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Hispanic-serving HBCUs: towards an anti-colonial meso-relevant theory of organizational identity in sacred spaces of Black education

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Introduction: This study addresses demographic changes at HBCUs and proposes an anti-colonial organizational framework for Historically Black emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions (HB-eHSIs, also referred to as Hispanic-serving HBCUs) to support both Black and Brown students while preserving the historic mission of HBCUs.

Methods: We use qualitative methodology and rely on 45–60 minute semi-structured interviews with 15 faculty and administrators from three Historically Black emerging HSIs in Texas to develop the proposed organizational framework.

Results: Findings are highlighted through four key tenets, each operationalized based on themes from extant literature and the practices and organizational logics of Black and Brown faculty and staff at HBeHSIs: 1. Tending to white settler colonialism, 2. Tending to fiscal precarity, 3. Tending to sacred spaces, 4. Tending to fallacious notions of essentialism.

Discussion: The proposed framework aims to foster solidarity between Black and Brown students and challenge oppressive systems through a radically inclusive approach to serving both communities. Recommendations include reexamining leadership structures, forming coalitions, and creating consortiums to support HBCUs' evolving needs and diverse student populations. Findings also emphasize the need for dual federal designation for HB-eHSIs to secure funding and legitimacy.

KEYWORDS

critical organizational theory, emerging HSIs, anti-colonialism, higher education, HBCUs

Introduction

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were the first universal access schools that inclusively embraced students of all races, sexes, genders, classes, religions, and nationalities during a time in which education had primarily been reserved for elite, white males (Albritton, 2012; Allen and Jewell, 2002; Gasman, 2013; Gasman and Nguyen, 2015; Palmer, 2010). Because these schools served predominantly Black students, they established an educational ethos that served the unique socio-political needs of the Black community. Recent changes in HBCU student demographics have “some people worr[ie]d that the changing composition of HBCUs endangers the very aspect of these learning spaces that make them unique; others argue that diversity makes these institutions stronger” (Gasman, 2013). Although scholars have documented how the shift in student demographics has influenced HBCUs, very little attention has been given to critical inclusive frameworks that show great promise in protecting HBCUs' unique institutional character and culture.

We assert that HBCUs have the institutional character and cultural capacity to serve both Black and Brown students inclusively. By drawing from a micro-level socio-political identity construct of Afro-Latinidades, we can build a viable organizational approach to inform the institutional character of Hispanic-serving HBCUs. To do this, we begin with parsing out four prominent tenets of Afro-Latinidades as conceptualized by Laó-Montes (2005) that tend to white settler colonialism, fiscal precarity, sacred spaces, and fallacious notions of essentialism. We then situate these tenets within extant literature to consider meso-level organizational drivers and levers (what we refer to as logics or logistics) that might be addressed through the framework to improve the organizational behavior of Hispanic-serving HBCUs and Hispanic-serving traditionally white schools with large populations of Black and Brown students. These tenets are intended to help (internal and external) HBCU campus constituents reconsider and reshape policy, curricular and co-curricular programming, and institutional practices in ways that best honor their evolving socio-political contexts.

With respect for the palpable tension between the theoretical lineages of antiblackness, anti-colonialism, and diversity equity and inclusion scholarship, we maintain that the Black struggle has always been one rooted in inclusive coalition building and way making for civil and human rights. As such, we draw from the literature on the experiences of Brown students at HBCUs to consider how the identity construct of Afro-Latinidades (Laó-Montes, 2005) might inform our understanding of the intersections of Blackness, Latinidad, and Indigeneity in these spaces. With exception to areas where we refer to the works of other scholars and mirror their language, we abstain from using the multitude of nation-based identity labels, which we do not deny are present within, and between, the Black and Brown diaspora (including, African, African-American, Latine, Hispanic, Indigenous/Native-American, and East/Southeast Asian peoples). Instead, we invoke the terms Black and Brown to disrupt the notion that nation-based-identities, and the way we relate to each other through said identities, should continue to reify white-settler mechanisms of imposition that aim to *other*, divide, and conquer. In doing so, we offer an applied consideration as to how Historically Black emerging HSIs (HB-eHSIs) might serve the socio-political needs of shifting and stayed student demographics, while simultaneously honoring its historical mission and commitment to the Black community with all its diversity.

Afro-Latinidad as conceptual framework

Despite evidence of systematic fiscal disenfranchisement (Gasman, 2009; Toldson, 2016), which has imposed devastating drivers of organizational identity, logics, and behavior at HBCUs, we contend that an anti-colonial commitment to Black and Brown communities could circumvent such external legal pressures. In the following sections, we consider how Hispanic-serving HBCUs might have a Black and Brown institutional character and identity, without marginalizing either community. In our framing of Afro-Latinidades as a critical organizational framework, we present an argument for the development of a radically inclusive anti-racist ethos that conceptually explicates the challenges facing HB-eHSIs and puts forth responses to those challenges. We posit this framework as an organizational

heuristic that can reveal how educators might better enhance inclusion within, and beyond, these campuses. As such, as an organizational heuristic this work offers a significant contribution in its capacity to protect sacred spaces of colonized peoples by honoring the institutions (HBCUs) that preserve their cultural ways of knowing and being.

Conceptualizing Afro-Latinidad as an organizational heuristic

Afro-Latinidades at the micro-level

Laó-Montes (2005) asserts that Afro-Latinidad reveals hidden histories and cultural cartographies that dominate essentialist notions of African-ness, American-ness, and Latinidades. That is to say, while Western notions of identity are “either-or (*sic*)” and divisive in nature, Afro-Latinidades is inclusive and operates from a “with-and” framework and is collective in nature. As such, this framework troubles what it means to serve Black and/or Brown students in the Americas. Hence, it has the capacity to deconstruct and redefine how Black and Brown students map their sense of self, culture, and power based on their shared (but unique) diasporic multiplicity and socio-political struggles.

Laó-Montes (2005) asserts that diasporic people, such as Black and Brown people, can never be nationalists because their historical roots and destinies lie beyond the time and space of their current situation and host nation. Therefore, Black and Brown people must “rethink self, memory, culture, and power beyond the confines [of a] nation [as Black or Latino nationalist] ... to develop a politics[*sic*] of decolonization” (Laó-Montes, 2005, p.125). This socio-political identity framework centers their shared history of displacement, labor exploitation, and resistance to colonialism. It is from Laó-Montes’ conceptual framework of Afro-Latinidades that we position this framework as an effective mechanism to explore the complex socio-political identities of Black and Brown-serving organizations. Hence, advancing Afro-Latinidad as a socio-political identity construct, translated into a meso-level organizational framework, would challenge federally designated HSIs with large portions of Black and Afro-Latine-identifying students to reassess, and in some cases, reconstruct their institutional character and mission through the embodiment of an anti-racist anti-colonial norm of inclusion. It also implicates the practices of HBCUs with large populations of Afro-Latine and Afro-Indigenous constituents.

