Introduction
Latinx Literary Modernities

This volume approaches Latinx literatures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the prismatic lens of modernity. Foregrounding from the outset that there is no single Latinx experience, we understand Latinx modernities as multiple and multiplying. Fredric Jameson argues that one "fundamental meaning of modernity . . . is that of worldwide capitalism" (12), but, as Aníbal Quijano and other decolonial theorists have noted, "since 'modernity' is about processes that were initiated with the emergence of America, of a new model of global power (the first world-system), and of the integration of all the peoples of the globe in that process, it is also essential to admit that it is about an entire historical period" (547). As the bookend dates for the volume indicate, Latinx modernities mark the convergence of these concepts by referring to US colonial expansion and the lasting impact of Spanish colonialism in the Americas. Beginning with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, in which Mexico ceded over half its territory to the United States to end an unjust war, this time period is marked by a series of US imperial maneuvers that have created the structural conditions of dispossession, forced migration, and racialization for many Latinx individuals and groups. A short list of such maneuvers includes the Spanish–American War of 1898; military interventions in Guatemala, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti; a decades-long embargo on the Cuban revolutionary state; and so-called soft power support of dictatorships in El Salvador, Chile, Peru, and elsewhere. Our concluding bookend date, 1992, marks the quincentennial of Columbus's arrival in the West Indies, reflecting the unfolding violence of European coloniality in the Americas as another constitutive feature of modernity.

The artists, objects, and phenomena under consideration in this volume respond to modernity's vicissitudes in multiple forms and in multiple media, disrupting the linearity of a strictly chronological or developmental approach to the period. Indeed, the multiple significations of *modernity* – and of Latinx expressive cultures – are nowhere more evident than in the

disjunction between conventional designations of modernism. In the US context, modernism has traditionally referred to the experimental, literary-artistic movement of the 1910s through the 1930s, a response to technological innovation, mass urbanization, and global warfare. In Latin America, by contrast, similarly motivated aesthetic experimentation is referred to as *vanguardismo* and comes slightly later, from the 1920s through the 1940s. *Modernismo*, on the other hand, denotes the literary movement of poetic refinement and belletrism that flourished between 1880 and 1910, heavily influenced by French Parnassianism and Symbolism. "*Modernismo*" expresses a different sense of modernity than "modernism": the rise of the bourgeois class in Latin America and its aspiration to lay hold of the cultural capital of world literature.

US Latinx literary and cultural expression beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emerges from the intersection of *modernismo*, modernism, *vanguardismo*, and the modernities they index. Just as modernism and *modernismo* are not cognates, therefore, Latinx literary modernity is not a Spanish-language version of high-Anglo modernism. To bring Latinidad into conversation with the modern galvanizes a reconsideration of the core terms at the center of this Introduction's title: What is Latinx?[1] What is the literary? What is modernity? Latinx literary modernities constellate the coloniality of US domination, the rapid and often traumatic social changes wrought by new technologies, the displacements associated with domestic revolutions and international warfare, and the innovation of literary forms commensurate with the spiritual yearnings of people on the margins of society.[2]

A literary-historical approach to the period, such as that taken by the landmark *Cambridge History of Latina/o American Literature*, might seek to track these different expressive impulses as they unfold over time. Such a historical overview of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latinx writing would stretch from the flowering of Mexican American cultural expression in the US Southwest through the formation of Spanish-language print culture in New York in the late nineteenth century, then on through the cultural upheaval of the Mexican Revolution, two World Wars, numerous US military interventions in Latin America, and, crucially, the epochal disruptions of the Chicano and Boricua movements of the 1960s and 1970s. This is the narrative that the *Cambridge History* traces, with its emphasis on canonical texts and broadly influential figures.

However, it is possible for such a narrative to cement into a monologic that belies the multiplicity of Latinx experiences of and responses to modernity in its various forms. Our volume thus assumes an organization

based on conceptual categories of US and Latin American modernities with the intention of highlighting emergent approaches to Latinx literatures. These conceptual categories – space, being, time, form, and labor – allow scholars working on different national groups across different time periods to be in more direct conversation with one another without assuming that they are telling the same story. Our categories make visible surprising connections, illuminate new methods, and push back against the coloniality of aesthetic models that limit the conditions of possibility for Latinx literature.

