Afro-Latiné students were disciplined. This pattern occurred both in relation to Hate Speech and in other unsanctioned behaviors, such as cell phone use.

Aaliyah described an incident in which she was called a racial slur and received consequences, while the students who caused the harm did not. Brianna noted that the entire class lost opportunities for fun when some students used Hate Speech, including those who were harmed. Zara shared that she did not observe Latiné students being disciplined for using anti-Black language, while Black students were often disciplined for smaller behaviors.

Brianna described two instances in which staff gave consequences to her and other Black peers for not following school rules (using cell phones and kicking a soccer ball), while Latiné students engaging in the same behaviors nearby did not receive consequences. While it was unclear whether the Latiné students' behavior was noticed or not, the fact that Black students *were* seen both times speaks to their hypervisibility. Gamez (2019) researched Black and Afro-Latine student experiences in a majority Latiné middle school. She highlighted the ways in which the hypervisibility of these students resulted in unequal discipline (Gamez, 2019). Throughout her observations, she witnessed Black and Afro-Latiné students being reprimanded and disciplined for the same behaviors that Latiné students had been permitted to engage in moments earlier (Gamez, 2019).

In this study, frequent incidents of racial harm, inconsistent staff responses, and awareness of their minority status resulted in Black and Afro-Latiné students feeling hypervisible. This hypervisibility contributed to further feelings of isolation and othering, as students shared in their interviews. This othering is an aspect of *breaking* (powell &

Galloway-Popotas, 2024). What the students described was similar to what has been found in previous studies about Black student experiences in majority Latiné schools. Jenkins (2003), Shange (2019), and Abrica (2020), all found that their research subjects felt hyper-visible due to their skin color and numerical minority, and were constantly aware of this status while at school.

Michael shared about a time when an older, Latiné student approached him at recess and compared him to two famous, Black basketball players. As only 3% of students at his recess identified as Black or Afro-Latiné, Michael's racial identity made him stand out. The perception that all Black people look the same and are a monolith is an aspect of anti-Blackness (Andriaccio, 2021; Jung & Vargas, 2021).

The stereotype that all Black people look alike was especially evident in Jenkins (2023) study, which took place at a majority Latiné high school where 5% of students identified as Black. One Black student shared that he attended multiple PE periods throughout the day so he could continue playing basketball, despite only being officially enrolled in one PE class (Jenkins, 2023). The interviewer asked if the staff member ever noticed, and the student indicated that he was certain the teacher had no idea what his name was and did not distinguish between him and other Black students (Jenkins, 2023). Both Michael and this student were seen by members of their school community as a stereotype rather than as an individual.

A Limited Portrayal of Blackness

One aspect of anti-Blackness is the portrayal of Black people as a homogeneous group or as a set of stereotypes (Jung & Vargas, 2021). This study demonstrated that learning about Blackness and Black stories within these Latiné schools was often minimal, episodic, and focused on history and oppression. By limiting learning about Black people to Black History

Month, schools signaled that Black experiences were not central to the broader curriculum. Students did not see contemporary Black figures, nor did they see multiracial identities.

Additionally, these lessons sometimes led to students in their classroom using racial slurs, raising important questions about how staff prepared for such instruction and their knowledge about how to respond in those moments. Instead of increasing understanding, the lessons could reinforce stereotypes or make Black and Afro-Latiné students into targets. Together, these patterns suggest a school environment in which Black stories were often minimized and Black and Afro-Latiné students may not have consistently experienced the protection and support needed to navigate racial harm.

All of the individuals who students reported learning about during Black History Month were historical figures, many of whom were framed as “firsts,” or the first Black person to participate in a particular activity. In total, eight unique individuals were named, with several appearing more than once, including Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Jackie Robinson, and Bessie Coleman. Of those identified, three were Civil Rights activists, two were professional athletes, one was a pilot, and one was a politician. The emphasis on historical figures, activists, and “firsts,” along with the repetition of the same individuals, reflected a limited and narrow portrayal of Blackness.

Afro-Latiné identities were not represented in school, despite the student and staff population being overwhelmingly Latiné. This erasure of Afro-Latiné identities is hardly surprising, given the lack of Afro-Latiné representation in broader Latiné culture, media, and history (Busey & Cruz, 2015, Hernández, 2022, Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010). Afro-Latiné identities are even excluded within higher education research that focuses specifically on Latiné

studies (García-Louis & Cortes, 2023; Dache et al., 2019). In this study, none of the five Afro-Latiné students interviewed mentioned that Black identities were represented in Hispanic Heritage Month. This lack of representation at school had an impact on Afro-Latiné students and their racial identity development. They were unable to conceptualize that being Afro-Latiné was a whole identity rooted in specific histories, not a split identity with a separate Black side and Latiné side.

Exposure to Racial Diversity Without Addressing Race

The findings in this study highlight a clear distinction between exposure to diversity and the development of racial understanding. Students shared that they learned about Black history during Black History Month and participated in units on Native American culture. While this indicated that diverse people and histories were present in classroom content, it does not mean that race itself was explicitly discussed. Students were being exposed to diversity, but they were not necessarily being supported in making sense of what race is, how it operates, or how it shapes people's experiences.

This distinction is reflected in existing research on multicultural and anti-racist education in elementary school settings. Lee et al. (2007) critique what they describe as a “tourist” approach to multicultural education, where diversity is presented through holidays, food, and notable figures without deeper conversations about identity, power, or inequity. The findings of this study reflected this pattern. Representation was present, but it was not paired with explicit conversations about race or racism. In other words, students were learning about difference without being supported in understanding it.

Similarly, Derman-Sparks & Edwards (2020) push back on the idea that young children are too young to engage in conversations about race and bias. The authors argue that avoiding these conversations does not protect children; it allows bias to go unexamined (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020). This is particularly important given that this study centered elementary students. The absence of explicit conversations about race in these findings was not about developmental readiness, but rather, it reflected missed opportunities. Students are capable of engaging in these conversations when adults are willing to facilitate them (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020).

Five out of 11 students, across grades 3rd–6th, did not know what the word “race” meant. Students used different *racial schemas* to describe themselves and the members of their families (Roth, 2012; Flores-González & Salgado, 2022). All five Afro-Latiné students described themselves by a combination of race and nationality, which aligns with the *nationality schema* that is commonly used throughout Latin America (Roth, 2012). Throughout interviews, the terms “Latino/a/é/x, Latin American, or Hispanic” were only used by two students, and four students described many classmates as “white,” although less than 1% of students at Achieve South Central Campus identified as such. These patterns suggest that students had not been explicitly taught about race or provided with a shared language to describe it. The variation and inconsistency in how students understood and used these terms points to the absence of intentional conversations about race in their school experience.

The lack of classroom conversations about race and racism also points to a potential absence of professional learning around these important topics. These findings raise questions about how districts can work toward disrupting systemic oppression when staff are not

consistently supported or provided with structured opportunities to engage in these conversations.

The findings from this study suggest patterns consistent with institutional anti-Blackness. These patterns included insufficient responses to racial harm, uneven discipline practices and student hypervisibility, limited representations of Blackness, and a lack of sustained conversations about race and Afro-Latiné identities. Given the presence of anti-Blackness within Latiné communities, these findings raise important questions about how schools may contribute to the persistence of anti-Blackness and the continued experiences of harm described by Black and Afro-Latiné students.

Finding Two: Racial Congruence

“People of Color” Colorblindness

Studies discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 proposed that Black and Latiné students have more positive outcomes when they are taught by a teacher of their same race and/or ethnicity (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019). When a student is taught by a teacher of the same race, this is called *racial congruence* (Bristol & Martin-Fernandez, 2019).

In California, during the 2024–25 school year, 80% of students identified as a person of color, but only 46% of teachers identified as a person of color (California Department of Education, 2026). As stated previously, Achieve Los Angeles strives to employ staff of color and have *racial congruence* in their schools (A. Rotwein, personal communication, April, 2026). Although Latiné staff made up the majority of employees at Achieve South Central Campus, Black and Afro-Latiné students identified feeling connected to them at far lower rates than to

white and Black staff, with connections to Black staff being especially pronounced. Jenkins (2023) refers to the ways that educational research and practices lump communities of color together as “people of color color-blindness” (p. 259). One aspect of this dynamic is the assumption that teachers of color inherently know how to connect with, support, and effectively teach all students of color, regardless of differences in racial/ethnic identity and lived experiences.

Existing research demonstrates that non-Black Latiné school staff can reproduce white supremacy culture and uphold anti-Blackness within majority Latiné school settings (Gamez, 2023; Hernández, 2022; Jenkins, 2023; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023, 2024). Singh’s (2023) study found that there was a continued centering of whiteness within school policies, practices, and curriculum, the expectation that male teachers of color serve as disciplinarians for boys of color, and the need for teachers to confront and unlearn anti-Black beliefs shaped by their own communities in order to effectively support students. Studies by Jenkins (2023) and Gamez (2023) found that Latiné staff in predominantly Latiné schools not only upheld anti-Blackness as an institution but also perpetuated it by contributing to anti-Black stereotypes (Jenkins, 2023; Gamez, 2023).

There are ways in which the lived experiences of Latiné educators are similar to those of Black and Afro-Latiné students. They all experience systemic marginalization and oppression, they are all negatively impacted by white supremacy culture, and their communities have been subjected to disproportionate discipline in schools (Pearman et al., 2019). These are important parallels, and they do matter. But Latiné educators are also part of communities that participate in anti-Blackness, and they must contend with this in order to better serve their Black and Afro-Latiné students (Singh, 2023).

Staff responses to anti-Blackness in this study varied considerably, suggesting that schools may not have had consistent systems in place for supporting staff in responding to anti-Blackness. Coupled with limited portrayals of Blackness in classrooms, these findings raise questions about how staff were prepared to engage with the complexity of Black histories and cultures and respond to the harm caused by anti-Blackness. While much of this onus falls on the school, unlearning about anti-Blackness and white supremacy culture is not the responsibility of the institution alone. Educators of all racial and ethnic backgrounds have an ethical obligation to learn about the ways they participate in these systems; ultimately, these systems harm not only Black and Afro-Latiné students, but all students.

The Positive Impact of Black Staff

Throughout this study, Black and Afro-Latiné students shared the meaningful impact Black staff had on their school experiences. Interviewees trusted Black staff to respond to racial harm in ways that felt both supportive to them and educational to their peers. Students reported that Black staff discussed race and racism in the classroom and during the BSU, which contributed to their racial identity development. Black staff were important cultivators for belonging, representing 40% of staff named by students as primary connections while only being 11% of the population.

This echoes previous research about the outsized impact Black teachers have on Black students (Duncan, 2022, 2025; Gershenson et al., 2022; Grissom & Redding, 2016; Hayes et al., 2023; Howell et al., 2019; Vaidya & Battery, 2022). This impact includes increased sense of belonging among students and accelerated outcomes in a high school math classrooms (Vaidya & Battery, 2022), a higher referral rate of Black students to gifted programs (Grissom & Redding,

2016), and a reduction in the disproportionate rates of discipline that Black students experience in many classrooms (Hayes et al., 2023). In their longitudinal study analyzing student data from kindergarten through 12th grade, Gershenson et al. (2022) found:

...Black students randomly assigned to at least one Black teacher in grades K–3 are 9 percentage points (13 percent) more likely to graduate from high school and 6 percentage points (19 percent) more likely to enroll in college compared to their Black schoolmates who are not. (p. 3)

One Black teacher in the primary grades can have a lasting impact on a student’s life. Additional studies demonstrate that Black middle and high school teachers engage in critical conversations with Black youth about white supremacy culture (Duncan, 2022), and that Black, female K–12 teachers increase school belonging for Black youth (Howell et al., 2019).

This study also replicates previous findings about the unseen labor placed on Black staff to support Black students (Lewis, 2008; Seaberry, 2026; Shange, 2019; Singh, 2023). Black, male educators are often expected to be the disciplinarians of male students of color, while simultaneously being expected to be the primary cultivators of belonging for the same students (Seaberry, 2026; Singh, 2023). In her study of a social-justice focused high school, Shange (2019) found that Black teachers were often relied upon to “connect with” Black students who other staff struggled to or did not attempt to build relationships with. Similarly, Lewis’ (2008) research into the racial dynamics of three elementary schools in Southern California indicated that Black staff are expected to carry the weight of supporting Black students and families.

Not only are Black educators carrying extra labor, they are also working in institutions where they themselves are experiencing anti-Blackness and white supremacy (Lewis, 2008;

Shange, 2019; Stanley, 2024). While Black staff were not interviewed in this study, it was evident that they were the primary supporters, navigators of racialized dynamics, and creators of positive identity development for Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus.

Finding Three: Conditional Belonging

Within powell and Galloway-Popotas' (2024) framework, *belonging* is understood as being seen in one's full humanity and dignity, while also having agency within a space. The authors contrast this with *breaking*, a form of othering that occurs when people are dehumanized, viewed as less worthy, or stripped of the fullness of their identities (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024).

Non-Instructional Staff as Cultivators of Belonging

This study indicates that belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students was primarily cultivated outside of the classroom, which was not where they spent the majority of their school day. Interviewees mentioned 36 staff members as the adults whom they felt most connected to at school. Due to some staff being named multiple times, 20 unique staff were named out of 145 staff total. Among those 20 named staff, 35% were classroom teachers, and 65% were administrators, behavior support specialists, counselors, custodians, instructional support specialists, or specialist teachers. Students in 3rd-6th each had two classroom teachers, one for English language arts, science, and social studies, and one for math and writing. Although students spent around 75% of the school day in their classrooms, only 6 out of 11 students named a classroom teacher as their "safe staff." Five of those students named a current classroom teacher, and two named Black teachers.

Previously mentioned articles about student belonging in elementary schools demonstrate that feeling a connection with the classroom teacher has the biggest impact on student academic outcomes, behavior, and engagement at school (Furrer and Skinner, 2003; Hawkins et al., 1999–2003). It makes sense that the teacher has the largest impact as the majority of the school day is spent in the classroom with them. With this context in mind, the fact that only 35% of the staff students felt most connected to were classroom teachers was notable. These findings suggest that classroom teachers were not consistently serving as the primary cultivators of belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students, despite being the adults who spent the most time with them. This left other staff, who often had more limited or inconsistent contact with students, to fill the role as primary cultivators of student belonging. The fact that non-instructional staff were serving as the primary cultivators of belonging was another indicator that Black and Afro-Latiné students were not experiencing full belonging at school.