Afro-Latinidades at the meso-level

All institutions and organizations have a unique character that mediates and moderates the institutional day-to-day operations and strategic plan (Fernández and Hogan, 2003). According to Fernández and Hogan (2003), the institutional character is reflected in how the leaders construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the mission, vision, core values, and ethics of the institution. The institutional character regulates the interactions within the organization and is explicitly and implicitly expressed through systemic interactions (programming), behaviors (practices and policies), correspondence (communications), and aspirations (strategic plans) of all the actors within the organization. The institutional character of HBCUs is rooted in its

historical mission and commitment to racial uplift and the empowerment of the Black community (Albritton, 2012; Allen and Jewell, 2002; Butler-Mokoro, 2010; Esters and Strayhorn, 2013; Harris, 2012; Gasman et al., 2015; Mawakana, 2011; Nichols, 2003).

Afro-Latinidades, as a socio-political identity construct, offers a viable organizational approach to inform the institutional character of Hispanic-serving HBCUs. At the meso-level, this theory can redefine how Hispanic-serving HBCUs map their sense of self, memory, and culture as institutions committed to, and composed of, constituents with unique diasporic multiplicity. Our framework is based on the experiential knowledge of each author, extant literature, and our data. See Table 1 for the key organizational commitments we identified as present when organizational constituents embody an Afro-centric anti-colonial praxis of inclusion.

Key terms

Before introducing our methodology, it is crucial that we pause to operationalize a few key terms. Our understanding of white settler colonialism is central to our argument and our understanding of the concept is interdisciplinary, spanning Black Studies, Cultural Studies, Sociology, and Indigenous education scholarship. The mechanism of white-settler colonialism that this study is primarily concerned with is white ideological domination of Black and Brown spaces of postsecondary education, as occurs on colonized lands that belong to established, ruptured, and evolving BIPOC communities. Fiscal precarity should be understood as the systemically reinforced financial position that Black, Brown, and Indigenous, peoples occupy due to past, present, and future stigmas reified by colonial systems of forced classification. These stigmas disenfranchise the lives of individuals belonging to these groups and the educational institutions that serve them. Additionally, the phrase sacred spaces is evoked to refer to mission-driven formal spaces of education and communal spaces of informal learning erected to advance and honor the culture of minoritized communities. Finally, the phrase fallacious notions of essentialism refers to false perceptions of ethno-racial purity or ethno-racial cultural monopoly that perpetuate monolithic fantasies of Indigeneity, Latinidad, and/or Black/Africanness.

TABLE 1 Afro-Latinidades as an organizational heuristic.

Tenet 1: Tending to white settler colonialism	Organizational constituents must philosophically recognize, attend to, and disrupt white settler colonial mechanisms of domination and oppression.
Tenet 2: Tending to fiscal precarity	Organizational constituents must acknowledge that institutions have been economically and politically constructed in ways that exploit and reinscribe colonial relations.
Tenet 3: Tending to sacred spaces	Organizational constituents must protect the sacred spaces of marginalized peoples by honoring the institutions (such as HBCUs) that preserve their cultural ways of knowing and being.
Tenet 4: Tending to fallacious notions of essentialism	Organizational constituents must acknowledge that settler colonialism constructs Black and Brown peoples as essentially different and in competition with each “other.”

Our proposed framework is oriented in such a way that gives education leaders the opportunity to process and critically navigate external socio-legal pressures that impact how institutions honor, protect, and serve Black and Brown members of their community. We propose that this framework best captures the resilience of Black and Brown people who have a history of collective resistance against white settler colonialism (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2018; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2021). Hence, Afro-Latinidades challenges us all to construct organizational identity and orient organizational behavior in ways that radically enhance inclusion on campus.

Methods

We have distilled the preceding four anti-colonial tenets from Laó-Montes's (2005) micro-level theory to establish a meso-relevant, macro-oriented, construct of Afro-Latinidades. Additionally, the heuristic we put forth is posited based on insights gathered through 45–60 min semi-structured interviews with 15 Hispanic-serving HBCU faculty and administrators from each of Texas' three historically Black emerging HSIs (see Table 2).

Participants were purposefully selected and recruited for participation based on their job role to diversify and broaden organizational input across participant perspectives. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy using Rev.com, then holistically coded for themes of anti-colonialism according to a coconstructed codebook, which was operationalized based on extant literature and experiential knowledge using Dedoose analytic software. The data was then further inductively analyzed using line by line coding, to refine each tenet based on insights from participants' perspectives. The first author applied 84 codes, 1,002 times, across 15 transcripts before identifying themes that were further elevated into four categories, which are represented here as the organizational heuristic put forth in this study. To protect the identity of our participants, who work at small colleges and might be easily identifiable, we refrain from tying participants to their respective organizations, direct quotes, or unique job title.

Statement of positionality

Together the first and second author bring an epistemic positionality that is rooted in liberatory praxis and thought leadership within and beyond the academy. A United States born Black woman, decedent of formerly enslaved Africans, granddaughter to a grandmother raised on a sharecropping farm in the deep south, the first author writes from a space of lived Black liminality and forced marginality. This space is one intentionally (re)centered in this study to challenge idea(s) of coloniality and fiscal and social disenfranchisement that mark the Black experience. Tracked early into predominantly white primary schools and secondary classes for the alleged gifted and talented and Federal Trio Programs for students from low-income backgrounds, the first author is a product and scholar of PWIs and historically white HSIs—experiences that offer a subjective point of reference on the fundamental serving deficits of comparable white spaces as Black students experience them. As a critical organizational theorist and policy analyst who focuses on issues of educational practice at the nexus of P-20 organizational behavior, public policy, and

TABLE 2 Participant demographics (faculty and administrators).