Rethinking literary modernity as a function of Latinidad means reassessing foundational concepts, not simply demonstrating the ways in which Latinx literature performs a modernity we already understand. It means chronicling and celebrating, rather than sweeping under the cognitive rug, all the ways in which Latinx literature behaves badly or upends expectations, as when Gloría Anzaldúa's writing, as Sheila Contreras demonstrates, betrays a pervasive anti-blackness despite the writer's conscious anti-racist efforts. The scholars working together in this volume alongside S. Contreras have chronicled, challenged, and celebrated correspondingly. Paula Park, for instance, reads early twentieth-century Filipinos in New Mexico as a flashpoint for latinasian literary history, while Evelyn Soto asks what "passing" really means as a function of modernity when we can locate instances of Indigenous, Black, and white racial fluidity in the late nineteenth century. Kelley Kreitz, Gabriela Valenzuela, Carlos Gallego, and Erin Murrah-Mandril, furthermore, ask what constitutes the literary. What forms of print demand "literary" analysis? How do our methods change when considering ephemera or texts that do not understand themselves as literary, or even when considering spaces of textual production, as Kreitz does, alongside the texts themselves?

Other scholars in this volume put verbal texts in similar conversations with non-verbal phenomena. Jonathan Leal revisits the *corrido* form, insisting on the significance of performance context and material conditions of production as key to apprehending its continued relevance. Curtis Marez, likewise, is interested in cinema and the film industry as ways to open up discussions of Tomás Rivera's oft studied work. Melinda Mejia also turns to images, in the form of digital archiving projects, in order to take up questions of literal and conceptual translation, while Ariana Ruíz uses photography to elide the Chicano Civil Rights Movement's historicizing power. Several of our chapters, like Ruíz's, challenge the naturalizing power of epistemes such as "history" to craft our experiences of the past. Armando García, for instance, deconstructs the resistance narrative of

Latinx theater history to reveal racial blind spots unable to account for white Latinx or Afrolatinx playwrights. Eric Vázquez and Ariana Vigil take an analogous approach to the study of war in Latinx literature, seeing patterns of anti-blackness in disparate conflicts.

Decentering historical chronology, our conceptual categories also show how Latinx expressive cultures move deftly between modernities and how we might understand artists in conversation across time and space. María del Pilar Blanco's chapter, to illustrate, reads two poets together – William Carlos Williams and Julia de Burgos – who have much in common but appear never to have met. Tatiana Argüello and Andrew Ryder connect, in like fashion, two very differently located Central American writers – Salomón de la Selva and Héctor Tobar – to stake theoretical claims about technologies of war, and Renee Hudson reads Gloria Anzaldúa alongside early twentieth-century short story writer María Cristina Mena to think through the long history of indigenism in Chicanx cultural production.

The connections established by the scholars in the volume are not all so creatively anachronistic: Sarah Quesada and Trent Masiki sketch tenuous queer filiations in the work of Miguel Algarín and Piri Thomas, for example. As with Marcela Di Blasi's assertions about the significance of faith in reading Chicanx literature, Quesada and Masiki argue above all for Latinx literature as *comunidad*. Imagined or not, synchronous or asynchronous, matters of theory or praxis, each of the scholars in this volume has established innovative networks, sighted new patterns, and engineered creative methods to make visible the artistic connections sustaining Latinx artists through the chaos of modernity and beyond.

Space

As a conceptual category of modernity, space has been naturalized as an empty container to be filled with whatever humans put into it. As Mary Pat Brady argues, "space is processual, it changes, goes extinct" (*Extinct Lands* 5). This is the legacy of European coloniality, which understood the New World as a blank space onto which Europeans could and should inscribe their presence. Later, Anglo territorial expansion, industrialization, and urbanization transformed and produced many of the spaces US Latinxs inhabit and move through – and, indeed, the differential production of space is one of the mechanisms of modern racialization, segregating minoritized populations into spaces of poverty and immiseration.

What does literature have to do with the naturalization of space? One obvious way this ramifies is in the identification of physical, aesthetic, and

political spaces with particular kinds of people. In the multicultural imaginary of the US academy, for example, we associate Blackness with the South and Indigeneity with the West. Within Latinx studies, we tend to identify the US Southwest with Chicanos, the Northeast with Puerto Ricans, and the Southeast with Cubans and Dominicans. It is not enough to say that Latinidad has become multiple and heterogeneous through the migration of Central Americans, South Americans, and Caribbeans. We must also see how these spatial designations have always served to obscure the itineraries and contradictions of Latinx migrations and communities. Hence, the chapters in this section have as much to do with expected and unexpected spaces of Latinx literary production as with the spatial paradigms we bring to *reading* Latinx literature.