In this study, students experienced belonging when they were with their friends or when they were with staff whom they felt connected to. At the same time, this belonging was conditional, as students did not feel this way in all school settings or among all students and staff. In most instances, non-instructional staff were the primary cultivators of student belonging. Students described many instances of *breaking* (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). Black and Afro-Latiné students felt hypervisible at school and that they were not always understood, which resulted in a denial of their full humanity. Fundamentally, Black and Afro-Latiné students belonging at Achieve South Central Campus was conditional—highly dependent on setting, and contingent on certain peers and staff. Students did not experience full belonging in all areas of school (powell & Galloway-Popotas, 2024). In contrast, the Black Student Union was a space where students experienced full belonging.

The Black Student Union

The first Black Student Union was founded at San Francisco State University (SFSU) in 1966 (San Francisco State University, n.d.). The purpose of the organization was, and is, to cultivate a space where Black people can gather, learn, organize, connect, celebrate, and build an activist mindset (San Francisco State University, n.d.). One notable legacy of the Black Student Union at SFSU is that the group's activism led to the creation of the first Ethnic Studies and Black Studies departments (Malone, 2025). Since then, Black Student Unions have been created on many university campuses, eventually trickling down to high schools. The United Black Student Unions of California counts unions from over 60 high schools as part of their organization (United Black Student Unions of California, n.d.).

Findings from this study suggest that the Black Student Union functioned as an important and affirming third space for Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus. Students consistently conveyed that the BSU was a place where they felt recognized, valued, and experienced joy. Unlike other areas of the school, where belonging often shifted depending on the adults or peers present, students described the BSU as a space where belonging was consistent. The BSU also differed from classroom spaces in that discussions about race, racism, and Black identity were welcomed and Black history was centered throughout the year rather than confined to specific months or events.

Most existing research about BSUs has focused on colleges and universities, and since elementary and middle school BSUs are rare, I was unable to find any studies on those specific settings. Nonetheless, research about BSUs in higher education parallels the findings in this study. Pirtle et al. (2024) interviewed Black students about their experiences while attending a Historically Hispanic Institution in California. Students shared that they were subjected to white

supremacy culture and anti-Blackness in all school spaces outside of the Black Student Union (Pirtle et al., 2024). They shared that the BSU was a space where they experienced cultural safety and joy, engaged in forms of activism centered on Blackness, and felt a sense of pride in their identities (Pirtle et al., 2024). Similarly, Malone (2025) interviewed students who attended California State University, Fullerton about their experiences as part of the Black Student Union from 2019–2023. She found that participation in the BSU helped students navigate the othering they felt while attending a Historically Hispanic Institution (Malone, 2025). After two highly public incidents of Hate Speech, to which the university did not respond, the BSU protested and developed a list of demands that the school eventually agreed upon (Malone, 2025). Both of these studies demonstrate how the BSU provided a much needed refuge for Black students in majority Latiné settings (Malone, 2025; Pirtle et al., 2024).

While there is a dearth in literature on the impact of BSUs in K–12 education, there is research on the impact of Black teachers that suggests similar findings. In a literature review of 28 studies on how Black K–12 educators influence Black students, Duncan (2025) found that Black teachers create classroom third spaces for Black youth, affirm and validate student identities, cultivate student voices, engage in discussions about oppressive systems, and build strong and caring relationships. These exact patterns emerged in this study in relation to the BSU. Students described the BSU as a space where they felt pride in being Black, felt comfortable with one another, spoke openly with peers, discussed their racial identities and racialized experiences, and built close, supportive relationships.

At Achieve South Central Campus, the BSUs met twice a week, once during lunch for 20–40 minutes, and once after school for an hour. Over the course of the school week, this meant students were in the BSU for 2% of the time, with an additional hour outside of the school day.

While this was not a significant amount of time, the impact of the BSU on belonging and identity development for Black and Afro-Latiné students was substantial. Full *belonging* exists when people are seen and celebrated as their most authentic selves, and the BSU was the space where that occurred. This comment from Faith, who was in 5th grade, said it all: “I used to not like my skin color. I used to hate it. And then when I got to BSU, now I love my skin. And how everybody is looking like that.”

Summary of Findings

Taken together, the findings of this study pointed to anti-Blackness and belonging as deeply interconnected. Students described moments of connection with specific peers and staff—and most consistently within the Black Student Union—yet belonging outside of the BSU remained inconsistent, shaped by context, relationships, and who was present. Non-instructional staff were the primary cultivators of belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students, and racial congruence with Black staff emerged as a meaningful source of affirmation and connection.

These dynamics were shaped by a school environment in which anti-Blackness was not isolated, but normalized through both institutional practices and interpersonal interactions. Across spaces outside of the BSU, Black and Afro-Latiné students encountered systems that were inconsistent in protecting them from racial harm, while also encountering limited and narrow representations of Black cultures, histories, and lived experiences. Afro-Latiné identities were largely absent from curriculum and school discourse, rendering them effectively invisible.

Ultimately, belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students at Achieve South Central Campus was shaped by anti-Blackness.

Study Limitations

This study had several limitations, particularly related to the small sample size of 11 students and the fact that all participants attended elementary schools within the same charter district.

This study did not dig into the differences in student experiences between students who identified as Black and those who identified as Afro-Latiné. While some small patterns arose, such as Black students describing greater hypervisibility than their Afro-Latiné peers, the sample size did not allow for these trends to be fully substantiated. The study also did not account for differences related to colorism or perceived race. Among the five students who identified as Afro-Latiné, three were fluent Spanish speakers, and the extent to which language influenced their sense of belonging was not explored.

Finally, this study did not examine other important aspects of identity that may shape students' school experiences, including ability and disability, age, country of origin, family dynamics, gender identity, nationality, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. While identity is inherently intersectional, this study focused specifically on race and ethnicity.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Majority Latiné Schools

There is a significant need for professional development focused on supporting educators in discussing race and racism with students.

The findings in this study suggest that staff responses to race-related harm and opportunities for classroom conversations about race varied across students' experiences. These patterns raise questions about whether educators have been provided with the preparation, resources, and ongoing support needed to engage in meaningful conversations about race and racism with young people. Without intentional learning opportunities, students may continue to encounter racial misconceptions, stereotypes, and limited opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of their own and others' racial identities.

Students engaged with curriculum that included racialized histories and identities, yet race itself was often not explicitly discussed. Exposure to diversity is not the same as developing racial understanding. Including diverse books, holidays, or historical figures does not ensure that students understand race, racism, or the ways racial systems shape people's experiences. Without explicit and intentional conversations, students are left to make sense of race and racial difference on their own. If schools are committed to disrupting racial harm, they must move beyond representation alone and create sustained opportunities for direct, developmentally appropriate conversations about race and racism throughout elementary school.

Additionally, the findings suggest that proactive learning about anti-Blackness and Hate Speech was limited within classrooms. Given the frequency with which students described experiencing or witnessing racial harm, schools should prioritize ongoing learning opportunities that support educators in recognizing, preventing, and responding to anti-Blackness.

When addressing anti-Blackness in schools with majority Latiné staff, professional development should be led by Latiné educators and scholars who can speak to the historical and cultural complexities of anti-Blackness within their own communities. Centering these voices

allows educators to engage in more nuanced conversations about the ways anti-Blackness operates across communities while also creating opportunities for collective reflection and accountability. This work should be framed as a shared responsibility that requires all educators to examine how racial hierarchies are reproduced and challenged within their own communities.

Rather than one-time trainings, professional development should be embedded into ongoing staff learning throughout the year and supported through structures that allow educators to continue reflecting, learning, and improving their practice.

Student learning about Black identities should be integrated throughout the year rather than confined to specific time periods. Afro-Latiné identities also need to be meaningfully represented in curriculum and instruction.

Students indicated that learning about Black people was largely confined to February and was primarily historical in nature. This suggests a need for more sustained representation throughout the school year, as well as more contemporary portrayals of Black identities.

Notably, Afro-Latiné identities and experiences were absent from the curriculum and instructional content, reflecting a narrow framing of both Black and Latiné identities.

As with the prior recommendation, these gaps point to a need for ongoing professional learning focused on Black history, narratives, and identity, so that staff can deepen their knowledge and more meaningfully integrate these topics year-round. For more comprehensive integration, school districts should adopt curricula that not only includes this content but also supports teachers in how to engage with these important discussions.

Schools should establish institutional systems for responding to Anti-Blackness

The findings from this study suggest a need for more consistent institutional systems for responding to anti-Blackness. Students described varied responses to incidents of racial harm, raising questions about whether schools have established processes that support staff in addressing harm, facilitating accountability, and engaging in meaningful repair. Rather than relying on individual adults to determine how to respond in the moment, schools should develop clear protocols for responding to anti-Black incidents and provide ongoing professional learning to support all staff in implementing these practices. As noted in the prior section, learning should include opportunities for educators to examine the history and impact of anti-Blackness both broadly and within their own communities. Additionally, sessions should include content about how Hate Speech affects students as well as developmentally appropriate strategies for prevention and response.

Addressing anti-Blackness also requires schools to consider how belonging is created through relationships, structures, and institutional practices. Powell and Galloway-Popotas (2024) describe *bridging* as an essential component of belonging that requires a systems approach attentive to historical context and structural inequality. Applied to this study, *bridging* requires more than creating opportunities for connection across racial groups. It requires schools to actively address the historical and structural conditions that shape students' experiences. For Black and Afro-Latiné students in majority Latiné schools, this includes developing a deeper understanding of how anti-Blackness operates within Latiné communities and creating intentional practices that affirm Black identities, foster accountability, and strengthen belonging.

Bridging practices can support schools in moving beyond responses that occur only after harm has taken place. Through intentional relationship-building, critical reflection, and

institutional accountability, schools can create conditions where Black and Afro-Latiné students are not only included but fully recognized and supported within the school community.

There is a need for classroom time centered on staff-to-student relationship building.

Belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students was primarily cultivated outside of the classroom. This suggests a need for classroom teachers to intentionally dedicate time to relationship-building with students, particularly those who are racially minoritized. While elementary educators often prioritize this at the beginning of the school year, these efforts should be sustained and embedded throughout the entire academic year, especially attending to students who identify as Black or Afro-Latiné.

Elementary schools should create affinity spaces to support Black and Afro-Latiné student belonging.

In 2015, I attended the Northwest Teachers for Social Justice Conference in Seattle, Washington. The annual conference features practitioner-led sessions and opportunities for collaboration, and I attended a high-school-student-led panel on the impact of Black Student Unions (BSUs). At the time, I was hoping to partner with colleagues to start a BSU at the elementary school where I worked, so after the session I asked the BSU staff leader how we might begin that process. I was struck by his response that “BSUs in elementary schools are not really a thing.”

Historically, BSUs developed as spaces where Black students could build community, affirm their racial identities, and organize around issues impacting their communities. Contemporary BSUs continue this work by providing opportunities for students to develop

collective voice, engage in conversations about race and identity, and challenge racial inequities within educational institutions (Malone, 2025; United Black Student Unions of California, n.d.). While BSUs have traditionally been associated with high school and university settings, the findings from this study illustrate the potential importance of creating intentional spaces for Black and Afro-Latiné students in elementary schools.

Critical race scholars have long argued that schools are not neutral spaces, but institutions shaped by broader racial and social structures (Bell, 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2023). From this perspective, BSUs represent more than an extracurricular opportunity; they reflect a broader commitment to creating school environments where Black students' identities, histories, and lived experiences are recognized and affirmed. This aligns with Ladson-Billings' (1995) framework of culturally relevant pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of supporting students' cultural competence, academic achievement, and critical consciousness. Similarly, Tatum (2003) describes affinity spaces as important opportunities for students to explore racial identity development and connect with others who share similar experiences.

The importance of these spaces is particularly relevant for Black and Afro-Latiné students attending majority Latiné schools. In these contexts, students experience hypervisibility due to their minoritized racial identity while simultaneously feeling unseen within curriculum, school traditions, and broader representations of Black identity. Research on Black students' racialized identities demonstrates the importance of environments where students can develop positive racial identities and make meaning of their experiences (Nasir, 2011). Affinity spaces such as BSUs can provide opportunities for students to build community, process shared experiences, and develop a stronger sense of belonging.

In school settings like Achieve South Central Campus, where Black students make up fewer than 10% of the population, BSUs may provide an important space where students can connect with peers, discuss experiences that may be difficult to navigate in predominantly non-Black spaces, and experience affirmation of their identities. However, the principles underlying BSUs should extend beyond the creation of a student group. Schools can incorporate these principles throughout the school day by centering Black histories and identities in curriculum, developing opportunities for student voice, supporting culturally affirming relationships, and creating intentional spaces for conversations about race and racism (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2020; Rogers & Mosley, 2006).

Ultimately, the goal of BSUs should not be to create a separate space where Black students carry the responsibility of finding belonging. Instead, BSUs can serve as a model for how schools create conditions where Black and Afro-Latiné students are recognized, supported, and valued throughout the broader school community.

Recommendations for Researchers

Researchers should be asking elementary schoolers about their racialized school experiences.

When I shared my plan to interview elementary school students about race with professors, researchers, and practitioners, I was repeatedly told that it was unlikely I would receive Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. I was encouraged, more than once, to instead interview staff or conduct observations. While people were supportive of my topic, they worried that I would dedicate a year of work to my dissertation only to subsequently have my project rejected by the IRB.

This experience suggests that many researchers may avoid interviewing elementary-aged students about race due to anticipated barriers in the IRB process. While these concerns are understandable given the time and effort required to prepare a study, this misconception may also discourage scholars from pursuing elementary-student-centered research altogether. At the same time, we know that racial identity development begins in early childhood and significantly shapes students' school experiences, making it essential to include their perspectives directly. Educators who work with young children also recognize that students are capable of engaging thoughtfully in conversations about race, as this study further demonstrates.