Name Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Gender/Pronouns	Campus role	Job tenure	HBCU alumni status
LuLu	South Korean, Chicana	She/Her	Executive-level admin	0.5 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Devin	Black	He/Him	Mid-level admin	1 year	Non-HBCU alumni
Safiyah	Indian	She/Her	Executive-level admin	1 year	Non-HBCU alumni
Neal	Hispanic	He/Him	Executive-level admin	1.5 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Derrick	Black	He/Him	Low-level admin	3 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Sonya	Chicana	She/Her	Mid-level admin	5 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Stephen	Black	He/Him	Executive-level admin	7 years	HBCU alumni
Jacob	Black	He/Him	Faculty	9 years	HBCU alumni
Latrice	Black, Mexican	She/Her	Faculty	10 years	HBCU alumni
Tempest	Black	She/Her	Mid-level admin	11 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Kevin	Black	He/Him	Low-level admin	13 years	HBCU alumni
Jonathan	Black	He/Him	Executive-level admin	15 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Ken	White	He/Him	Mid-level admin	19 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Jeff	White	He/Him	Faculty	31 years	Non-HBCU alumni
Virginia	Black	She/Her	Faculty	49 years	Non-HBCU alumni

antiblack racism the first author's professional and personal identities converge in ways that call for an iterative micro-to-meso-to-macro reflexive sensemaking. This sensemaking fueled the development of the posited organizational heuristic.

The second author, enters this space as a Black, meXica, and Choctaw woman. A woman who has learned, that her presence as an Afro-Indigenous Latina in the colonial project referred to as the United States, is a transgression. A woman who has learned that her very existence is resistance—resistance to school applications that questioned: What race are you? Black or White or Asian, or Indian? Choose one. Are you Hispanic or Non-Hispanic? Are you Black, Non-Hispanic? Choose ONLY one. Choose one, despite the counterfactual that her presence is all the above (and beyond) most school's identity metrics; ever evolving, past, present, and future. Her personal and professional background as a proud HBCU alumna, former Hispanic-serving HBCU faculty member, and community activist deepen her passion to disrupt the hauntings of conversations past, that reveal the disheartening truth about disjointed community relations between Black and Brown peoples.

Both authors come to this research, this we-search, having grappled deeply with these socio-cultural realities and the ways in which anti-colonial organizational behavior drives and exacerbates these community and educational disruptions at HSIs and HBCUs in Texas.

Findings

In this study we detail the ways in which each tenet is operationalized as an element of our critical organizational heuristic. More specifically, we layout how aspects of each tenet is reflected in the practices and organizational logics of the majority Black and Brown faculty and staff who breathe life into these unique sacred spaces of Black education through qualitative interview data. For the purpose of laying out an anti-colonial

organizational heuristic for emerging Hispanic Serving HBCUs, we present findings while simultaneously discussing how each finding ties to, or presses the current boundaries of, extant literature. We present findings juxtaposed to extant literature to promote reflection on how constituents' lived experiences, at every level of the institution expands our understanding of how to protect sacred spaces of colonized peoples at Historically Black emerging HSIs. We acknowledge that this is an unconventional layout. We employ it, not to frustrate the reader, rather for two reasons: (1) to further our aims in disrupting white academic norms; and (2) to allow our deductive analysis of the data to more vividly elucidate the tensions, contradictions, and overlap between conclusions drawn from extant literature that has yet to center the voices captured in our study—Black and Brown Hispanic-serving HBCU organizational members. Overall, participants' reflections highlight how these postsecondary professionals think about honoring the institutions (HBCUs) that preserve Black cultural ways of knowing and being, while serving the collective diaspora.

TENET 1: tending to white settler mechanisms of occupation

To employ Afro-Latinidades, as a critical organizational heuristic, is to recognize, attend to, and disrupt white settler policies, practices, and logics that dispossess HBCUs and their constituents of organizational autonomy and sovereignty. Over the last several decades, scholars have turned their attention toward explicating the persistent ways in which white settler colonialism discursively manifests within the U.S. social structure (Irwin, 2022; Warren, 2018; Veracini, 2011) and its schools (Dei and Kempf, 2006; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Rowe and Tuck, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). These scholars assert that white settler colonialism not only continues to exploit the labor of Black and Brown people but threatens their sovereignty through dispossession of their land (which extends to sacred spaces/places and

organizations/institutions); as well as, the dispossession of their cultural ways of knowing and being (Patel, 2015).

Extant literature on the ways in which such mechanisms of imposition have affected Black education also demonstrates that white settlers have used the facade of philanthropic donations as a means to alienate Black and Brown people from their traditions and from each other, with aims towards the strategic desolation of collective Black critical consciousness (Du Bois, 1935; Watkins, 2001). In so doing, white settlers have historically and contemporarily instilled an institutionalized socialization process of compulsory education that confers notions of Black and Brown inferiority and White superiority, by design (Du Bois, 1933, 1935; Woodson, 1937). With many HBCUs having evolved from primary schools under the influence of such a legacy, we contend that the pressure for schools to accept and internalize these notions of deficit and divisive discourses comes at the expense of liberatory educational objectives in learning spaces intended to support and amplify Black excellence, Black joy, and Black socio-economic and socio-political power.

One example is Watkins (2001), who found that HBCUs were pressured to tailor their curriculum and instruction to meet the vision of philanthropic donors. For example, as the industrial models of education, Hampton University and Tuskegee University were accepted as compromises between maintaining the economic interest of White supremacy (i.e., a skilled workforce) and satisfying the interests of Black educational aspirations (Watkins, 2001). Philanthropists like Samuel Armstrong, John D. Rockefeller, George Peabody, Robert Ogden, William Baldwin, Julius Rosenwald, and Charles Dabney were particularly interested in the implementation of a caste-like education that would ensure that Black people studied a curriculum that would “build attitudes of discipline, thrift, piety, respect for property, and an appreciation for labor which the “childlike” Negro lacked” (Rooks, 2017; Watkins, 1990, p. 12).

White settlers not only sought to maintain an exploitable labor caste system via the HBCU curriculum but also sought to impact gender relations via institutionalized forms of Black education. In a historical archival analysis of charitable gifting at Spelman College, Peebles (2010) found that the philanthropic support of Sofia Packard, Harriet Giles, and John D. Rockefeller was contingent on evangelizing a gender-specific morals curriculum. Hence, Spelman students were required to take courses on moral philosophy and the evidence of Christianity (Peebles, 2010). As Spelman attracted industrial sponsors, their curriculum broadened and shifted toward preparing students for their gendered responsibilities in both the religious and societal realms.