The first chapter in this section, Paula C. Park's "José Garcia Villa's Sojourn in New Mexico: Rethinking the Geographies of Latinidad," unsettles our usual identifications of space with particular iterations of Latinidad by examining the work of one of the most celebrated Filipino writers of the twentieth century, Villa, as it was refracted by his time in New Mexico, a space that scholars have strongly associated with Hispanos. Park shows how Villa's early fiction and poetry – produced while he was a student at the University of New Mexico – put the Hispanism of Filipino literature in conversation with the ostensible Spanishness of US Latinx cultural production. In doing so, Park not only transforms our usual associations with New Mexico but also reminds us of the consonance and persistence of Spanish coloniality in the Philippines and US Southwest, both of which provide enduring structures of modernity that have been obscured by the administrative segregation of Filipinx and Latinx literatures into different fields in present-day scholarship.

Meanwhile, Sarah Quesada's chapter, "Latinx Internationalism, French Orientalism, and a Nuyorican Morocco," casts its gaze across the Atlantic Ocean to consider the possibility of what Quesada terms "South–South internationalism," or transnational solidarity between US Latinxs and Africans during the age of decolonization. Quesada analyses a little-studied poem by the Nuyorican poet Miguel Algarín titled "Tangiers," showing how its representation of child sex workers in Morocco reproduces an Orientalist, Western gaze, interrupting the potential for decolonial solidarity between the poem's speaker and its Moroccan subjects. In contrast with Park's chapter, which unsettles our expectations relative to a US Latinx space, Quesada's work builds on such scholars as B. V. Olguín and Walter Mignolo by thinking of Latinidad as a worlding phenomenon, a subject position that travels beyond the boundaries of subnational minoritization.

Gabriela Valenzuela's "*Centro America* in San Francisco: Diasporic Literariness at the End of the Long Nineteenth Century" offers both new archival research into early twentieth-century Latinx print culture and a complex theorization of Central American transnational imaginaries. Central American studies have challenged the conventional arrangements of Latinx studies in recent decades; Valenzuela's work builds on these challenges, showing that the complexities of building a cohesive Central American identity extend back historically over at least a century. At the same time, the writing published in *Centro America* – particularly the letter written by the working-class unionist Abel Romero – suggests how Central Americanness gets worked out through transnational dialogue among intellectuals and workers in Central America and in minoritized Latinx spaces in the United States.

Finally, Felice Blake's chapter, "Bridges, Backs, and Barrios: Radical Women of Color Feminisms and the Critique of Modern Space," invites us to consider the production of space as a problem of interracial solidarity. For Blake, the anthology form emblematizes this problem, particularly the landmark anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, whose influence Blake traces from its 1981 publication up to the present. The space of the anthology stands in for the conceptual space of solidarity in Blake's work, but it is a space that must be carefully created and negotiated among individuals with different, often competing, ideas about how best to pursue revolutionary political projects.

Notably, both Valenzuela's and Blake's chapters pressure conventional notions of literariness, taking as their objects a letter to the editors of a newspaper and an anthology with writing in multiple genres. This is not surprising: the differential production of space has an analogy in the differential production of discourses that segregates literature from other types of textual production. By contrast, Valenzuela and Blake each in their own way insist on the intersections of form, aesthetics, and justice. Along with the chapters by Park and Quesada, they show that world-making ideas can travel across time and space and community boundaries, and they suggest that the desire to lock down texts and ideas is a function of systemic racism.

Being

Identity, likewise, can restrict bodies in discrete categories that shore up and support, rather than undermine, white supremacy. José Esteban Muñoz referred to this phenomenon as the "burden of liveness"

(*Disidentifications* 187) and it motivates this next section. These essays focus less on the inward and outward productions of identity, attending more to the phenomenology of raced, sexed, and gendered bodies. The contributors to this section share a sense of the Foucauldian matrix out of which modern categories of race, gender, and sexuality emerge. But they also understand that Latinidad, far from statically representing those categories, evolves in a mutually animating relationship with each of them. The scholars in this section pressure the Latinidad of Latinx, depicting it as processual and contingent, awash in contradictions.