Some also questioned whether parents and guardians would be comfortable with their children participating in this type of study. In February 2026, I was in the process of recruiting students to interview. During a Black History Month luncheon and celebration at Achieve South Central Campus, I went from table to table speaking to families about my research and distributing consent forms. Responses were consistently positive; many adults thanked me for centering their children, and others shared their own experiences of harm in predominantly Latiné spaces. Although the final sample included only 11 participants, this was primarily due to my own time constraints and logistical challenges in collecting consent forms from other schools rather than a lack of family interest.

The continued grouping of “Black and Brown” students in research and practice erases Afro-Latiné identities and masks differences in students’ school experiences, underscoring the need to disaggregate data by race.

The majority of research continues to put Black and Latiné or Black and Brown students into the same categories, rather than disaggregating data by racial identity. While there are some

similarities between the two populations in regards to their educational outcomes, there are also significant differences in school experiences that this conflation ignores.

For example, consider the brief, *Why Race & Relationships Matter in Schools* (Californians for Justice, 2020), which presents data on student outcomes in California public schools. One bolded statement reads, “Students of color are disproportionately represented in suspensions, special education, and foster care” (Californians for Justice, 2020, p. 3). This framing can lead readers to assume that outcomes are relatively similar across all students of color. However, a closer examination of the original data sources shows that this is not the case. The suspension data cited in the brief comes from the *2017 Brown Center Report on American Education: Race and School Suspensions* (Loveless, 2017). The report indicates that Black students are suspended at rates approximately four times higher than any other racial group. Framing this issue using the term “students of color” rather than disaggregating by race obscures the extent to which Black students experience disproportionately high suspension rates (Loveless, 2017).

Similarly, grouping Black and Latiné students together obscures a reality that was evident in this study—that Black and Afro-Latiné students have different school experiences than their non-Black Latiné peers due to their racial identities. As this study also demonstrates, the use of the term “Black and Brown” erases students who are Afro-Latiné, despite evidence that their lived and school experiences differ significantly from those of their non-Black Latiné peers. This underscores the need to distinguish between Black and Latiné identities in educational practice and research, as well as the need for scholarship that specifically examines Afro-Latiné students’ school experiences.

Personal Reflection and Conclusion

This study revealed pervasive anti-Blackness in schools where the majority of students and staff were Latiné. At first glance, these findings could be read as an indictment of this specific community. However, such an interpretation overlooks the broader context: these dynamics reflect how racialized hierarchies operate as designed, positioning marginalized groups in competition with one another and rewarding proximity to whiteness. In this sense, the patterns identified here are not unique to Latiné communities. This dissertation could just as easily have focused on schools where any non-Black community of color constitutes the majority, or on predominantly white schools.

At the same time, the focus on Latiné populations in this study was intentional. Latiné communities represent the largest ethnoracial group in Los Angeles and are projected to comprise 29% of the U.S. population by 2050—more than twice the size of any other community of color (Pew Research Center, 2010). In California, the proportion of Latiné teachers has also increased, rising from 22% of the educator workforce in 2019–2020 to 26% of the workforce in 2023–2024 (Bishop et al., 2026). Black, Afro-Latiné, and Latiné students often attend the same schools yet Black and Afro-Latiné students are frequently the minority within these settings. This dynamic calls for focused attention from both researchers and practitioners.

I hope this study serves as a catalyst for schools to prioritize professional learning focused on anti-Blackness. Racialized systems are insidious and are reproduced by all of us, regardless of whether we identify as white, as multiracial, or as people of color. Student belonging is foundational to learning; when professional development centers only on academic

outcomes without attending to the conditions that shape belonging, it is the young people who suffer.

It is clear that racial affinity groups can and should exist in elementary schools. For schools unsure of where to begin in increasing belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students, racial affinity groups are a place to start. While this study did not examine elementary affinity spaces centered on other aspects of identity, I would expect to see similarly positive outcomes.

The purpose of this research was to spark change. I hope that people truly listen to these 8–12-year-olds and feel compelled to raise these issues within their own schools. No student should have to endure this level of harm.

In the final interview question, I invited students to share anything else they felt needed to be included in this research. Valerie responded: “Because we’re all kids here. It’s not just, ‘oh, she’s a Black student. She’s a white student.’ No, we’re all students here....We’re regular human beings like everybody else.” All children have the right to attend schools where they are recognized as “regular human beings” and where their full humanity is both seen and celebrated. We must do better. We owe them that.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Black Student Union Recruitment Presentation Parent Information Sheet, *English*

Dear Parents and Guardians,

My name is Ms. Abby Rotwein, I am a Doctoral Candidate at UCLA and in my third year as Assistant Principal at [REDACTED]. I have been taking classes the last two years at UCLA and writing my dissertation, which focuses on the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students in predominantly Latino schools. For my final year of my Doctorate degree, I must conduct research on my topic, which will eventually be published in my dissertation.

I am conducting a research study at [REDACTED] to learn more about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students so that we can make our schools more welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of all racial identities. For my study, I am looking for students to interview and observe who are in grades 3rd–6th, who attend [REDACTED] and who are part of their school's Black Student Union (BSU).

Next month, I will be presenting my research topic at the monthly [REDACTED]-wide BSU meeting.

I wanted to invite you to attend the meeting if you are interested in learning more.

The meeting will take place from _____ in _____.

At the meeting, I will be sharing details about my research, why I am passionate about this topic, and give students, staff, and parents an opportunity to ask questions.

At the end of the meeting, I will pass out permission forms for students who are interested in participating in individual interviews and/or in observations. All forms of participation in this study are voluntary. Attendance at the meeting is not required for parents and guardians, it's simply an opportunity to speak in person.

If you have any questions, my email address and cell phone number are listed below.
Thank you!

Sincerely,

Ms. Abby Rotwein

abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu, 323-430-1449

Appendix B: Black Student Union Recruitment Presentation Parent Information Sheet, *Spanish*

Estimadas familias y tutores,

Mi nombre es Ms. Abby Rotwein, soy candidata doctoral en UCLA y estoy en mi tercer año como subdirectora en [REDACTED]. Durante los últimos dos años he estado tomando clases en UCLA y escribiendo mi disertación, la cual se enfoca en las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en escuelas predominantemente latinas. En mi último año del programa doctoral, debo realizar una investigación sobre este tema, la cual eventualmente será publicada como parte de mi disertación.

Estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación en [REDACTED] para aprender más sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americano y Afro-Latiné con el fin de que podamos hacer que nuestras escuelas sean más acogedoras, inclusivas y afirmativas de todas las identidades raciales. Para mi estudio, estoy buscando estudiantes para entrevistar y observar que estén en los grados de 3rd–6th, que asistan a [REDACTED], y que formen parte de la Black Student Union (BSU) de su escuela.

El próximo mes, presentaré mi tema de investigación en la reunión mensual de BSU de toda la red [REDACTED].

Quería invitarle a asistir a la reunión si está interesado/a en aprender más.

La reunión se llevará a cabo de _____ en _____.

En la reunión, compartiré detalles sobre mi investigación, por qué me apasiona este tema, y ofreceré a los estudiantes, al personal y a los padres/tutores la oportunidad de hacer preguntas.

Al final de la reunión, repartiré formularios de permiso para los estudiantes que estén interesados en participar en entrevistas individuales y/o en observaciones. Todas las formas de participación en este estudio son voluntarias. No es obligatorio que los padres o tutores asistan a la reunión; simplemente es una oportunidad para conversar en persona.

Si tiene alguna pregunta, mi dirección de correo electrónico y número de celular están indicados a continuación. ¡Gracias!

Atentamente,

Ms. Abby Rotwein

abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu, 323-430-1449

Appendix C: Student Interview Consent and Assent Forms, *English*

Dear Parents and Guardians,

My name is Ms. Abby Rotwein, I am a Doctoral Candidate at UCLA and in my third year as Assistant Principal at [REDACTED]. I have been taking classes the last two years at UCLA and writing my dissertation, which focuses on the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students in predominantly Latino schools. For my final year of my Doctorate degree, I must conduct research on my topic, which will eventually be published in my dissertation.

I am conducting a research study to learn more about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students at [REDACTED] so that we can make our schools more welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of all racial identities. For my study, I am looking for students to interview who are in grades 3rd–6th, who attend [REDACTED], and who are part of their school's Black Student Union (BSU). I will also be observing students while they attend BSU meetings.

The [REDACTED], as well as the Principals at each school, are familiar with my topic and have given their consent for me to conduct research at the [REDACTED] schools. I am working closely with the BSU staff members for this project, and recently presented information about my study to students at the monthly BSU meeting.

If you are receiving this document, it is because your child has indicated an interest in being interviewed and/or observed as part of this study. As the parent or guardian, consent to participate is ultimately your decision.

If you allow your child to participate in an interview, I will work with you and your child to find a time after school to conduct the one hour 1-on-1 interview with them. The interview will take place on [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED] Room, which is a small classroom near the playground. I will communicate with you to establish the best day and time to do so with your family's schedule. If you allow your child to participate in being observed at BSU meetings, this means I will observe three BSU meetings and take notes about what is taking place.

Your child does not have to participate in both an individual interview and in BSU meeting observations. You may consent to only the individual interview, only BSU meeting observations, or you may consent to both. More details about this study can be found on the following consent pages. All forms of participation in this study are voluntary.

If you consent to your child being interviewed and/or being observed at BSU meetings, please complete the attached forms. Please have your child return the forms to me, Ms. Abby. If you do not consent to your child being interviewed, there is no need to return this form. *Please return this form by* _____.

If you have any questions, my email address and cell phone number are listed below. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Ms. Abby Rotwein, abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu, 323-430-1449

University of California, Los Angeles
PARENT PERMISSION FOR MINOR TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Black Student Experiences at Majority Latin American Schools

Abigail Rotwein, Doctoral Candidate **from the** School of Education and Information Studies **at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is conducting a research study.**

Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because of their participation in their school's Black Student Union. **Your child's participation in this research study is voluntary.**

Why is this study being done?

I am conducting a research study to learn more about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students at [REDACTED] so that we can make our schools more welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of all racial identities. For my study, I am looking for students to interview who are in grades 3rd–6th, who attend [REDACTED], and who are part of their school's Black Student Union (BSU). I will also be observing students while they attend BSU meetings.

What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, we would ask them to:

If you allow your child to participate in an interview, I will work with you and your child to find a time after school to conduct the one hour 1-on-1 interview with them. The interview will take place on [REDACTED] in the [REDACTED], which is a small classroom near the playground. I will communicate with you to establish the best day and time to do so with your family's schedule.

The interview contains questions about your child's racial identity and racial experiences at school, both positive and negative. If a child indicates at any time during the interview that they no longer want to participate, they will be thanked and the interview will end.

If you allow your child to participate in being observed at BSU meetings, this means I will observe three BSU meetings and take notes about what is taking place.

Your child does not have to participate in both an individual interview and in BSU meeting observations. You may consent to only the individual interview, only BSU meeting observations, or you may consent to both.

If you give consent for your child to participate in an individual interview, they will also be asked verbally if they agree to participate. That process, which is called “Student Interview Oral Assent Protocol,” is attached at the end of this packet for your reference.

If you give consent for your child to participate in BSU meeting observations, they will also be asked verbally if they agree to participate. That process, which is called “Black Student Union Observation Staff & Student Oral Assent Protocol,” is attached at the end of this packet for your reference.

How long will my child be in the research study?

Participation in an individual interview will take a total of about one hour.

Participation in BSU observations will take place over three BSU meetings, for a total time of about three hours.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that my child can expect from this study?

There are no known risks to your child from participating in this study. Their grades and class standing will not be affected in any way if they do, or do not, participate. Since race and racism can be difficult topics to talk about, your child may experience strong feelings, such as sadness or anger, when participating in this study. It may cause your child to have emotional discomfort.

Are there any potential benefits to my child if he or she participates?

Your child will not directly benefit from this research.

The results of the research may benefit others by informing practices and policies to make our schools a more positive and inclusive space for students of all racial identities.

Will information about my child’s participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify your child will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission.

I will not use your child’s name in the interview transcript, I will use a randomly generated pseudonym. I will not use your child’s name in any observation notes, I will use a randomly

generated pseudonym. The published writing, as well as any future published articles or presentations, will not include any information that would allow someone to identify your child. I will use a pseudonym, as well as removing information about which school your child attends and any other personally identifiable information.

I will record the interview on a recording device. Afterwards, I will be paying a company to transcribe the interview exactly as it was recorded. Observation notes will be taken on a digital Observation Protocol document. The audio file of the interview will not be shared with anyone else, and the interview transcripts and observation notes will only be shared with the three professors who are part of my Doctoral Committee. Teachers, administrators, and other adults at your child's school will not be told about or see what your child shares in their interview. The only exception would be if your child shares information about hurting themselves or others, which I am required to report by law because I am a Mandated Reporter.

During the study, only the Principal Investigator (PI) and Committee Chair will have access to the data. Upon completion of this study, the digital files of the interviews and observations will be transferred to an external hard drive, where they will be stored until they are destroyed, five years after the publication of my dissertation. Upon completion of this study, any identifying information about students and staff will be removed from the transcripts, and they will remain password protected in my Apple Cloud Account. No data collected during this study, including de-identified data, will be shared for future research.

What is a Mandated Reporter?

In my role as a public educator, I am a Mandated Reporter. Under California law, I must report any information about known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder to the authorities. This includes but is not limited to, physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse or neglect. While I am not asking any questions related to these topics in student interviews, if content of this type is shared, I would not be able to keep it private or confidential.

What are my and my child's rights if they take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want your child to be in this study, and you may withdraw your permission and discontinue your child's participation at any time.
- Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you or your child, and no loss of benefits to which you or your child were otherwise entitled.
- Your child can skip or refuse to answer any questions that they do not want to answer during an individual interview and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research, you can talk to the researcher and/or the Committee Chair. Please contact:

Principal Researcher: Abigail Rotwein, abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu

Doctoral Committee Chair: Dr. Julissa Muñiz, j.muniz@ucla.edu

UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program (OHRPP):

If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, or you have concerns or suggestions and you want to talk to someone other than the researchers, you may contact the UCLA OHRPP by phone: (310) 206-2040; by email: participants@research.ucla.edu or by mail: Box 951406, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1406.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Your child does not have to participate in both an individual interview and in BSU meeting observations. You may consent to only the individual interview, only BSU meeting observations, or you may consent to both.