Given the insidious historical aims of white-settler education and its persistent legacy in present day education it is vital that emerging and emergent Hispanic-serving HBCU constituents (i.e., faculty, staff, students, and alumni) recognize and tend to the lingering remnants of the oppressive legacy of white-settler compulsory education. Afro-Latinidades challenges Hispanic-serving HBCU educators to attend to the ways in which white settler occupation, and the mechanisms by which it is made manifest in education, undergirds their institutional identity and character (i.e., mission, curricular, and co-curricular programming).

To employ Afro-Latinidades, as a critical organizational heuristic, is to recognize, attend to, and disrupt white settler policies, practices, and logics that dispossess HBCUs and their constituents of organizational legitimization, autonomy, and sovereignty. Over the last

several decades, scholars have turned their attention toward explicating the persistent ways in which white settler colonialism discursively manifests within the U.S. social structure (Spillers, 2003; Veracini, 2011) and its schools (Dancy et al., 2018; Dei and Kempf, 2006; Tuck and Yang, 2012; Rowe and Tuck, 2017; Wolfe, 2006). Scholars have pointed out the detrimental effects of ignoring the role of white settler colonialism as this perpetuates the logics of the settler state and undergirds the system of white supremacy which perpetuates racial inequities (Bonds and Inwood, 2016; Smith, 2017).

One incident uncovered in our findings aligned directly with the manifestation of white settler colonialism and the mechanisms of occupation reflected in extant literature surrounding the decision-makers who do not belong to the communities they purport to serve but are granted authority over HBCUs and Historically Black emerging HSIs, alike. In an interview with a participant who was talking about her experiences as a faculty member, one participant commented,

The other piece is that depending on the board of trustees, very often we have white men and women on our board of trustees. The president now is a white woman. We’ve had a white man and I do not know if you know about the history about [our college] and all the stuff we went through with him, but the president was a white man and I had some really awful dealings with him. And he wrote a letter to me saying, “If you continue this gorilla warfare and spelled it G-O-R-I-L-L-A, that it will result in...” And so for me that gorilla was intentional. It wasn’t a mistake, a misuse of a word. He was identifying me as such.

Her experiences as a faculty member were in large part determined by leadership. With the board not reflecting the population they are serving, the main decision-makers do not share the lived experiences of the majority of the students or faculty and administrators constitute the body of the HBCU. This leaves ample room for antiblackness; a “system of beliefs and practices that attack, erode, and limit the humanity of Black people” (Carruthers, 2018, p. 26) as we have made reference to in framing the problem. In the particular example above, the white president refers to “gorilla warfare” with this Black professor and she believes this is intentionally done to identify her as such. She also shares that he refers to her as Mrs. instead of Doctor, her earned credential. We see the board member (a white man) both dehumanizing and delegitimizing the participant. The question then becomes, how do HBCUs exercise autonomy when they are not even in the room when decisions are made or in key leadership positions in the organization?

Our anti-colonial inclusion framework, as an organizational heuristic, would call for each practitioners to recognize that the power structures in HBCUs continue to perpetuate white settler notions of white supremacy and antiblackness; and that the composition of boards could constitute what Bonds and Inwood (2016) refer to as “material practices of domination that lead to the exposure to premature death and sustain racism within settler societies” (p. 728) and deprives the majority of students in these organizations of representation that attends to the unique contours of their lived experiences. To attend to and disrupt the status quo, there must be a concerted effort to make boards more representative of the populations HBCUs serve (Commodore and Nadrea, 2020).

TENET 2: tending to (de)legitimation in pursuit of fiduciary sovereignty

To employ an Afro-Latinidades framework as an organizational heuristic is to acknowledge the financial precarity of Hispanic-serving HBCUs as a mechanism of white settler occupation, made manifest through funding policies, financial aid practices, and curriculum orientations that dispossess institutions of their organizational autonomy and sovereignty. Reconstructing Laó-Monte's concept of Afro-Latinidades as an organizational heuristic invites constituents to subsequently leverage strategic resistance initiatives. These acts of resistance will support HBCU educators as they proactively tend to externally imposed schemas of legitimation and delegitimation (i.e., coercive socio-legal pressures designed to (de)elevate a school's reputation and brand), while simultaneously working towards community and institutional fiduciary sovereignty.

Historically, and contemporarily, White settler mechanisms have manifested through funding models imposed by both private and public entities to (de)legitimize formal spaces of Black education (Watkins, 2001; Rooks, 2017). These mechanisms influence who HBCUs serve, the education HBCU students receive (i.e., academic frameworks, curriculum and instruction, and campus culture), and the ways in which students, faculty, and staff are perceived in relation to their non-Black counterparts. Despite a recent influx of crisis-relief funds from the federal government, following the COVID-19 pandemic and racial reckoning of 2020, HBCUs continue to face long-term financial uncertainty. This reality renders HBCUs dependent on the benevolence of donors—who have their own agendas; or renders them dependent on the funding priorities of the United States' executive leadership (Toldson and Lewis, 2017)—whose generosity shifts with the appetite of the citizenry and the ideology of their political party.

Since the development of the 2nd Morrill Act of 1890 (Wheatle, 2019), governing bodies (i.e., federal, state, and professional accrediting agencies) have levied external influence through funding mechanisms that have resulted in the systematic underfunding and divestment of resources from Black schools, Black students, Black teachers, and Black communities. These influences persist today in covert, and overt ways—most often through organizational legitimation processes. One such process being, accountability metrics embedded into performance-based and enrollment-based funding models that are put in place to improve the legitimacy of Historically-white Hispanic-serving colleges and universities with large Black student populations (Bradley, 2018; Hillman and Corral, 2017) and HBCUs alike (Jones, 2016; Lee, 2010; Rooks, 2017; Watkins, 2001). Such neoliberal metrics are often easily imposed on HBCUs (as well as other institutions like community colleges, regional colleges, and tribal colleges), who often find themselves navigating external processes of legitimation out of survival (Bradley, 2018; Andrews et al., 2016) while simultaneously striving to provide the most advanced education possible for their students (Nguyen et al., 2019). Jones (2016) ties performance-based funding models to shifts in the purpose and mission of HBCUs, implying that fiscal precarity may be a lever of institutional change (for better or worse), pulled upon by policymakers and wealthy policy influencers, in the specific case of HBCUs.