Renee Hudson, for instance, sees the possibility of a "brown modernism" emerging from an awareness of the racialized contradictions of mestizaje, which in the Mexican context was a tool of nationalist mythmaking that depended on relegating Indigenous people to a romanticized past. Building on José Muñoz's "sense of brown" (see *Sense of Brown*), Hudson compares the early twentieth-century short story writer María Cristina Mena with the later twentieth-century critic Gloria Anzaldúa, to argue for a dialectical reading of the two as a cornerstone of Latinx modernity. Both writers, Hudson acknowledges, have been roundly criticized for their artistic deployments of indigeneity, but those critiques, she argues, occlude feminist filiations between them fueling what Hudson calls brown modernism. This emerges through each writer's centering of indigeneity through a feminist lens. While Hudson doesn't discount Mena's and Anzaldúa's Indigenous fetishizing, she urges readers to see their strategies as illuminating tensions in relational networks that critics should nurture rather than sever.

Sheila Contreras's contribution to this volume offers a productive counter to Hudson's reading. Contreras identifies the "Indigenous fetishizing" we mention above as "indigenism" and cautions readers to understand it as distinct from indigeneity. Leaving aside Anzaldúa's strategic deployments of indigeneity, Contreras explores the fundamental anti-blackness of the writer's indigenism, linking it to the long histories of anti-black racism embedded in the mestizaje so foundational to Anzaldúa's work. She acknowledges that Anzaldúa did not invent the anti-blackness of mestizaje and that she attempted to confront racism and to work in solidarity with Black women. Through a series of meticulous close readings, however, Contreras identifies a grammar of anti-blackness in Anzaldúa's articulations of mestizaje, for which, she argues, scholars and activists must account in order to move through and past our shared structures of oppression.

We might understand the unconscious distancing Contreras identifies as partly responsible for the critical tendencies Trent Masiki illuminates in

his essay, "The Camaraderie of Influence: Intersectional Trauma in *Down These Mean Streets*." Masiki points out that while the racial anxieties at the center of Piri Thomas's 1967 memoir have received a fair bit of scholarly attention, few critics have noted how the racial and sexual crises Thomas's protagonist faces resonate with those experienced by the central character in John Oliver Killens's *Youngblood* (1954). Killens, a Black thought leader and co-founder of the Harlem Writers Guild, was an important mentor to Thomas, and Masiki argues that understanding Thomas in this artistic context deepens our understanding of his racial aesthetics and helps make more sense of his memoir's sexual politics. That both writers use young people, moreover, as vehicles for their artistic, racial, and sexual philosophies demands further study, says Masiki, and has the potential to reframe important critiques of both works.

While Masiki argues that intersections of childhood and Latinidad, particularly children's experiences of race and sex, could bear the weight of further serious study, Marcela Di Blasi argues for a similar reconsideration of religious faith. In "Spiritual Service and Gendered Labor: Rereading Religion and Labor in . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra* and *Face of an Angel*," Di Blasi explores the lasting impact of activist-oriented literary criticism that understands religion as a colonial matrix of the self. All criticism is activist to some extent, but Di Blasi attends to a certain strain of Marxist critique, deployed in Ramón Saldívar's influential reading of Tomás Rivera's . . . *y no se lo tragó la tierra*, that sees the rejection of organized religion as a necessary precondition for the veneration of labor and Latinx liberation. What is lost, Di Blasi asks, when we fail to take seriously religious expression in Latinx literature, so often associated with female characters? Turning to Theresa Delgadillo's reading of Denise Chávez's *Face of an Angel*, Di Blasi points out that even Delgadillo's celebration of the characters' "spiritual mestizaje" relies on a presumed progression from organized religion to self-actualization. Both approaches, Di Blasi argues, deny working-class women of color agency of action and faith, foreclosing the world-making potential of their religious activity.

Di Blasi, Masiki, Contreras, and Hudson each thread their way through the thicket of critical assumptions surrounding what Latinx authors and characters should be and think, and how they should behave. These assumptions are grounded in the political histories of Latinx aesthetics and are important to the field. Taken together in this section on "Being," however, they emphasize that just as there are many intersecting positionalities to inhabit within Latinidad, there are also many ways to "be" Latinx.