Please X the boxes that you consent to for your child.

☐ **I consent to my child participating in an individual interview.**

☐ **I consent to my child participating in BSU meeting observations.**

SIGNATURE OF PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN

Name of child: _____

Name of parent or legal guardian: _____

Signature of parent or legal guardian: _____

Parent or guardian's phone number: _____

Date: _____

SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT:

Name of person obtaining consent: _____

Signature of person obtaining consent: _____

Person obtaining consent's phone number: _____

Date: _____

If you give consent for your child to participate in an individual interview, they will also be asked verbally if they agree to participate. That process, which is called "Student Interview Oral Assent Protocol," is attached at the end of this packet for your reference.

If you give consent for your child to participate in BSU meeting observations, they will also be asked verbally if they agree to participate. That process, which is called "Black Student Union Observation Staff & Student Oral Assent Protocol," is attached at the end of this packet for your reference.

University of California, Los Angeles
ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Black Student Experiences at Majority Latin American Schools

Student Interview Oral Assent Protocol

Good afternoon _____ (name of interviewee). Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. The goal of our time together is to hear about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students on [REDACTED]. As you know, I am in my third year as a Doctoral Candidate at UCLA. You and your parents/guardians signed a consent form agreeing to participate in this interview. Please let me know if you would like to see that document again.

I have prepared some questions for us to talk about. Depending on where the conversation goes, I may ask more or less questions. This interview will last between 30 minutes and one hour. I will record the interview on this recording device to ensure I can focus on our conversation and I do not miss anything you share.

Afterwards, I will be paying a company to transcribe, which means write down, the interview exactly as it was recorded. The audio file, which means the recording of the interview, will not be shared with anyone else, and the interview transcript will only be shared with the members of my Doctoral Committee, which is a fancy way of saying the professors who are helping me with my project.

There are no known risks to you from participating in this study. Your grades and class standing will not be affected in any way if you do, or do not, participate. Since race and racism can be difficult topics to talk about, you may experience strong feelings, such as sadness or anger, when participating in this study. It may cause you to have emotional discomfort. Your teachers, administrators, and other adults at your school will not be told or see the interview transcript or hear the audio file. The only exception would be if you share information about hurting yourself, hurting other people, or other people hurting you. If you share that type of information, I am required to tell other adults who are responsible for protecting children because I am a Mandated Reporter.

You will not directly benefit from this research. The results of the research may benefit others by informing practices and policies to make our schools a more positive and inclusive space for students of all racial identities.

If you don't want to be in this interview, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this interview is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later. All forms of participation in this study are voluntary.

The questions I will ask are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test. If at any point in the interview you would like the content to not be recorded or you would like to skip a question, feel free to tell me to pause the interview and I will do so.

Please let me know if at any point you would like to take a break from the interview. I have a planned break in the middle but we can take more breaks than that if needed.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can email me at abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu or ask me next time you see me.

Please now state your name and if you agree or do not agree to be interviewed as part of this research study.

My name is _____ and I agree to being interviewed as part of this research study.

My name is _____ and I do not agree to being interviewed as part of this research study.

University of California, Los Angeles
ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Black Student Experiences at Majority Latin American Schools

Black Student Union Observation Staff & Student Oral Assent Protocol

Hello BSU students and staff!

As I shared with you a few weeks ago, I am a Doctoral student at UCLA conducting education research. The purpose of my research is to learn more about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students at JTC so that we can make our schools more welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of all racial identities.

I am here today because I want to observe your BSU meeting and see how being a part of the Black Student Union impacts your school experience.

Your participation in this observation is voluntary and confidential.

If you agree to participate, I will observe the meeting and take notes about what is taking place. You can, however, opt out and ask that I not include you in any of my notes. If at any point, my presence makes you uncomfortable you can also request that I leave that particular meeting.

If you agree to participate, I will not use your name in my notes, I will use a randomly generated pseudonym, which means a made-up name. The published writing, as well as any future published articles or presentations, will not include any information that would allow someone to identify who you are. I will use a pseudonym, as well as removing information about which school you attend or work at and any other information that would allow someone to identify you.

There are no known risks to you from participating in this study. Your grades and class standing will not be affected in any way if you do, or do not, participate. Since race and racism can be difficult topics to talk about, you may experience strong feelings, such as sadness or anger, when participating in this study. It may cause you to have emotional discomfort. Your teachers, administrators, and other adults at your school will not be told or see what is in my observation

notes. The only exception would be if you share information about hurting yourself, hurting other people, or other people hurting you. If you share that type of information, I am required to tell other adults who are responsible for protecting children because I am a Mandated Reporter.

You will not directly benefit from this research. The results of the research may benefit others by informing practices and policies to make our schools a more positive and inclusive space for students of all racial identities.

If you don't want to be in this observation, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this observation is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can email me at abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu or ask me next time you see me.

Please now state your name and if you agree or do not agree to be observed during BSU as part of this research study.

My name is _____ and I agree to be observed during BSU as part of this research study.

My name is _____ and I do not agree to be observed during BSU as part of this research study.

Appendix D: Student Interview Consent and Assent Forms, *Spanish*

Queridos Padres y Tutores,

Mi nombre es Ms. Abby Rotwein, soy candidata doctoral en UCLA y estoy en mi tercer año como Subdirectora en [REDACTED]. He estado tomando clases los últimos dos años en UCLA y escribiendo mi disertación, que se enfoca en las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en escuelas predominantemente Latinas. Para mi último año de doctorado, debo realizar investigación sobre mi tema, la cual eventualmente será publicada en mi disertación.

Estoy llevando a cabo un estudio de investigación para aprender más sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en [REDACTED], con el fin de que nuestras escuelas sean más acogedoras, inclusivas y que afirmen todas las identidades raciales. Para mi estudio, estoy buscando estudiantes de 3rd–6th grado, que asistan a [REDACTED], y que formen parte de la Black Student Union (BSU) de su escuela, para entrevistarlos. También estaré observando a los estudiantes durante sus reuniones de BSU.

El [REDACTED], así como los Directores de cada escuela, están familiarizados con mi tema y me han dado su consentimiento para realizar investigación en las tres escuelas de [REDACTED]. Estoy trabajando de cerca con el personal de BSU en este proyecto y recientemente presenté información sobre mi estudio a los estudiantes en la reunión mensual de BSU.

Si estás recibiendo este documento, es porque tu hijo/a ha mostrado interés en ser entrevistado y/o observado como parte de este estudio. Como padre, madre o tutor, el consentimiento para participar es, en última instancia, tu decisión.

Si permites que tu hijo/a participe en una entrevista, trabajaré contigo y con él/ella para encontrar un horario después de clases para realizar una entrevista individual de una hora. La entrevista se llevará a cabo en el [REDACTED], en el salón [REDACTED], que es un salón pequeño cerca del patio de juegos. Me comunicaré contigo para establecer el mejor día y hora que se ajuste al horario de tu familia. Si permites que tu hijo/a participe en las observaciones de las reuniones de BSU, esto significa que observaré tres reuniones de BSU y tomaré notas sobre lo que ocurra.

Tu hijo/a no tiene que participar tanto en la entrevista individual como en las observaciones de las reuniones de BSU. Puedes dar tu consentimiento solo para la entrevista individual, solo para las observaciones de las reuniones de BSU, o para ambos. Más detalles sobre este estudio se encuentran en las páginas de consentimiento que siguen. Todas las formas de participación en este estudio son voluntarias.

Si das tu consentimiento para que tu hijo/a sea entrevistado y/o observado en las reuniones de BSU, por favor completa los formularios adjuntos. Tu hijo/a puede devolver los formularios firmados a Ms. Abby. Si no das tu consentimiento para que tu hijo/a sea entrevistado, no es necesario devolver este formulario. Por favor devuélve este formulario antes del _____.

Si tienes alguna pregunta, mi correo electrónico y número de celular están anotados abajo.
¡Gracias!

Atentamente,

Ms. Abby Rotwein, abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu, 323-430-1449

University of California, Los Angeles
PERMISO DE LOS PADRES PARA QUE EL MENOR PARTICIPE EN
INVESTIGACIÓN
Experiencias de Estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en Escuelas
Mayoritariamente Latinoamericanas

Abigail Rotwein, candidata doctoral de la Escuela de Educación y Estudios de la Información en la Universidad de California, Los Ángeles (UCLA), está realizando un estudio de investigación.

Tu hijo/a fue seleccionado/a como posible participante en este estudio por su participación en la Black Student Union (BSU) de su escuela. La participación de tu hijo/a en este estudio es voluntaria.

¿Por qué se está haciendo este estudio?

Estoy realizando un estudio de investigación para aprender más sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en [REDACTED], con el fin de que nuestras escuelas sean más acogedoras, inclusivas y que afirmen todas las identidades raciales. Para mi estudio, estoy buscando entrevistar a estudiantes de 3rd–6th grado que asistan a [REDACTED] y que formen parte de la Black Student Union (BSU) de su escuela. También estaré observando a los estudiantes durante sus reuniones de BSU.

¿Qué pasará si mi hijo/a participa en este estudio?

Si aceptas que tu hijo/a participe en este estudio, le pediremos lo siguiente:

Si permites que tu hijo/a participe en una entrevista, trabajaré contigo y con él/ella para encontrar un horario después de clases para realizar una entrevista individual de una hora. La entrevista se llevará a cabo en el [REDACTED], en el salón [REDACTED], que es un salón pequeño cerca del patio de juegos. Me comunicaré contigo para establecer el mejor día y hora de acuerdo al horario de tu familia.

La entrevista incluirá preguntas sobre la identidad racial de tu hijo/a y sus experiencias raciales en la escuela, tanto positivas como negativas. Si en cualquier momento durante la entrevista tu hijo/a indica que ya no quiere participar, se le agradecerá y la entrevista terminará.

Si permites que tu hijo/a participe en las observaciones de las reuniones de BSU, esto significa que observaré tres reuniones de BSU y tomaré notas sobre lo que ocurra.

Tu hijo/a no tiene que participar tanto en la entrevista individual como en las observaciones de las reuniones de BSU. Puedes dar tu consentimiento solo para la entrevista, solo para las observaciones de BSU, o para ambos.

Si das tu consentimiento para que tu hijo/a participe en una entrevista individual, también se le pedirá verbalmente que confirme si está de acuerdo en participar. Ese proceso, llamado “Protocolo de Asentimiento Oral para la Entrevista de Estudiantes,” está incluido al final de este paquete para tu referencia.

Si das tu consentimiento para que tu hijo/a participe en las observaciones de BSU, también se le pedirá verbalmente que confirme si está de acuerdo en participar. Ese proceso, llamado “Protocolo de Asentimiento Oral de Personal y Estudiantes para Observaciones de la Black Student Union,” está incluido al final de este paquete para tu referencia.

¿Cuánto tiempo estará mi hijo/a en el estudio?

Participar en una entrevista individual tomará alrededor de una hora en total.

Participar en las observaciones de BSU tomará lugar durante tres reuniones de BSU, con un tiempo total de unas tres horas.

¿Existen riesgos o incomodidades para mi hijo/a en este estudio?

No hay riesgos conocidos para tu hijo/a al participar en este estudio. Sus calificaciones ni su posición académica se verán afectadas de ninguna manera, ya sea que participe o no. Dado que hablar sobre raza y racismo puede ser difícil, tu hijo/a podría experimentar sentimientos fuertes, como tristeza o enojo, al participar en este estudio. Esto puede causarle incomodidad emocional.

¿Hay beneficios potenciales para mi hijo/a al participar?

Tu hijo/a no recibirá beneficios directos de este estudio.

Los resultados de la investigación podrían beneficiar a otros, ayudando a mejorar prácticas y políticas para que nuestras escuelas sean espacios más positivos e inclusivos para estudiantes de todas las identidades raciales.

¿Se mantendrá confidencial la información sobre la participación de mi hijo/a?

Toda la información obtenida en este estudio que pueda identificar a tu hijo/a se mantendrá confidencial. Solo se divulgará con tu permiso.

No usaré el nombre de tu hijo/a en la transcripción de la entrevista; en su lugar usaré un seudónimo generado al azar. No usaré el nombre de tu hijo/a en las notas de observación; también usaré un seudónimo generado al azar. Los escritos publicados, así como cualquier artículo o presentación futura, no incluirán información que permita identificar a tu hijo/a. Además de usar un seudónimo, se eliminará información sobre a qué escuela asiste y cualquier otro dato identificable.

Grabaré la entrevista con un dispositivo de grabación. Después, pagaré a una empresa para transcribirla exactamente como fue grabada. Las notas de observación se tomarán en un documento digital de Protocolo de Observación. El archivo de audio de la entrevista no se compartirá con nadie más, y las transcripciones de la entrevista y notas de observación solo se compartirán con los tres profesores que forman parte de mi Comité Doctoral. Los maestros, administradores y otros adultos en la escuela de tu hijo/a no sabrán ni verán lo que él/ella comparta en la entrevista. La única excepción sería si tu hijo/a comparte información sobre hacerse daño a sí mismo/a o a otros, lo cual estoy obligada a reportar por ley ya que soy Reportera Obligatoria.

Durante el estudio, solo la Investigadora Principal (PI) y la Presidenta del Comité tendrán acceso a los datos. Al finalizar el estudio, los archivos digitales de entrevistas y observaciones se transferirán a un disco duro externo, donde se almacenarán hasta ser destruidos, cinco años después de la publicación de mi disertación. Al finalizar, cualquier información identificable de estudiantes y personal se eliminará de las transcripciones, las cuales permanecerán protegidas por contraseña en mi cuenta de Apple Cloud. Ningún dato recopilado durante este estudio, incluidos los datos anónimos, se compartirá para futuras investigaciones.

¿Qué es una Reportera Obligatoria?

En mi rol como educadora pública, soy una Reportera Obligatoria. Según la ley de California, debo reportar cualquier información sobre incidentes conocidos o razonablemente sospechados de abuso o negligencia de un niño, adulto dependiente o persona mayor a las autoridades. Esto incluye, pero no se limita a, abuso físico, sexual, emocional o financiero, así como negligencia. Aunque no haré preguntas relacionadas con estos temas en las entrevistas, si se comparte información de este tipo, no podría mantenerla privada o confidencial.