Extant literature illustrates how these funding models typically prioritize the needs of the local, state, and/or federal economy

(Toldson and Lewis, 2017; Main et al., 2019), as opposed to the needs of HBCUs, the students they serve, or their surrounding communities (Williams, 2019; Hillman and Corral, 2017; Toldson, 2016). We posit that through such funding models, White-settler mechanisms of imposition are employed to financially incentivize white-normative professional standards of compliance and legitimation into the very fabric of the HBCUs that they influence. This effectively obfuscates the institutional identity and character of an organization (Coupet, 2017). Hence, HBCU educators must diligently tend to mechanisms of delegitimation by prioritizing the educational needs and affirming the cultures of groups rendered “other” in a white-settler society.

Manifestations of white-settler occupation have also been observed through philanthropic influence imposed by private donors and corporations who prioritize talent acquisition through the promotion of industry-driven initiatives (Rooks, 2017; Watkins, 2001). Such partnerships promote individual financial independence and social mobility for a few token HBCU students. However, they also influence curriculum in ways that promote science, technology, and engineering workforce development (Main et al., 2019) while distorting liberatory curriculum orientations.

Over the last century, HBCUs have faced unprecedented political and economic pressure to compete with historically white colleges and universities for students and faculty of all races (Boland and Gasman, 2014; Gasman and Hilton, 2012; Jones, 2016; Lee, 2010) in order to maintain a status of relevance in a post-Jim Crow socio-cultural context. Though HBCUs have always had open-door admissions policies (inclusive of all racial groups), extant literature suggests that contemporary changes in HBCU student demographics may be driven, in part, by the need to sustain a competitive operating enrollment budget (Gasman et al., 2010; Jefferson, 2011; Harris, 2012), which would arguably call for a shift in vision, mission, and curricular orientations at tuition-dependent schools such as HBCUs. Others more recently identify the key role HBCUs play in moments of racialized political violence and subsequent political unrest (Williams, 2019; Williams and Palmer, 2020).

Harris (2012) conducted a content analysis of the mission statements of 103 HBCUs listed on the Department of Education's website. His study illustrated a significant decrease in explicit references to educating Black students and an increase in references to “commitment to diversity” in HBCU mission statements over the last couple of decades (Harris, 2012). Though Andrews et al. (2016) demonstrated diversifying to be one of the least viable solutions in the minds of a sample of HBCU business school Deans, there is a foundation of scholarship that suggests the change in mission statements may be reflective of institutionalized fiscal pressures to increase enrollment in ways that distance HBCUs from Blackness to legitimize HBCUs as “racially diverse” learning environments (Gasman et al., 2010; Harris, 2012; Hebel, 2001). Drawing from our meso-level construct of Afro-Latinidades, we have identified such fiscal impositions, as coercive socio-legal pressures (Edelman and Suchman, 1997; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) that systematically work to maintain the settler state by reinscribing and reinstating colonial relations between the predominantly Black & Brown constituents of HBCUs (particularly, Hispanic-serving HBCU and HSIs with a critical mass of Black students), and various third-party constituents (particularly donors, industry leaders, and agents of the state writ-large). Constituents across every level of the organization acknowledged the particular struggle of Historically

Black emerging HSIs, who are ineligible to receive federal support to institutionalize and improve service to Black and Brown student communities. In this vein, one participant expressed the collective support for each community, which they tied directly to the need to legitimate the intuitive organizational character of HBCUs. When asked how a dual federal designation might benefit his HBCU, he stated,

I think obviously the finances, just being eligible to different pots of money. I think also just, I do not know if legitimacy is the word, but instead of me having to be like, “Oh, we are 75% Black and 20% Hispanic....” Yeah, it kind of legitimizes why we do the things we do or the way we do it. Instead of having to always explain that we have a big Latino population, I can just say, “Oh, well we are an HBCU and an HSI,” and so I think that part of it is helpful. Obviously, just being eligible for more grants and funding opportunities is always great, but I think just having the title to prove what we already do, which is serving both our Black students and our Latino students and our students who are both.

Focusing even more on the area of enrollment management another participant shared a similar frustration with the funding ineligibility, given the current barriers to federal funding that would otherwise support the improvement of Hispanic-serving initiatives and facilities at historically Black colleges and universities. This constituent also spoke to the legitimating factor of a dual designation, for HBCUs with large Brown student populations.

...we have been at that [enrollment benchmark] for a long time now, and we made an effort to receive the dual designation from the federal government and we were informed that we could not have both because (I think that no one said this explicitly), but I think it's because of the connection to accessing additional federal resources because there's certain pots of resources that are available for HBCUs, and then certain pots designated for HSIs. I think that's changing a bit with this new emerging term called MSIs, Minority-Serving Institutions, so that's all I have to say... HACU as one entity and Excelencia, (which I never say correctly), those two organizations have the ability to give a designation that suggest to students who identify in the Latinx [diaspora that] these institutions are safe harbors, for lack of a better term, for individuals to go who are of Hispanic descent.

To this same point about shifting identities to secure funds, another constituent offered insights that gave voice to concerns about broadening the moniker in ways that shift these institutions' market value and reduce diversification of the higher education landscape. He shared,

I think that there's a perception that shifting from an HBCU to an MSI, we lose something. There's a perception I think with that, and so that would be difficult, not impossible, difficult to walk forward with, because a lot of our value proposition to even local industry here is that we are an HBCU, and so MSI designation changes that to some degree.

As is evidenced above constituents were able to frankly articulate the varying elements of concern for the ways in which pursuing a dual federal designation, if eligible, might compromise or enhance the capacity of HBCUs to effectively convey their historic and contemporary mission in harmony. Based on our findings, what is at stake is clear to members of Historically Black emerging HSIs—both fiscally and culturally.

In the case of HBCUs, fostering the harmonious articulation of its mission must involve a shared acknowledgment among campus constituents (i.e., university administrative leadership, staff, faculty, students, alumni, and philanthropic donors) regarding the intentional historic, and contemporary, fiscal disenfranchisement of HBCU institutions. Additionally, it means developing a unified consciousness that funding streams must ultimately lead towards institutional self-determination and fiduciary sovereignty. To do so requires a collective consciousness of how each specific campus has been economically and politically constructed in ways that exploit and reinscribe colonial relations with the federal government and private philanthropists. Additionally, it requires a strategic fiscal plan that is rooted in self-determination with aims toward financial liberation for the college or university and its campus constituents (faculty, staff, students, alumni, and local Black communities).