Time

We can also understand these shifting ontologies as signaling how Latinidad speaks to itself across times, how its multiple iterations echo each other such that we can limn the nineteenth century well into the twentieth in ways that disrupt the exigencies of Anglo-American aesthetic periodization. "Time" thus denotes the very social experience that modernity seeks to name, but it is perhaps misleading to include that term in the singular, since the contributors to this section share a commitment to questioning the kind of "homogeneous, empty time" that Walter Benjamin famously claimed as the basis of the modern nation-state (261). Stretching from work on the nineteenth-century Mexican American writer María Amparo Ruiz de Burton to twenty-first-century explorations of slain journalist Rubén Salazar, these chapters show how Latinx literature indexes different experiences of time, and also, importantly, how our critical relationship to the past continues to produce new understandings of historical experience.

Ariana Ruíz's chapter, for example, shows how the Chicano Movement is never simply fixed in the past, at least not as long as we continue to reimagine it through new forms. Her analysis in "Death at and Afterlives of the Silver Dollar Café in Chicanx Cultural Production" posits the café, where Mexican American journalist Rubén Salazar was tragically killed in 1970, as a site with the affective potential to generate endless forms of historical meaning. Ruíz examines two specific forms – Raul Ruiz's iconic photograph of police outside the café and Maria Nieto's novel *Pig behind the Bear* (2012) – to demonstrate the purchase of the past on the present across time and media. The photograph has had a ripple effect across Chicanx cultural production, enabling subsequent generations, including Nieto's, to create historically informed art that is relevant to their contemporary moment. These affective artistic attachments to place and image refute linearity and aesthetic chronologies, arguing for art as an iterative process that might heal the wounds of history.

As Ruíz traces the temporal movement of photographic objects through various interpretive frames, Evelyn Soto, in "Passing Time: Latinx Racialization, Modernist Satire, and the Captivity Narrative," traces the temporal movement of interpretive frames. As a question of form, racial passing is conventionally understood as an early twentieth-century social anxiety informing modernist aesthetics, particularly those of the Harlem Renaissance. Soto, however, deploys the concept to understand the peregrinations of Lola Medina, protagonist of María Amparo Ruiz de Burton's

1872 novel *Who Would Have Thought It?* Lola is born white, has her skin dyed black when she is taken into Native American captivity, and ends the novel as a white woman once more. Soto reads Lola's various racial passings as a technique for exposing the links between Anglo-American imperialism and the rise of modern capitalism after the US Civil War. Focalized through a relentlessly ironic narrator, Soto identifies these moments of passing as a narrative strategy of Latinx modernism predating, though resonating with, Anglo-American modernism.

This idea of predating, or anticipating, energizes Armando García's reading of the playwright Josefina Niggli. In "Romancing Latinidad: Race, Resistance, and Latinx Theater History," García demonstrates how the widely accepted origin story of Latinx theater as an art form born out of mid-twentieth-century civil rights movements cannot account for someone like Niggli. A white Mexican whose significant body of work largely predates the social ferment of the 1960s, Niggli is typically considered as part of the "prehistory" of Latinx theater, says García. This classification, he argues, illuminates the field's colorism, which in Niggli's case amounts to an investment in *brownness* that precludes considering her work seriously. These racial politics excise the early twentieth century from a history of Latinx theater, and García shows how they reverberate into the present and future by making it difficult to include Afrolatinx works in emerging genealogies of Latinx performance.

Jonathan Leal explores an analogous conceptual blind spot in "Singing Apocalypse: On *Corridos*, Catastrophe, and the Poetics of Reconstitution." García shows how the very structures that make Latinx theater visible also occlude white and Black Latinx writers; Leal, by extension, demonstrates how the intellectual paradigms that made possible the academic study of Chicanx popular culture run the risk of ossifying it as a relic of the past. Both García and Leal, in other words, make plain that the very act of creating scholarly space for Latinx cultural production can make it difficult to understand its continued relevance and world-making potential. Leal's analyses of the literary and performance context of *corridos* about Hurricane Beulah, which struck South Texas in 1967, enable his argument about the form's contemporary power to sonically and lyrically create community.

Form

Leal's astute attention to form highlights the interplay of literary expression and our approaches to it. His work opens the door to our next section, the chapters in which foreground the intimate relationship between the forms