¿Cuáles son mis derechos y los de mi hijo/a si participa en este estudio?

- Puedes decidir si quieres que tu hijo/a participe o no, y puedes retirar tu permiso y detener su participación en cualquier momento.

- Sea cual sea tu decisión, no habrá penalización para ti o tu hijo/a, ni perderán beneficios a los que ya tenían derecho.
- Tu hijo/a puede saltarse o negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta durante la entrevista individual y aún así permanecer en el estudio.

¿Con quién puedo comunicarme si tengo preguntas sobre este estudio?

Si tienes preguntas, comentarios o dudas sobre la investigación, puedes hablar con la investigadora y/o la Presidenta del Comité. Por favor contacta a:

Investigadora principal: Abigail Rotwein, abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu

Presidenta del Comité Doctoral: Dra. Julissa Muñiz, j.muniz@ucla.edu

Oficina del Programa de Protección de la Investigación Humana (OHRPP) de UCLA:

Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos como sujeto de investigación, inquietudes o sugerencias y desea hablar con alguien que no sea uno de los investigadores, puede comunicarse con la OHRPP de UCLA por teléfono: (310) 206-2040; por correo electrónico: participants@research.ucla.edu; o por correo postal: Box 951406, Los Ángeles, CA 90095-1406.

Recibirás una copia de esta información para tus registros.

Tu hijo/a no tiene que participar tanto en la entrevista individual como en las observaciones de las reuniones de BSU. Puedes dar tu consentimiento solo para la entrevista, solo para las observaciones de BSU, o para ambos.

Por favor marca con una X las casillas de lo que consientes para tu hijo/a.

- ☐ **Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo/a participe en una entrevista individual.**
- ☐ **Doy mi consentimiento para que mi hijo/a participe en observaciones de reuniones de BSU.**

FIRMA DEL PADRE/MADRE O TUTOR LEGAL

Nombre del niño/a: _____

Nombre del padre/madre o tutor: _____

Firma del padre/madre o tutor: _____

Teléfono del padre/madre o tutor: _____

Fecha: _____

FIRMA DE LA PERSONA QUE OBTIENE EL CONSENTIMIENTO:

Nombre de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento: _____

Firma de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento: _____

Teléfono de la persona que obtiene el consentimiento: _____

Fecha: _____

Si das tu consentimiento para que tu hijo/a participe en una entrevista individual, también se le pedirá verbalmente que confirme si está de acuerdo en participar. Ese proceso, llamado “Protocolo de Asentimiento Oral para la Entrevista de Estudiantes,” está adjunto al final de este paquete para tu referencia.

_____ también se le pedirá verbalmente que confirme si está de acuerdo en participar. Ese proceso, llamado “Protocolo de Asentimiento Oral de Personal y Estudiantes para Observaciones de la Black Student Union,” está adjunto al final de este paquete para tu referencia.

University of California, Los Angeles
ASENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN INVESTIGACIÓN
Experiencias de Estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en Escuelas
Mayoritariamente Latinoamericanas

Buenas tardes _____ (nombre del entrevistado/a). Muchas gracias por tomarte el tiempo para hacer esta entrevista. El objetivo de nuestro tiempo juntos es escuchar sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en el campus _____. Como sabes, estoy en mi tercer año como candidata doctoral en UCLA. Tú y tus padres/tutores firmaron un formulario de consentimiento aceptando que participes en esta entrevista. Por favor dime si quieres volver a ver ese documento.

He preparado algunas preguntas para que conversemos. Dependiendo de cómo vaya la conversación, podría hacer más o menos preguntas. Esta entrevista durará entre 30 minutos y una hora. Voy a grabar la entrevista con este dispositivo de grabación para asegurarme de que pueda concentrarme en nuestra conversación y no perder nada de lo que compartas.

Después, voy a pagar a una compañía para transcribir, es decir, escribir palabra por palabra, la entrevista tal como fue grabada. El archivo de audio, es decir, la grabación de la entrevista, no se compartirá con nadie más, y la transcripción solo se compartirá con los miembros de mi Comité

Doctoral, que es una forma elegante de decir los profesores que me están ayudando con mi proyecto.

No hay riesgos conocidos para ti al participar en este estudio. Tus calificaciones y tu posición académica no se verán afectadas de ninguna manera si participas o no. Dado que hablar sobre raza y racismo puede ser un tema difícil, podrías experimentar sentimientos fuertes, como tristeza o enojo, al participar en este estudio. Esto podría causarte incomodidad emocional. Tus maestros, administradores y otros adultos en tu escuela no sabrán ni verán la transcripción ni escucharán el archivo de audio de la entrevista. La única excepción sería si compartes información sobre hacerte daño a ti mismo/a, hacer daño a otras personas, o que otras personas te estén haciendo daño. Si compartes ese tipo de información, estoy obligada a contárselo a otros adultos responsables de proteger a los niños, porque soy Reportera Obligatoria.

No recibirás beneficios directos de esta investigación. Sin embargo, los resultados del estudio podrían beneficiar a otros al ayudar a mejorar prácticas y políticas para que nuestras escuelas sean espacios más positivos e inclusivos para estudiantes de todas las identidades raciales.

Si no quieres participar en esta entrevista, no tienes que hacerlo. Recuerda, estar en esta entrevista depende de ti, y nadie se enojará si no quieres participar o incluso si cambias de opinión más tarde. Todas las formas de participación en este estudio son voluntarias.

Las preguntas que te voy a hacer son solo sobre lo que tú piensas. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas porque esto no es un examen. Si en algún momento de la entrevista prefieres que no se grabe el contenido o quieres saltarte una pregunta, dime que pause la entrevista y lo haré.

Por favor avísame si en algún momento quieres tomar un descanso. Tengo un descanso planeado en la mitad de la entrevista, pero podemos hacer más si lo necesitas.

Puedes hacer cualquier pregunta que tengas sobre el estudio. Si más tarde tienes una pregunta que no pensaste ahora, puedes escribirme a mi correo: abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu, o preguntarme la próxima vez que me veas.

Por favor, di ahora tu nombre y si aceptas o no participar en esta entrevista como parte de este estudio de investigación.

Mi nombre es _____ y acepto ser entrevistado/a como parte de este estudio de investigación.

Mi nombre es _____ y no acepto ser entrevistado/a como parte de este estudio de investigación.

University of California, Los Angeles
ASENTIMIENTO PARA PARTICIPAR EN INVESTIGACIÓN
Experiencias de Estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en Escuelas
Mayoritariamente Latinoamericanas

Protocolo de Asentimiento Oral de Personal y Estudiantes para Observaciones de la Black Student Union (BSU)

¡Hola estudiantes y personal de BSU!

Como les compartí hace unas semanas, soy estudiante de doctorado en UCLA realizando una investigación en educación. El propósito de mi investigación es aprender más sobre las experiencias de estudiantes Afro-Americanos y Afro-Latiné en JTC, con el fin de que nuestras escuelas sean más acogedoras, inclusivas y que afirmen todas las identidades raciales.

Hoy estoy aquí porque quiero observar su reunión de BSU y ver cómo el hecho de ser parte de la Black Student Union impacta en su experiencia escolar.

Tu participación en esta observación es voluntaria y confidencial.

Si aceptas participar, observaré la reunión y tomaré notas sobre lo que ocurra. Sin embargo, tú puedes decidir no participar y pedir que no te incluya en mis notas. Si en algún momento mi presencia te hace sentir incómodo/a, también puedes pedirme que me retire de esa reunión en particular.

Si aceptas participar, no usaré tu nombre en mis notas, sino un seudónimo generado al azar, es decir, un nombre inventado. Los escritos publicados, así como cualquier artículo o presentación futura, no incluirán información que permita identificar quién eres. Usaré un seudónimo, además de eliminar información sobre en qué escuela estudias o trabajas y cualquier otro dato que pueda identificarte.

No hay riesgos conocidos para ti al participar en este estudio. Tus calificaciones ni tu posición académica se verán afectadas de ninguna manera, ya sea que participes o no. Dado que hablar sobre raza y racismo puede ser difícil, podrías experimentar sentimientos fuertes, como tristeza o enojo, al participar en este estudio. Esto puede causarte incomodidad emocional. Tus maestros, administradores y otros adultos en tu escuela no sabrán ni verán lo que está en mis notas de observación. La única excepción sería si compartes información sobre hacerte daño a ti mismo/a, hacer daño a otras personas, o que otras personas te estén haciendo daño. Si compartes ese tipo de información, estoy obligada a contárselo a otros adultos responsables de proteger a los niños, porque soy Reportera Obligatoria.

No recibirás beneficios directos de esta investigación. Sin embargo, los resultados del estudio podrían beneficiar a otros al ayudar a mejorar prácticas y políticas para que nuestras escuelas sean espacios más positivos e inclusivos para estudiantes de todas las identidades raciales.

Si no quieres participar en esta observación, no tienes que hacerlo. Recuerda, estar en esta observación depende de ti, y nadie se enojará si no quieres participar o incluso si cambias de opinión más tarde.

Puedes hacer cualquier pregunta que tengas sobre el estudio. Si más tarde tienes una pregunta que no pensaste ahora, puedes escribirme a mi correo: abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu, o preguntarme la próxima vez que me veas.

Por favor, di ahora tu nombre y si aceptas o no ser observado/a durante BSU como parte de este estudio de investigación.

Mi nombre es _____ y acepto ser observado/a durante BSU como parte de este estudio de investigación.

Mi nombre es _____ y no acepto ser observado/a durante BSU como parte de este estudio de investigación.

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Site: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Interviewer: Abby Rotwein

Introduction, Confidentiality Statement, and Student Interview Oral Assent Protocol

Good afternoon _____ (name of interviewee). Thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. The goal of our time together is to hear about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students on [REDACTED]. As you know, I am in my third year as a Doctoral Candidate at UCLA. You and your parents/guardians signed a consent form agreeing to participate in this interview. Please let me know if you would like to see that document again.

I have prepared some questions for us to talk about. Depending on where the conversation goes, I may ask more or less questions. This interview will last between 30 minutes and one hour. I will record the interview on this recording device to ensure I can focus on our conversation and I do not miss anything you share.

Afterwards, I will be paying a company to transcribe, which means write down, the interview exactly as it was recorded. The audio file, which means the recording of the interview, will not be shared with anyone else, and the interview transcript will only be shared with the members of my Doctoral Committee, which is a fancy way of saying the professors who are helping me with my project.

There are no known risks to you from participating in this study. Your grades and class standing will not be affected in any way if you do, or do not, participate. Since race and racism can be difficult topics to talk about, you may experience strong feelings, such as sadness or anger, when participating in this study. It may cause you to have emotional discomfort. Your teachers, administrators, and other adults at your school will not be told or see the interview transcript or hear the audio file. The only exception would be if you share information about hurting yourself, hurting other people, or other people hurting you. If you share that type of information, I am required to tell other adults who are responsible for protecting children because I am a Mandated Reporter.

You will not directly benefit from this research. The results of the research may benefit others by informing practices and policies to make our schools a more positive and inclusive space for students of all racial identities.

If you don't want to be in this interview, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this interview is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later.

The questions I will ask are only about what you think. There are no right or wrong answers because this is not a test. If at any point in the interview you would like the content to not be recorded or you would like to skip a question, feel free to tell me to pause the interview and I will do so.

Please let me know if at any point you would like to take a break from the interview. I have a planned break in the middle but we can take more breaks than that if needed.

You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can email me at abbyrotwein@g.ucla.edu or ask me next time you see me.

Please now state your name and if you agree or do not agree to be interviewed as part of this research study.

My name is _____ and I agree to being interviewed as part of this research study.

My name is _____ and I do not agree to being interviewed as part of this research study.

Interview Questions

Warm Up Questions:

These questions are just a background to get to know you a little bit and understand how you feel about school broadly.

1. Please share your name, age, grade level, and what school you attend.
2. What grade were you in when you started attending your current school?
3. What's your favorite part of the school day?
4. What's your favorite topic to learn about at school?
5. What's your favorite event or celebration that happens at your school? Why?

6. What do you think is the best part about attending your school? Why?

Race and Identity Questions:

Now we are going to talk about race and identity so that I can get to know you and your family a bit more.

7. What is your racial identity? (What is your race?)
8. What racial identities are the members of your family?
9. What languages do you speak?
10. What languages do the members of your family speak?
11. Where were you born?
12. Do you know how long your family has lived in Los Angeles?
13. Did anyone in your family grow up in another country?
14. Do you and your family talk about your race or racism at home?
 - a. If so, what kind of things do you talk about?
15. Do you and your family ever talk about other people's race at home?
 - a. If so, what kind of things do you talk about?

This is where we will take a ten minute break. You may choose what you would like to do during the break, here are a few ideas: Go for a walk outside, go play a sport outside, eat a snack, play with Magna Tiles, color. This is also a great time to use the bathroom and get a drink of water.

Questions About Race at School:

These next questions will be about race at school.

16. Do you feel like you fit in at your school?
 - a. What are some things that make you feel like you fit in?

- b. Do you have any specific examples of times or places where you feel like you fit in?
- 17. Have you ever had a moment(s) in school when you didn't feel like you fit in?
 - a. What are some things that make you feel like you don't fit in or are left out?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples of times or places where you felt like you did not fit in or you were left out?
- 18. How do you think most students at your school would describe their racial identity?
- 19. How do you think most staff at your school would describe their racial identity?
- 20. Do you ever feel like your racial identity makes you stand out at your school?
 - a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
- 21. Do you feel like your racial identity is celebrated at your school?
 - a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
- 22. Do you feel like there are positive examples of your racial identity at your school?
 - a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
- 23. Do you think that most staff at your school understand Black students and Black culture?
(if applies to identity of student)
 - a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
- 24. Do you think that most staff at your school understand Afro-Latiné students and Afro-Latiné culture? *(if applies to identity of student)*

- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
25. Do you think that most staff at your school know about the positive contributions Black and Afro-Latiné people have made to the United States and the world?
- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
26. Do you feel that most staff at your school feel comfortable talking about race?
- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
27. Do you feel that most staff at your school feel comfortable talking about racism?
- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
28. Who are the staff at your school that you feel most connected to and understood by?
- a. What makes you feel connected to them and understood by them?
 - b. Do you know the racial identities of those staff members?
29. Do students make negative comments about your race at your school?
- a. Can you give me some examples?
 - b. How often does that kind of thing happen to you?
 - c. How does that make you feel about your school?
30. When that happens, how have adults at your school responded? *(Do they allow it/ignore it/stop it/have consequences?)*
- a. Can you give me some examples?
 - b. Do adults check on you after those things happen?