TENET 3: tending to sacred spaces

As an organizational heuristic, Afro-Latinidades (Laó-Montes, 2005) entails analyzing complex, complicated, and entangled geo-historical identity constructs that lend themselves to collective understandings and community at the organizational-level. According to Laó-Montes, American-ness, African-ness, and Latin-ness are the cultural byproducts of colonial systems of dispossession and displacement. Both Black and Brown communities are situated within intersectional hierarchies of difference that yield similar cultural cartographies (McKittrick, 2016) of labor and land exploitation in the Americas (Meléndez-Badillo, 2019; Ruef, 2012). These cultural cartographies inform who we are in relation to each other—our community—and are sacred spaces of community development.

The unique cultural cartography of HBCU educators and students makes up the very fabric of the HBCU community. Moreover, there is unique reciprocity between HBCUs and the community. HBCUs are often considered the educational, political, and social centers of their community. Gasman et al. (2015) found that HBCU faculty tend to believe that a good education reached beyond a single individual and that there was a “rippling effect that education has on society” (p. 362) beyond the classroom. As such, they tend to have curriculum orientations that encourage students to reach out and serve their community—lifting as they climb (Apple, 2013; Gasman et al., 2015; Harris, 2012; Tillis, 2018). As such, HBCU students often place a higher value on service, leadership, and engagement in the community than their historically white peers (Carr, 2014). Their unique curriculum orientations (Watkins, 2001) and *communitas* (Favors, 2019) make them particularly effective for serving the unique socio-political needs of both Black and Brown students seeking critical consciousness, civic engagement, social justice, and community development (Arroyo et al., 2016; Allen and Stone, 2016; Davies, 2007; Ozuna, 2012).

Research on Brown students enrolled in HBCUs suggests that they have a smoother cultural transition from their high schools to HBCUs, not only because they share that communal ethos (Strayhorn, 2019; McQueen and Zimmerman, 2004), but because they have lived in or near Black communities (Davies, 2007; Ozuna, 2012; Canida, 2014). Many Brown students grew up in multiracial neighborhoods, had cross-cultural interactions, listened to the same music, ate the same food, and felt comfortable interacting with Black people. In a study conducted by Allen (2016), a Brown HBCU student explained that “[she] always went to, like, a predominantly Black and Hispanic school, so [she’d] grown up around [diversity]” (p. 385). Afro-Latinidades ask that we tend to common cultural cartographies that bring us to sacred spaces of community development. The proximity of HBCUs to Black and Brown residential communities supports the development of alliances and accomplices that lend themselves toward collective struggle against white settler community displacement and dispossession.

The displacement and dispossession of historically Black and Brown residential neighborhoods surrounding HBCU campuses reflects an enduring legacy of settler colonialism that currently manifests in the neoliberal urban plans that cater to a real-estate industry that engages in rent hikes, and property tax increases. Afro-Latinidades ask that we draw from our collective struggle against colonial regimes of displacement and dispossession by seeing ourselves, our humanity, in each other. Amidst an increasingly neoliberal higher education landscape, HBCUs maintain an ethic of care and communal ethos that transcends the campus and extends well into the neighboring community. While historically white colleges and universities are often solely, or primarily, preoccupied with meeting the demands of workforce development, extant literature shows that HBCUs continue to seek ways to integrate community development into their campus culture, curriculum, and co-curricular programming (Liou et al., 2007; Lowe, 2008; Smith, 2017).

In a study conducted by Liou et al. (2007), researchers found that HBCUs encourage community engagement at all levels, from the college administration, staff, faculty, to the student body. HBCUs in Liou et al.’s (2007) sample served their community by offering community development programs in early childhood literacy, college readiness, health and wellness, environmental sustainability, housing/homelessness, food security, and poverty alleviation (Liou et al., 2007). Liou et al. (2007) found that HBCUs implemented different community development programs and practices that fit their unique institutional capacity. For HBCU educators, having the trust of their community is just as important as having the trust of their boards, faculty, and government officials (Smith, 2017). Now, more than ever, HBCUs must play a significant role in protecting and preserving their community.

Considering that many HBCU educators practice and profess the African proverb—Ubuntu, which means I am because you are—the communal and familial culture of HBCUs makes them particularly welcoming for Brown students seeking a sense of belonging (Canida, 2014; Davies, 2007; Nuñez, 2009; Strayhorn, 2008). A prominent cultural value of Brown (Indigenous Latine) people is also community, referred to as *in lak ech*. In Lak Ech celebrates and affirms the humanity of others by acknowledging that “I am you, and you are me.” To draw from an Afro-Latinidades framework for Hispanic-serving HBCU is to leverage both Black and Brown collective ways of knowing and being (ubuntu and in lak ech) as complementary to each other celebrated together—in community. One of our participant’s thoughts

reflects the fundamental essence of this tenet. When asked about the relations between their HBCU and the surrounding Black and Brown communities, they explained,

We’re located in [a city in the south]—but on the border between the historic district for Latinx populations as well as African American populations. Because of that, we have always had this very intertwined relationship and existence between both communities. Then we have always had a large contingent of international students here on campus as well from the early days of international student exchange programs.

So, we naturally bake in this environment that makes everybody feel comfortable and welcome because everyone is really striving for the same goal, which is an opportunity to earn a degree, to have an enriching and collegiate experience, so our core values really speak to that.

As such, HBCUs are sacred spaces of identity construction, cultural production, and community development. Afro-Latinidades challenges HBCU constituents to engage in radically inclusive ways that honor and protect both Black and Brown sacred spaces of community development. This framework builds on previous HSI frameworks of servingness (Garcia, 2019) to capture how the campus culture, curriculum, and co-curricular programming at HBeHSIs are contextually situated within Black and Brown communities. It challenges us to think of ourselves in relation to others, how we organize and govern ourselves around common goals, make decisions, resolve disputes, and restore justice. It advances a resiliency-based perspective that offers critical insight into how sacred spaces carry within them our cultural cartographies that inform how we make meaning of our lived experiences. This begins with creating an inclusive campus culture that prioritizes liberation, social justice, critical consciousness, civic engagement, and community development.

TENET 4: tending to fallacious notions of essentialism

No race is monolithic. “Black” has been used to describe Africans, Caribbeans and African Americans (Richardson, 2022), groups who have distinction within and between group lived experiences. As it pertains to racial identity and Black students in higher education, there are layers informed by “racial identity theories, assimilation theories, and relationships formed within the Black diaspora” (Richardson, 2022, p.79). A similar observation can be made among Brown students where the use of umbrella terms has often led simultaneously to the amplifying and/or silencing of whole groups (Soto-Luna, 2023; Vega et al., 2022) whose experiences are equally nuanced in distinct ways. Brown (and Black) students at Hispanic-serving HBCUs face complex and often conflicting realities because of their identity and heritage (Laó-Montes, 2005; Palmer et al., 2015). Thus, tending to fallacious notions of essentialism prompts us to resist the reduction and flattening of these dynamic and encompassing groups to any one definition.