31. Do you feel that adults at your school notice when those things happen and know how to respond to them in a way that makes you feel supported?
- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Can you give me some examples?
 - c. Do all adults know how to respond?
 - d. Which adults do you feel know how to respond best?
32. Do staff members make negative comments about your race at your school?
- a. Can you give me some examples?
 - b. How often does that kind of thing happen to you?
 - c. How does that make you feel about your school?
33. What are some things that make you feel like you belong at your school?
- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?
34. Why did you decide to become part of the BSU at your school?
35. Has being part of BSU changed how you feel about your school?
- a. What makes you think that?
36. Would you recommend your school to other Black and Afro-Latiné students as a place where they will feel like they belong?
- a. What makes you think that?
37. Overall, do you feel that your school is a place that makes you feel proud of your racial identity?
- a. What makes you think that?
 - b. Do you have any specific examples?

38. Overall, do you feel that your school is a place that makes you feel safe in your racial identity?

a. What makes you think that?

b. Do you have any specific examples?

39. Is there anything else you want me to know about the experiences of Black students and Afro-Latiné students that I have not asked yet?

Thank you so much for being candid and vulnerable. I greatly appreciate your time!

Appendix F: Non-Verbal Behaviors Interview Protocol

Student Pseudonym:	Time of interview:
Date of interview:	Length of interview:

Category	Non-verbal behaviors observed	During which interview questions were these behaviors observed? (question numbers and/or time)
Hands	Fidgeting with hands or fidgets	
	Tapping hands	
	Hands shaking (tremoring)	
	Head in hands	
	Balling up hands	
	Balling up items with hands	
	Tearing up items with hands	
	Digging into palm with fingernails	
	Digging into leg with fingernails	
	Picking nails	
	Biting nails	

	Hitting head with palm (facepalm)	
	Banging hands on table	
	Doodling	
	Drawing	
Feet	Tapping feet	
	Stomping/banging feet	
Whole body	Rocking in chair	
	Shrugging	
	Leaning back in chair	
	Standing up	
	Walking around	
Face or head	Looking at the ground	
	Getting teary-eyed	
	Crying	
	Smiling	
	Staring off into space	

	Pulling hair	
	Pulling eyelashes	
	Putting head on table	
	Banging head on table	
	Shaking head no	
	Shaking head yes	
	Biting lip	
	Rubbing eyes	
	Looking around	
Auditory	Repeated sighing	
	Laughing	

Appendix G: Units of Observation Chart

Units of Analysis

My Unit of Analysis are: Black and Afro-Latiné students' sense of belonging, their experiences with anti-Black racism, and sense-making pertaining to their racial identity.

Units of Observation Chart

Research Question	Units of Observation	Data Collection Methods
RQ1: How, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students perceive incidents of anti-Black Hate Speech and anti-Black racism within a predominantly Latiné school?	• Hate Speech: N-word, monkey, other similar language • Colorism: negative comments about skin tone • Stereotypes, the following specifically: intelligence/lack of intelligence, communication styles, behavior, family structures/beliefs • Lack of representation in curriculum (or only	• Semi-structured individual interviews

	represented in February) • Reactive vs. proactive responses by staff to: Hate Speech, colorism, and stereotypes	
RQ2: To what extent, if at all, do Black and Afro-Latiné students describe feeling a sense of belonging within a predominantly Latiné school?	• Representation in curriculum year-round • Positive representation in classroom books, posters, and wall imagery year-round • Positive representation in schoolwide books, posters, and wall imagery year-round • Black & Afro-Latiné staff	• Semi-structured individual interviews

	• Non-Black staff that connect with students about identity • When a non-Black student interrupts Hate Speech or harmful comments • Staff connection with families • Celebrations of Black and Afro-Latiné identity • Black Student Union meetings, events & content	
RQ3: What factors (e.g. spaces, policies, practices), if any, within the school environment, contribute towards a student's racial identity development?	• Representation in curriculum year-round • Positive representation in classroom books, posters, and wall imagery year-round	• Semi-structured individual interviews

	• Positive representation in schoolwide books, posters, and wall imagery year-round • Black & Afro-Latiné staff • Black Student Union meetings, events & content • Non-Black staff that connect with students about identity • When a non-Black student interrupts Hate Speech or harmful comments • Staff connection with families • Celebrations of Black and Afro-Latiné identity	
--	--	--

	• Preferential treatment for non-Black Latiné students: staff are nicer to them, don't make them follow the rules as closely, more forgiving of their mistakes (tardies, absences, late assignments) • Disproportionate discipline: Black & Afro-Latiné students receiving harsher discipline than non-Black Latiné students • Non-Black Latiné identity centered in school community: events, curriculum, celebrations	
--	---	--

Appendix H: Data Use Agreement with [REDACTED]

DATA USE AGREEMENT

DATA USE AGREEMENT ("Agreement" or "DUA") is entered into by and between [REDACTED] ("Collaborator") and Abigail Lauren Rotwein and UCLA School of Education and Information Studies with offices at Moore Hall, 457 Portola Plaza, Los Angeles, CA, 90095 ("Company"). Collaborator and Company may hereinafter be referred to individually as a "Party," and collectively as the "Parties." The effective date of this Agreement shall be August 25, 2025 (the "Effective Date").

WHEREAS, Collaborator shall make Data, as defined below, available to Company as described herein;

WHEREAS, As part of its ongoing efforts to improve student sense of belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students, Collaborator is partnering with Company to ascertain which school practices are effective at increasing student sense of belonging for Black and Afro-Latiné students ("the Project"). A detailed description of the Project (the "Project Description") is attached hereto as Exhibit A.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Parties hereto agree as follows:

I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

In order to successfully accomplish the Project, Company will, as described in this DUA, have temporary access to the Collaborator's data identified in this DUA and any addenda to it. This DUA sets forth the requirements for the sharing of contemplated in the Project.

II. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Collaborator's data will be used by the Company to answer the questions posed in the Project Description.

III. TERM

This Agreement takes effect upon the Effective Date and shall remain in effect until completion of the project described herein, or twelve (12) months from the date of this Agreement, or until canceled by either Party upon thirty (30) days written notice to the other Party, whichever occurs first. The Agreement is renewable upon written approval by an authorized representative of each Party.

IV. DATA DISCLOSURE

To conduct the Project, one or more different raw data files and fields, as identified below, will need to be shared with COMPANY (the "Data"). COMPANY is requesting from Collaborator the following raw data for the 2025–2026 school year:

Data used in this study for which individual consent and assent will not be obtained will include:

- Behavior Data from Powerschool, including Hate Speech Incidents
- Student classwork
- Staff lesson plans, including slideshows, handouts, and planning documents
- District and school social media posts
- Schoolwide books, posters, and wall imagery
- Observation of students and staff in the following spaces:
 - Classrooms
 - Hallways
 - Playground

Data used in this study for which verbal assent will be obtained from staff will include:

- Observation of:
 - Black Student Union Meetings

Data used in this study for which individual, written consent will be obtained from the legal guardians of students, and for which individual, verbal assent will be obtained from those same students will include:

- Individual student interviews
- Observation of:
 - Black Student Union Meetings

COMPANY is also requesting from Collaborator the following raw data from the 2023–2024 school year and the 2024–2025 school year:

- Behavior Data from Powerschool, including Hate Speech Incidents

In order to minimize the amount of personally identifiable information ("PII") retained outside of Collaborator's systems, Company will make reasonable efforts, or will work with Collaborator to, remove PII elements and generate masked research identifiers before the Data is used by Company. When any Data is transported outside Collaborator's systems, Company will reasonably assist Collaborator such that all such Data is encrypted and moved via encrypted physical media (i.e., CD or DVD) or secure HTTP. No Data will be transferred outside Collaborator's systems via email.

V. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

To effect the transfer of data and information that is subject to federal and state confidentiality laws and to ensure that the required confidentiality of personally identifiable information shall always be maintained, Company agrees to:

1. In all respects comply with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and applicable state law. Nothing in this Agreement may be construed to allow either Party to maintain, use, disclose, or share the Data in a manner not allowed under Federal or state law or regulation.
2. For purposes of this Project and for ensuring Company's compliance with the terms of this Agreement and all applicable state and federal laws, Company designates Abigail

Lauren Rotwein as the temporary custodian of the Data ("Temporary Custodian"). Collaborator will release the Data for this Project to the named Temporary Custodian. The Temporary Custodian shall be responsible for transmitting all requests for Data and maintaining a log or other record of all Data requested and received pursuant to the Agreement, including confirmation of the completion of the Project and the return or destruction of the Data as described below. Collaborator or its agents may upon request review the records required to be kept by Company under this Agreement. Collaborator designates Chris Carr as its liaison for all communications with Company regarding this Project and the Agreement as it relates to the Project.

3. Use the Data for only the purposes as specified in this Agreement. Nothing in the Agreement shall be construed to authorize Company to have access to additional data from Collaborator that is not included in the scope of the Agreement or to govern access to the Data by entities other than the Parties. Company further agrees not to share the Data received under the Agreement with any other entity without prior written approval from Collaborator. Company understands that the Agreement does not convey ownership of the Data to Company. Company acknowledges that the Data belongs to the Collaborator, and that Company's use of the Data is subject to the control and discretion of the Collaborator.
4. Require all employees, contractors, and agents of any kind to comply with the Agreement and all applicable provisions of FERPA and other laws with respect to the Data shared under the Agreement. Company agrees to require and maintain an appropriate confidentiality agreement from each employee, contractor, or agency with access to the Data pursuant to the Agreement. Nothing in this section authorizes Company to share the Data provided under the Agreement with any other individual or entity for any purpose other than completing Company's work as authorized by Collaborator consistent with this Agreement.
5. Not disclose the Data produced to it under the Agreement in any manner that could identify any individual student, except as authorized by FERPA, to any entity other than Collaborator, or authorized employees, contractors, and agents of Company working the Project. Persons participating in the Project on behalf of Company shall neither disclose nor otherwise release any Data relating to an individual student, nor disclose information relating to a group or category of students without ensuring the confidentiality of individual students in that group. Publications and reports generated in furtherance of the Project, including preliminary project descriptions and draft reports, shall include only deidentified information, such as aggregate data and no PII or other information that could lead to the identification of any student shall be included within these publications and/or reports.
6. Not provide any of the Data obtained under this Agreement to any entity or person ineligible to receive data protected by FERPA, or prohibited from receiving data from any entity for any other reason.
7. Within thirty (30) days after termination of this DUA, Company will return all data files

and hard copy records to Collaborator and purge any copies of the Data from its computer systems. Company agrees to require all employees, contractors, or agents of any kind working on the project to comply with this provision. No other entity is authorized to continue research using the Data obtained under the Agreement upon the termination of the Agreement and the Project described herein. Company will destroy all Data obtained under the Agreement and addenda to it when no longer needed for the purpose for which it was released by Collaborator. Nothing in this Agreement authorizes Company to maintain the Data beyond the time period needed to complete the Project.

8. Provide Collaborator with one electronic and at least one paper copy of the final versions of all reports and other documents/datasets associated with the Project, along with making Company staff available to discuss Project with Collaborator for a minimum of two (2) hours.
9. Company agrees to comply with all applicable laws that require notification of individuals in the event of an unauthorized release of personally identifiable information or other event requiring notification. In the event of a breach of any of Company's security obligations, or any other event requiring notification under applicable law, Company agrees to:
 - Immediately notify Collaborator of such event within 24 hours of discovery; and
 - Cooperate with Collaborator to inform all such individuals in accordance with applicable laws; and
 - Indemnify, hold harmless and defend Collaborator and its trustees, officers, and employees from and against any claims, damages, fees or other harm related to such a data breach.
10. Company is prohibited from using PII to engage in targeted advertising.

VI. PUBLICATIONS

Company has the right, consistent with scientific standards, to publish, present, or use the study results it has gained in the course of the research under this Agreement but only if consented to by Collaborator in writing. No PII shall be included in the study results and only deidentified information may be disclosed. Company shall not own the copyright in any works it originally authors under this Agreement.

VII. USE OF NAME

Except as expressly authorized in this Agreement and for identification of Collaborator as the source of the Data, neither Collaborator nor Company shall use (alone or as part of another name) any names, logos, seals, insignia or other words, symbols or devices that identify the other Party or any unit, division or affiliate of the other Party ("Protected Names") for any purpose in connection with the Project or this Agreement except with the prior written approval of, and in accordance with restrictions required by, the other Party, nor shall either Party seek to register any Protected Names of the other Party in any manner in any jurisdiction. Without limiting the foregoing, each Party shall cease all use of Protected Names of the other authorized under this Agreement on the termination or expiration of this Agreement, except as otherwise expressly provided herein. These restrictions shall not apply to information required to be disclosed to a government entity.

VIII. REPRESENTATIONS AND WARRANTIES

Under this DUA, Collaborator is representing and warranting that it has the right to provide the Data to Company.

IX. INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR

The Parties are independent contractors and do not intend that any agency, partnership, joint venture, or exclusive relationship is created between the Parties by this Agreement. Nothing in this Agreement shall be construed as obligating the Parties to enter into any subsequent agreement or relationship.

X. RELATED PARTIES

Company represents that it is able to abide by the terms of this Agreement, including confidentiality, maintenance, publication, and destruction or return of data, and to require compliance by all related or associated institutions, individuals, employees or contractors who may have access to the Data or may own, lease, or control equipment or facilities of any kind where the Data is stored, maintained or use in any way.