One might suggest that Laó-Montes’s (2005) argument is reductive in similar ways, however, our argument is not for a micro-level identity, but rather an organizational one—which calls for one to maximize collectivistic understandings of self and others beyond the

self. Laó-Montes (2005) asserts that Black and Brown people must “rethink self, memory, culture, and power beyond the confines [of a] nation [as Black or Latine nationalist] ... to develop a politics[sic] of decolonization” (Laó-Montes, 2005, p.125). We agree that such an approach holds space for the unique and multiple ways people’s identities intersect and differ at the micro level in order to make room for the creation of an organizational heuristic that strives for the collective liberation of all these groups featuring a shared politic of civic engagement, coalition building, and solidarity. By drawing from Afro-Latinidades as an organizational heuristic, HBCU educators are called upon to consider the ways that curricular and co-curricular programming may be curated to reconstruct our sense of self, cultural memory, and sociopolitical histories beyond imposed Eurocentric ways of knowing and being.

Historically, HBCUs have played an instrumental role in the racial identity development of the Black community. Passionately committed to Black excellence in the classroom and community, HBCU educators cultivate an unapologetically Black education by curating their student’s racial identity and orientation about what it means to *know* and *be* in an antiblack world (Carr, 2014; Favors, 2019; Spencer, 2018; Tillis, 2018). Because of this, Black students often attend HBCUs with a distinct desire for racial identity development (Van Camp et al., 2009; Favors, 2019). These students seek HBCUs to be around other students of color and have opportunities for racial identity development (Van Camp et al., 2009). Unfortunately, for many Black students, HBCUs may be the only space wherein their culture is celebrated (Favors, 2019; Harris, 2012; Williams and Palmer, 2020; Williams et al., 2021b).

Although HBCUs have historically focused their curriculum on the Black experience, recently, they have turned toward infusing more culturally diverse experiences into the curriculum (Arroyo and Gasman, 2014; Palmer et al., 2016). Research shows that both Black and Brown students’ sense of belonging increases as institutions create curricular experiences that affirm their cultural heritage and develop their racial identity, critical-consciousness, social agency, and community engagement (Van Camp et al., 2009; Davies, 2007; Favors, 2019; Nuñez, 2009; Spencer, 2018; Palmer et al., 2015; Williams et al., 2021b). However, some HBCU practitioners assert, “while diversity can enrich the educational experience for Black students, the erosion of Black cultural identity at HBCUs could negatively impact students’ academic self-concept and sense of belonging” (Palmer et al., 2016, p. 7). The question remains, how can HBCU educators serve the unique sociocultural curricular needs of their Brown students without marginalizing the Black or Brown community?

Although HBCU faculty cultivate their students’ racial consciousness and anti-oppressive orientations, Brown students have expressed that HBCU faculty are not always well informed about the multiplicity of Brown diasporic experiences (Afro-Latine, Latine, and Indigenous-Latine) (Davies, 2007; Ozuna, 2012; Palmer and Maramba, 2015). Palmer and Maramba (2015) found that Latine HBCU students felt that “classes focus[ed] on what happened to Black [people]” (p.120). These studies show that there were missed opportunities to draw connections between the intersecting cultural cartographies of Black and Brown people.

While the dominant narrative associates Black peoples with slavery (Ruef, 2012) regardless of nation-state allegiance, and associates Brown peoples with domesticated and blue-collar labor (Meléndez-Badillo, 2019)—regardless of nation-state allegiance or

immigrant status (Davies, 2007), it is important to note that Brown diasporic peoples (Indigenous Latine, specifically) were enslaved, and were also, enslavers of Black peoples in the United States across the southwest from Texas to California. This complicates historic relations in ways that perpetuate settler colonialism today, as relations largely remain unhealed and under interrogated (Ulido, 2018). To further complicate relations, the abolishment of slavery was led by the first president of Mexico, Vicente Guerrero, (a self-identified Afro-Latine). Shortly after Mexico lost Tejas, Black and Brown people (Seminoles largely) worked to overthrow white settlers and their slavocracy in the region (Horne, 2005; Ortiz, 2018). During this time, Black and Brown people developed an underground railroad to Mexico (Horne, 2005; Ortiz, 2018). The fear of Black and Latine coalitions prompted the lynching of both Black and Brown people throughout the southwest—even further complicating relations among Black formerly enslaved people and other Indigenous tribes that were staunchly antiblack and complicit in U.S. chattel slavery.

It is from this historical context that white settlers used schools to propagate the pseudo-science eugenics to develop racial categories of difference to engage in split-labor force strategies and divide-and-conquer tactics to break Black and Latine land and labor alliances (Bonacich, 1975). The demarcations of difference were used to create a false allegiance to whiteness (Spanish and English colonial empires) and justify the anti-Black and anti-Indigenous treatment and exploitation of Black and Brown people. In this short section, we have provided just one example through labor-relations to colonized lands that tell a much deeper story of shared space, place, and struggle to demonstrate the necessity of students seeing themselves, their peoples, and their futures at the intersections of land and labor exploitation in ways that are culturally nuanced and historically comprehensive to resist competitive narratives and communal strategies towards liberation rooted in scarcity or an “us vs. them” organizational culture.

I think that within some of that planning and even just again, how my identity [as a Latina] relates to it, there have been some things that I’ve seen where it may feel a bit imbalanced; and really, (I would say) it’s really thinking about how to merge cultures and how to bring inclusivity into that. I think that as an HBCU, there’s so much history as far as why HBCUs exists. And at the same time with us being in a very evolving position where we hopefully will become an HSI as well, I think that is something where I personally feel like is to question and to think critically about, to say, ‘Well how can we bring these two cultures together?’

Another participant, had to acknowledge that there are tensions that come along with these efforts among HBCU constituents on emerging HSI campuses who might struggle with such transitions—particularly, alumni.

I think some facets of the community would be excited about that, and I think some facets would be concerned about that, especially our alums because the university at its core is an HBCU. That is a moniker that many of our alums really hold hard and fast too, and so if we were to lose that, that would have some significant ripple with our alumni association to include the local community as well.