XI. ENTIRE AGREEMENT

This Agreement expresses the entire agreement of the Parties and shall not be modified or altered except in writing executed by authorized representatives of Collaborator and Company, and in a manner consistent with applicable state and federal laws.

[SIGNATURES ON FOLLOWING PAGE]
[REMAINDER OF PAGE INTENTIONALLY BLANK]

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, Collaborator and Company have executed this Agreement as of September 8, 2025.

Authorized Signatures

[Redacted]

Collaborator: Dr. [Redacted]

Site: [Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Company: Abigail Rotwein/UCLA
School of Education and
Information Studies

By: 

By: 

Name
: Dr. [Redacted]

Name
: _____ Abigail Rotwein

Title:

Executive Director

Title: Primary

Investigator/Researcher

Date:

9/8/2025

Dated
: 9/8/2025

Exhibit A

Project Description

Abigail Lauren Rotwein is an Ed.D candidate at UCLA. The purpose of her research study is to learn more about the experiences of Black and Afro-Latiné students at predominantly Latin American elementary schools in order to improve student sense of belonging and ensure our institutions are welcoming, inclusive, and affirming of all racial identities.

Her study will require accessing the following data from [REDACTED]. Her dissertation will also go through an Institutional Review Board from UCLA.

Data used in this study for which individual consent and assent will not be obtained will include:

- Behavior Data from Powerschool, including Hate Speech Incidents
- Student classwork
- Staff lesson plans, including slideshows, handouts, and planning documents
- District and school social media posts
- Schoolwide books, posters, and wall imagery
- Observation of students and staff in the following spaces:
 - Classrooms
 - Hallways
 - Playground

Data used in this study for which verbal assent will be obtained from staff will include:

- Observation of:
 - Black Student Union Meetings

Data used in this study for which individual, written consent will be obtained from the legal guardians of students, and for which individual, verbal assent will be obtained from those same students will include:

- Individual student interviews
- Observation of:
 - Black Student Union Meetings

COMPANY is also requesting from Collaborator the following raw data from the 2023–2024 school year and the 2024–2025 school year:

- Behavior Data from Powerschool, including Hate Speech Incidents

REFERENCES

- Abrica E. J., García-Louis C., Gallaway C. D. J. (2020). *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 23(1), 55–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2019.1631781>
- Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review*, 30(1), 1–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-016-9389-8>
- Alexander, M. (2011). *The new Jim Crow: Mass incarceration in the age of colorblindness*. New Press.
- Alicea, J. (2023). *Black in Brown space: Anti-Blackness at a Latinx-serving, “social justice” school before and after George Floyd*. University of California, Los Angeles.
- Andriaccio, K. R. (2021). *How Black students experience school in a predominantly white suburban high school: A phenomenological study to examine student perceptions of self-efficacy, sense of belongingness, and perceived educational opportunity*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.
- Arguello, M. M. (2019). We joined others who were poor: the Young Lords, the Black freedom struggle, and the “original” Rainbow Coalition. *Journal of African American Studies* (New Brunswick, N.J.), 23(4), 435–454. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12111-019-09453-7>
- Aronson, B., & Stohry, H. R. (2023). Latinx and Asian engagement/complicity in anti-Blackness. *Genealogy*, 7(37), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy7020037>
- Balfanz, R. (2009, June). *Putting middle grades students on the graduation path: A policy and practice brief*. Everyone Graduates Center & Talent Development Middle Grades Program, National Middle School Association.
- https://www.amle.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Policy_Brief_Balfanz.pdf

- Baptiste, D. L., Caviness-Ashe, N., Josiah, N., Commodore-Mensah, Y., Arscott, J., Wilson, P. R., & Starks, S. (2022). Henrietta Lacks and America's dark history of research involving African Americans. *Nursing Open*, 9(5), 2236–2238. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.1257>
- Berry, T. R., & Stovall, D. O. (2013). Trayvon Martin and the curriculum of tragedy: Critical race lessons for education. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 16(4), 587–602. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.817775>
- Bell, J. (2013). *The four "I's" of oppression*. YouthBuild USA.
- Bhabha, H. K. (1994). *The location of culture* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203820551>
- Blazar, D. (2021). Teachers of Color, culturally responsive teaching, and student outcomes: Experimental evidence from the random assignment of teachers to classes. EdWorkingPaper No. 21–501. *Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University.
- Bishop, J., Carver-Thomas, D., Meza, L., & Orozco, M. (2026). *Six years of change: What statewide trends reveal about California's teaching workforce*. UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools. <https://transformschoools.ucla.edu/research/six-years-of-change-what-statewide-trends-reveal-about-californias-teaching-workforce/>
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). The structure of racism in color-blind, “post-racial” America. *The American Behavioral Scientist (Beverly Hills)*, 59(11), 1358–1376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215586826>
- Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19(33), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1026>

- Brangham, W. (2022, October 11). *Pressure mounts on Los Angeles city leaders following leaked audio of racist remarks*. PBS News.
<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/pressure-mounts-on-los-angeles-city-leaders-following-leaked-audio-of-racist-remarks>
- Bristol, T. J., & Martin-Fernandez, J. (2019). The added value of Latinx and Black teachers for Latinx and Black students: Implications for policy. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 6(2), 147–153. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219862573>
[ino](#).
- Burke, T. (2024, February 8). "Black/African American" - Black cultural erasure in genetic counseling. *Perspectives*.
<https://perspectives.nsgc.org/Article/blackafrican-american-black-cultural-erasure-in-genetic-counseling#:~:text=Ethnicity%20is%20a%20state%20of,American%E2%80%9D%20refers%20to%20an%20ethnicity>.
- Busey, C., & Cruz, B., (2015). A shared heritage: Afro-Latin@s and Black history. *The Social Studies*, 106(6), 293–300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2015.1085824>
- Cabrera Rajo, S. (2017). Introduction of African Black slaves in the kingdom of Guatemala and provinces of San Salvador and Honduras. *Kóot (Online)*, 7(8), 82–172.
<https://doi.org/10.5377/koot.v0i8.5872>
- California Department of Education, Data Quest. (2024). *2023–2024 enrollment by ethnicity, Los Angeles County report*.
<https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/dqcensus/EnrEthLevels.aspx?cds=19&agglevel=county&year=2023-24>

California Department of Education. (2024). *Diversifying the teacher workforce*.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/pl/diverseteteacherworkforce.asp#:~:text=Currently%20in%20California%2C%2023%20percent,of%20teachers%20share%20that%20demographic.>

California Department of Education. (2026). *Facts about English learners in California*.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ds/ad/ceffingertipfacts.asp>

California Department of Education. (2026). *Universal prekindergarten FAQs*.

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/em/kinderfaq.asp>

Californians for Justice. (n.d.). Why race and relationships matter in California schools.

<https://caljustice.egnyte.com/dl/XDr3C96lKt/>

Carbado, D. W., & Gulati, M. (2013). *Acting white?: Rethinking race in “post-racial” America*.

Oxford University Press.

CBS Los Angeles. (2020, February 11). *Deputies respond to second fight in 6 months at*

Paramount High School. CBS Los Angeles.

<https://www.cbsnews.com/losangeles/news/deputies-paramount-high-school-fight/>

Census Reporter. (2023). <https://censusreporter.org>

Census Reporter. (2026). <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/86000US90003-90003/>

Chang, H. N., & Romero, M. (2008, September). Present, engaged, and accounted for: The critical importance of addressing chronic absence in the early grades. *National Center for*

Children in Poverty. https://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/text_837.pdf

Charles, C. Z. (2006). *Won't you be my neighbor?: Race, class, and residence in Los Angeles*.

Russell Sage Foundation.

- Chavez-Dueñas, N., Adames, H., & Organista, K. (2014). Skin-color prejudice and within-group racial discrimination: Historical and current impact on Latino/a populations. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 36(1), 3–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986313511306>
- City of St. Louis. (2025). *A preservation plan for St. Louis, part I: Historic contexts: 8 - the African-American experience*.
<https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/planning/cultural-resources/preservation-plan/Part-I-African-American-Experience.cfm>
- Clay, J. S. (2021). *The experiences of Black students attending predominantly white high schools*. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.
- Cole, K., & Verwayne, D. (2018). Becoming upended: Teaching and learning about race and racism with young children and their families. *YC Young Children*, 73(2), 34–43.
- Contreras, M. (2024, May 16). *Latino students are the most segregated they have been since 1968*. Axios.
<https://www.axios.com/2024/05/16/student-segregation-latino-brown-v-board-of-education>
- Cook, J. E., Purdie-Vaughns, V., Garcia, J., & Cohen, G. L. (2012). Chronic threat and contingent belonging: Protective benefits of values affirmation on identity development. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(3), 479–496.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026312>
- Corral, A. (2020). Allies, antagonists, or ambivalent? Exploring Latino attitudes about the Black Lives Matter movement. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 42(4), 434–454.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986320949540>
- Cras, P. (2025). Anatomy of an improbable alliance: Chicago’s first Rainbow Coalition, or how

- to redefine radical interracial solidarity (1968–1976). *Revue Française D'études Américaines*, 185. <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfea.185.0053>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Cruz, I. (2023, October 10). *Afro-Latinos in El Salvador: History, identity, and recognition*. Los Angeles Times.
<https://www.latimes.com/delos/story/2023-10-10/afro-latinos-el-salvador-history>
- Dache, A., Haywood, J. M., & Mislán, C. (2019). A badge of honor not shame: An AfroLatina theory of Black-imiento. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 88(2), 130–145.
- Damiani, J. (2014). Unlocking elementary students' perspectives of leadership. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 6(2), 229–256.
- Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2023). *Critical Race Theory: An introduction*. New York University Press.
- Delpit, L. (2008). *Other people's children*. The New Press.
- Delpit, L. (2002). *The skin that we speak*. The New Press.
- Derman-Sparks, L., & Edwards, J. O. (2020). *Anti-bias education for young children and ourselves* (2nd ed.). National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Dumas, M. J. (2014). "Losing an arm:" Schooling as a site of Black suffering. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 17(1), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2013.850412>
- Dumas, M. J. (2016). Against the dark: Antiblackness in education policy and discourse. *Theory into Practice*, 55(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1116852>
- Dunbar-Ortiz, R. (2014). *An Indigenous people's history of the United States*. Beacon Press.

- Duncan, K. E. (2022). “That’s my job”: Black teachers’ perspectives on helping Black students navigate white supremacy. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 25(7), 978–996.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1798377>
- Duncan, K. E. (2025). Guiding like the North Star: A literature review of Black teachers helping Black students navigate civic estrangement, 2014–2023. *Review of Educational Research*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543251355264>
- The Education Trust-West. (2017, November 3). *The majority report: Supporting the educational success of Latino students in California* (Report). Oakland, CA.
https://west.edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/ETW_TMR_FINAL.pdf
- Elliott, D. (2022, August 12). *The Charlottesville rally 5 years later: ‘It’s what you’re still trying to forget.’* NPR.
<https://www.npr.org/2022/08/12/1116942725/the-charlottesville-rally-5-years-later-its-wh-at-youre-still-trying-to-forget>
- Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Equal Justice Initiative. (n.d.). *December 4, 1969: Police kill Black Panther leader Fred Hampton*. <https://calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice/dec/4>
- Fanon, F. (1967). *Black skin, white masks* /Frantz Fanon; translated from the French by Charles Lam Markmann. (C. L. Markmann, Tran.). Grove Press.
- Feliciano, C., Lee, R., & Robnett, B. (2011). Racial boundaries among Latinos: Evidence from internet daters’ racial preferences. *Social Problems* (Berkeley, Calif.), 58(2), 189–212.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/sp.2011.58.2.189>

- Finn, J. D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. *Review of Educational Research*, 59(2), 117–142.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543059002117>
- Flores-González, N., & Salgado, C. D. (2022). Shifting racial schemas: From post-racial to new “old-fashioned” racism. *Sociological Inquiry*, 92(2), 341–363.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12474>
- Furrer, C., & Skinner, E. (2003). Sense of relatedness as a factor in children’s academic engagement and performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95(1), 148–162.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.95.1.148>
- Gamez, R. (2023). Constructing Latinidad as a constrained credential: Anti-Blackness and racialized inequities in a majority Latinx middle school. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/aeq.12477>
- Garcia, T. (2022, October 12). *Latiné vs Latinx? What young people of Latin American descent think of these terms*. Teen Vogue. <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/Latiné-vs-latinx-what-young-people-think>
- Garcia, V. (2022). *La vidas Negras: Examining identity among Afro-Latinos in the US in the twilight of Black Lives Matter*. USF Tampa Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
<http://digitalcommons.usf.edu/etd/9357>
- García-Louis, C., & Cortes, K. L. (2023). Rejecting Black and rejected back: AfroLatinx college students’ experiences with anti-AfroLatinidad. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 22(1), 182–197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2020.1731692>
- Gates, H., Jr. (2014, January 6). *How many slaves landed in the US?* The Root.
<https://www.theroot.com/how-many-slaves-landed-in-the-us-1790873989>

- Gobat, M. (2013). The invention of Latin America: A transnational history of anti-imperialism, democracy, and race. *The American Historical Review*, 118(5), 1345–1375.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/118.5.1345>
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 62(1), 60–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220973.1993.994383>
- Gonzalez, D., López, N., Karpman, M., Furtado, K., Kenney, G. M., McDaniel, M., & O'Brian, C. (2022). *Observing race and ethnicity through a new lens*. Health Policy Center.
<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Observing%20Race%20and%20Ethnicity%20through%20a%20New%20Lens.pdf>
- Gordon, L. R. (1997). *Her Majesty's other children: Sketches of racism from a neocolonial age*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Green, K., Winn, M. T., & Paris, D. (2014). Doing double dutch methodology: Playing with the practice of participant observer. *Humanizing Research* (pp. 147–160).
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544329611.n8>
- Grissom, J. A., & Redding, C. (2016). *Discretion and disproportionality*. AERA Open, 2(1), Article 233285841562217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858415622175>
- Gutiérrez, K. D., Baquedano-López, P., & Tejeda, C. (1999). Rethinking diversity: Hybridity and hybrid language practices in the third space. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 6(4), 286–303.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039909524733>
- Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Hyman, J., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2022). The long-run impacts of same-race teachers. *American Economic Journal. Economic Policy*, 14(4), 300–342. <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20190573>