Their insights suggest that significant care must be taken as efforts to decolonize are institutionalized in ways that might shift the

fundamental character of HBCUs for better, or worse—if done without strategic organizational planning. Similarly, another participant shared,

I think the issue that we have is the fear of losing our identity as an HBCU and maybe people not fully understanding what that means and what the transition would mean...So, when you look at HBCUs that are predominantly African American or Black spaces, the addition of other nationalities or others can sometimes, not often, but sometimes some can maybe feel like an intrusion because now we have to shift how we do things. I think the challenge over the next 10 or 15 years is going to be how do we navigate that space and so that we are one, living up to our mission, our universal mission of serving underserved populations of our collective community, and how do we make sure that their voices are heard?

This participant's reflections highlight two important factors for consideration in these emerging HSI environments. The first being, that this issue of practice marks a decade plus long challenge ahead. That is to say, that the support to address this challenge must be long term and the solutions and initiatives that are ultimately employed must be sustainable ones. Secondly, the last comment highlights the fact that this is ultimately a challenge to support HBCU educators in emerging HSI contexts to enhance and further institutionalize the universal mission of HBCUs to serve the collective African diasporic community.

As an organizational heuristic, Afro-Latinidades would call for Hispanic-serving HBCU educators to have (and in some cases to develop) a critical humanizing sociocultural knowledge of both Black and Brown people to engage in radically inclusive identity development that is conducive to an identity politics of collective liberation. As is evidenced in our findings, these educators must understand that they serve Black and Brown diasporic people situated within an entangled tension in the colonial states of the Americas (Laó-Montes, 2005). Educators at Hispanic-serving HBCUs do, and must continue to, practice a “with and” form of student development, which is to say they serve many more students at the intersections of Blackness, Latineness, and Indigeniety: Black and Brown students, Black and womyn students, Brown and working-poor students, Black and Muslim and queer students, documented and undocumented and affluent and cis-gendered students. Moreover, historically Black emerging HSI educators must understand that they are—we are—ultimately a part of a liberatory pursuit and practice of liberation. As such, HBCU educators must intentionally tend to the intersectionality of their students' identities and pay particular attention to how their curriculum at an institutional level is used to curate a critical consciousness of collective liberation.

Conclusion

Over the last several years, the higher education landscape has drastically shifted to accommodate increases in the diversity of prospective students and their unique sociocultural needs. While historically white colleges and universities are struggling to maintain enrollment following the pandemic, HBCUs have captivated the interest of prospective students seeking a liberatory education, an education that speaks not only to who they are, but to the community

and cultures from where they come (Williams et al., 2021a; Williams and Palmer, 2020). We anticipate that as these efforts are better evidenced through asset-based empirical research with and by HBCU administrators and faculty, policy advocates might be better positioned to advocate for HBCUs to be appropriately incentivized and supported through Title V federal funding to continue their efforts. Only then will their efforts be scaled at a magnitude that matches their impact on students' individual lives.

As the higher education landscape continues to evolve, we urge HB-eHSI administrators to disrupt white settler mechanisms of occupation by reclaiming control over their institutions' financial structures and building fiduciary sovereignty. This requires reexamining neoliberal leadership models and reducing dependence on donors whose agendas compromise institutional autonomy. We urge Hispanic Serving HBCUs to form coalitions with Historically white HSIs that are committed to uplifting Black and Brown students. Together, they can advocate for dual federal designation, ensuring that both Black and Brown students attending HB-eHSIs receive the funding they deserve. Beyond policy advocacy, we recommend that HBCUs, HSIs, and HB-eHSIs create consortiums to share educational resources and foster collective solidarity.

We ask that you consider the following:

- 1 In what ways can HB-eHSIs reexamine and transform neoliberal leadership structures to align more closely with the needs of Black and Brown students?
- 2 How can HBCUs and HSIs form coalitions to advocate for dual federal designation and ensure equitable access to funding for both Black and Brown students?
- 3 What steps can HB-eHSIs take to create consortiums with HBCUs and HSIs that foster the sharing of educational resources and promote collective solidarity among their institutions?

Above we discuss the necessity for Hispanic-serving HBCU educators to engage in radically inclusive student development that reflects the principles of Ubuntu and In Lak Ech, fostering solidarity and joint action between Black and Brown students. This approach must be intentionally infused into the curriculum and co-curriculum in ways that cultivate students' critical consciousness, celebrate the complexities of their intersectional racial and ethnic identities, and prepare them to collectively challenge systems of oppression. Hispanic-Serving HBCU curriculum should highlight the historical and ongoing colonial struggles of both Black and Brown communities, integrating Afro-Latinidades to explore issues of land dispossession and labor exploitation from anti-colonial frameworks and the collective struggle for liberation. We ask that Hispanic-serving HBCU educators contemplate the following praxis-oriented questions:

- 1 How does your curriculum and co-curricular programming reflect the unique cultural and political histories of both Black and Brown students?
- 2 How are you fostering critical consciousness and racial identity development in ways that allow students to see themselves in each other and empower students for collective liberation?

Whether Historically Black emerging HSIs, referred to interchangeably here as Hispanic-serving HBCUs, should be rebranded as anything other than HBCUs, remains an ostensibly controversial question. Despite our not settling that question, we have found that

Afro-Latinidades offers unique insights into how HBCU educators can think about preserving their sacred historic mission, while also embracing the plurality that exists within the Black diaspora. Centering a shared history of resistance to white settler colonialism, Afro-Latinidades, as an organizational framework, offers a roadmap to reclaiming institutional autonomy by leaning into the complexities of constituents' intersectional identities in radically inclusive ways. We further submit that it provides implications into how these efforts might be institutionalized through a dual federal designation that seeks to honor the fact that HBCUs have and will continue to uplift all underserved communities. As such, it has the capacity to ensure that the institutional character of HBCUs remains grounded in racial uplift, social justice, and collective liberation.

Data availability statement

The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because data from this sample size would be identifiable unless kept confidential given the nature of the study, size of the institutions highlighted, and limited personnel in the administrative leadership roles represented. (i.e., presidents, provosts, faculty heads of departments, etc.). To protect the confidentiality of participants the dataset will not be made available. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to dwuana.bradley@usc.edu.

Ethics statement

This study, involving humans, was approved by The University of Southern California's Institutional Review Board and the Institutional Review Board of the University of Memphis. The study was conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Each participant provided recorded verbal consent to participate in this study and was assigned a pseudonym.

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