- Hagerman, M.A. (2018). *White kids*. New York University Press.
- Harper, S. R., Smith, E. J., & Davis, C. H. F. (2018). A critical race case analysis of Black undergraduate student success at an urban university. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.)*, 53(1), 3–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085916668956>
- Hawkins, J. D., Catalano, R. F., Kosterman, R., Abbott, R., & Hill, K. G. (1999). Preventing adolescent health-risk behaviors by strengthening protection during childhood. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 153(3), 226–234. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpedi.153.3.226>
- Hayes, M. S., Liu, J., & Gershenson, S. (2023). Who refers whom? The effects of teacher characteristics on disciplinary office referrals. *Economics of Education Review*, 93, Article 102376. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2023.102376>
- Haywood, J. M. (2017). “Latino spaces have always been the most violent:” Afro-Latino collegians’ perceptions of colorism and Latino intragroup marginalization. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30(8), 759–782. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2017.1350298>
- Hernández, T.K. (2004). Afro-Mexicans and the Chicano movement: The unknown story: Racism on trial: The Chicano fight for justice by Ian F. Haney Lopez. *California Law Review*, 92, 1537–1825.
- Hernández, T.K. (2007, January 7). *Roots of anger*. Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-jan-07-op-hernandez7-story.html>
- Hernández, T.K. (2021). Latino antiBlack bias and the census categorization of Latinos: Race, ethnicity, or other? In M.-K. Jung & J. H. C. Vargas (Eds.), *Antiblackness* (pp. 283–296). Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1grbbwr.16>

- Hernández, T.K. (2022). *Racial innocence: Unmasking Latino anti-Black bias and the struggle for equality*. Beacon Press.
- Howard, T. C. (2016). Why Black lives (and minds) matter: Race, freedom schools & the quest for educational equity. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 8(2), 101–113.
- Howell, D., Norris, A., & Williams, K. L. (2019). Towards Black gaze theory: How Black female teachers make Black students visible. *Urban Education Research and Policy Annuals*, 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.55370/uerpa.v6i1.915>
- Jenkins, D. (2023). Seen and unseen: Narratives of in/visibility of Black youth who attend a predominantly Latinx high school. *Teachers College Record*, 125(3), 237–263.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681231178864journalhs.sagepub.com/home/tcz>
- Jiménez Román, M., & Flores, J. (Eds.). (2010). *The Afro-Latin@ reader: History and culture in the United States*. Duke University Press.
- Jones, M., & Yonezawa, S. (2002). Student voice, cultural change: using inquiry in school reform. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 35(3), 245–254.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/713845322>
- Jung, M.-K., & Vargas, J. H. C. (Eds.). (2021). *Antiblackness /edited by Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas*. Duke University Press.
- Kim, C. J. (2023). *Asian Americans in an anti-Black world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kinloch, V., & Pedro, T. Winn, M. T., & Paris, D. (2014). The space between listening and storying: Foundations for projects in humanization. *Humanizing Research* (pp. 21–42).
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781544329611.n8>

- Krupnikov, Y., & Piston, S. (2016). The political consequences of Latino prejudice against Blacks. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 80(2), Summer 2016, 480–509.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw013>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465–491.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- Lareau, A. (2021). *Listening to people: A practical guide to interviewing, participant observation, data analysis, and writing it all up*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, E., Menkart, D., & Okazawa-Rey, M. (Eds.). (2007). *Beyond heroes and holidays: A practical guide to K–12 anti-racist, multicultural education and staff development*. Teaching for Change.
- Lewis, A. E. (2008). *Race in the schoolyard: Negotiating the color line in classrooms and communities*. Rutgers University Press.
- Lind, M. (2024, November 8). *Democrats are in shock at their collapse among Hispanic voters. They shouldn't be*. The Telegraph.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/us/comment/2024/11/08/democrats-are-in-shock-at-their-collapse-among-hispanic-vot/>
- Lipsitz, G., Sánchez, G., HoSang, D., Molina, N., & Hernández, K. (2019). 1. Race as a relational theory: A roundtable discussion. In N. Molina (Ed.), *Relational formations of race: theory, method, and practice* (pp. 22–42). University of California Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520971301-004>
- Loh, T. H., Coes, C., & Buthe, B. (2020, December 16). *Separate and unequal: Persistent*

residential segregation is sustaining racial and economic injustice in the U.S.. Brookings Institution.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/trend-1-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods-are-sustaining-racial-and-economic-injustice-in-the-us/> (brookings.edu)

Los Angeles Almanac. (2023). Hispanic or Latino ethnic origin (of any race) Los Angeles County. <https://www.laalmanac.com/population/po18.php>

Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. (2023). *2023 LA County hate crime report*.

https://assets-us-01.kc-usercontent.com/0234f496-d2b7-00b6-17a4-b43e949b70a2/600d7f30-4ad4-44c0-a5f7-0bcea2b95ea9/2023%20Hate%20Crime%20Report_FINAL.pdf

Los Angeles Unified School District. (2025). *Fingertip facts 2025–26*. LAUSD.

https://communications.lausd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=4401650&type=d&pREC_ID=2654752

Loveless, T. (2017, March 21). *2017 Brown Center report, part III: race and school suspensions*. Brookings.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/2017-brown-center-report-part-iii-race-and-school-suspensions/>

Malone, M.-L. (2025). It's giving Black power: A case study of one Black Student Union in California and the historical framework for structural change they used. *Journal of Black Studies*, 56(6), 498–520.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

McCormick, J. (2019). *Mendez v. Westminster: Domestic and international forces underlying*

- the fight for school desegregation. *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 39(1), 5–34.
<https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerethnhist.39.1.0005>
- McKown, C. & Weinstein, R.S. (2003). The development and consequences of stereotype consciousness in middle childhood. *Child Development*, 74: 498–515.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.7402012>
- Messerly, M., Leonard, K., & Diaz, D. (2024, November 6). 'A hard political pill to swallow': Dems grapple with losing Latino voters. Politico.
<https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/06/democrats-latino-vote-trump-00187991>
- Milner, H. R., IV. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, 36(7), 388–400.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0013189x07309471>
- Molina, N. (2014). *How race is made in America: Immigration, citizenship, and the historical power of racial scripts*. University of California Press.
- Muñiz, J. O. (2024). Learning from within: Life-affirming practices and third spaces created by and for incarcerated youth. *Educational Studies*, 60(4), 391–406.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2024.2390912>
- Nasir, N. S. (2011). *Racialized identities: Race and achievement among African American youth* /Na'ilah Suad Nasir. Stanford University Press.
- NBC News. (2024, November 9). *National exit polls: Election 2024 results*.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-elections/exit-polls>
- NCES. (2024). *Racial/Ethnic enrollment in public schools*.
<https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cge/racial-ethnic-enrollment>

- Núñez, C., Silver, J., Galdámez, M., & López, N. (2024, August 7). *Latino is not a race: Understanding lived experiences through street race*. UCLA Latino Politics and Policy Institute.
- <https://latino.ucla.edu/research/latino-is-not-a-race/#:~:text=The%20Census%20first%20began%20collecting,white%20was%20due%20to%20the>
- Okun, T. (2023). *White supremacy culture*. [White Supremacy Culture - Still Here](#)
- Oladipo, G. (2024, March 5). *Trump says racist things about Black voters. Why are some defending him?* The Guardian.
- <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/05/trump-racism-black-republicans-vote>
- Oluo, I. (2020). *Mediocre: The dangerous legacy of white male America*. Seal Press.
- Paris, D., & Winn, M. T. (Eds.) (2014). *Humanizing research: Decolonizing qualitative inquiry with youth and communities*. Sage Publications.
- Pearman, F. A., II, Curran, F. C., Fisher, B., & Gardella, J. (2019). Are achievement gaps related to discipline gaps? Evidence from national data. *AERA Open*, 5(4).
- <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419875440>
- Perlego. (2024). *What is third space?* Perlego Knowledge / Study Guides.
- <https://www.perlego.com/knowledge/study-guides/what-is-third-space>
- Pew Research Center. (2010). *U.S. population projections: 2005–2050*.
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2008/02/11/us-population-projections-2005-2050/>
- Pew Research Center. (2019). *Who is Hispanic?*
- <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/12/who-is-hispanic/>

Pew Research Center. (2022). *U.S. Hispanic population continued its geographic spread in the 2010s*.

https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/02/03/u-s-hispanic-population-continued-its-geographic-spread-in-the-2010s/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCQiAlbW-BhCMARIsADnwasrK0WOLgXdaw3b6ciUa7rS7JB_xXUIRAQSnetAU0QLx3qTF_CV5Vt0aAsvoEALw_wcB

Pew Research Center. (2024). *Key facts about public school teachers in the U.S.*

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/24/key-facts-about-public-school-teachers-in-the-u-s/>

Pirtle, W. N., Brock, B., Aldonza, N., Leke, K., & Edge, D. (2024). “I didn’t know what anti-Blackness was until I got here”: The unmet needs of Black students at Hispanic-Serving Institutions. *Urban Education (Beverly Hills, Calif.)*, 59(1), 330–357.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859211044948>

Pollock, M. (2004). *Colormute: Race talk dilemmas in an American school* (1st ed.). Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400826124>

powell, john a, & Galloway-Popotas, R. (2024). *The power of bridging: how to build a world where we all belong*. Sounds True Inc.

Public Religion Research Institute. (2022, May 24). *PRRI survey: Friendship networks of White Americans continue to be 90% White*.

<https://prri.org/press-release/prri-survey-friendship-networks-of-white-americans-continue-to-be-90-white/>

Raffaele Mendez, L. M. (2003). Predictors of suspension and negative school outcomes: A

- longitudinal investigation. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2003(99), 17–33.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.52>
- Rand, J. (2016, May 12). *Danny Trejo addresses racially-charged fight at Sylmar High School*. ABC7 Los Angeles.
<https://abc7.com/danny-trejo-sylmar-high-school-fight-racial/1334682/>
- Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84(1), 26–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418822335>
- Rogers, R., & Mosley, M. (2006). Racial literacy in a second-grade classroom: Critical Race Theory, whiteness studies, and literacy research. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 41(4), 462–495. <https://doi.org/10.1598/RRQ.41.4.3>
- Roth, W. (2012). *Race migrations: Latinos and the cultural transformation of race*. Stanford University Press.
- Saini, A. (2019). *Superior: The return of race science*. Beacon Press.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- San Francisco State University. (n.d.). *Black Student Union*. [Africana Studies Department](#)
- Schmidt-Nowara, C. (2011). Abolition. *Latin American Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199766581-0002>
- Shange, S. (2019). *Progressive Dystopia: Abolition, antiblackness, and schooling in San Francisco*. Duke University Press.
- Silva, K. (2016). What Is Brown?: Theorizing race in everyday life. *Brown Threat* (pp. 25–51). University of Minnesota Press.
- Singh, M. (2023). Negotiating antiblackness as non-Black Latino men teachers. *Urban Education*, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859231162901>

- Singh, M. (2024). *Good boys, bad hombres: The racial politics of mentoring Latino boys in schools*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Sexton, J. (2010). People-of-Color-blindness: Notes on the afterlife of slavery. *Social Text*, 28(2), 31–56. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-2009-066>
- Seaberry, M. J. (2026). Invisible armor: Black male educators, fugitive pedagogy, and the politics of presence. *Taboo*, 24(1), 89–104.
<https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/invisible-armor-black-male-educators-fugitive/docview/3302701335/se-2>
- Stanley, D. A. (Ed.). (2024). *#BlackEducatorsMatter: the experiences of Black teachers in an anti-Black world* / Darrius A. Stanley, editor. Harvard Education Press.
- Sweeney, K. A., & Borden, A. L. (2009). Crossing the line online: Racial preference of internet daters. *Marriage & Family Review*, 45(6–8), 740–760.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01494920903224335>
- Tatum, B. D. (2003). *“Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?”: And other conversations about race*. Basic Books.
- Telles, E. (2014). *Pigmentocracies: Ethnicity, race, and color in Latin America*. University of North Carolina Press.
- Terkel, A. & Lebowitz, M. (2024, September 19). *From ‘rapists’ to ‘eating the pets’: Trump has long used degrading language towards immigrants*. NBC News.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-degrading-language-immigrants-rcna171120>
- Times Staff. (2022, November 21). *Inside the room: The entire L.A. City Council racist audio leak, annotated by our experts*. Los Angeles Times.

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2022-11-21/la-city-council-racist-audio-leak-transcription-annotation>

United Black Student Unions of California. (n.d.). *About us*. [UBSUC](#)

United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2009, October 30).

Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination considers report of El Salvador
[Press release].

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2009/10/committee-elimination-racial-discrimination-considers-report-el-salvador>

United States Census Bureau. (2023). *Quick facts Los Angeles City, California*.

U.S. Department of State. (2023). *2022 country reports on human rights practices: El Salvador*.

U.S. Department of State.

[https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/el-salvador/#:~:text=Systemic%20Racial%20or%20Ethnic%20Violence,recent%20population%20census%20\(2007\).](https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/el-salvador/#:~:text=Systemic%20Racial%20or%20Ethnic%20Violence,recent%20population%20census%20(2007).)

Vaidya, A. N., & Battey, D. (2022). Homeplace: Black teachers creating space for Black students in mathematics classrooms. *Teachers College Record (1970)*, 124(11), 218–256.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681221139535>

Valdez, S. (2023, December 27). *Understanding the Mexican casta system: A historical and cultural perspective*. Indigenous Mexico.

<https://www.indigenoustmexico.org/articles/understanding-the-mexican-casta-system-a-historical-and-cultural-perspective>

Vitale, A., Hunt, K., Thorp V, F. (2018, January 11). *Trump refers to Haiti and African nations as 'shithole' countries*. NBC News.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/trump-referred-haiti-african-countries-shithole-nations-n836946>

Wilkerson, I. (2020). *Caste: The origins of our discontents*. Random House.

Winkler, E. (2009). Children are not colorblind: How young children learn race. *PACE* 3(3), 2009, 1–8.

Zamora, S. (2022). *Racial baggage: Mexican immigrants and race across the border*. Stanford University Press.