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### **Nostalgia and Precarious Placemaking in Southern Poultry Worlds: Immigration, Labor, and Community Building in Rural Northern Alabama**

***Brian Walter***

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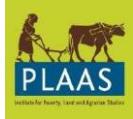
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# Nostalgia and Precarious Placemaking in Southern Poultry Worlds: Immigration, Labor, and Community Building in Rural Northern Alabama

*Brian Walter*

## Prologue: A Story of Two Signs—Maybe Three

While working on my ethnography, I learned about the history of two signs in Albertville. One was rumored to be in the past, sometime before the 1970s. Posted near the town entrance, the sign menacingly told African Americans “don’t let the sun go down on you”<sup>1</sup>. I don’t know for sure if this sign ever stood in front of Albertville, but it wouldn’t be surprising—such signs were found all over the United States between 1890 and 1968 in “sundown towns” that used threats of violence to discourage non-whites from permanent settlement (Loewen 2005). These billboards presented a clear message that even if the federal government might change its policies on race equality, white communities could and would still take matters into their own hands.

The other sign is more recent, but its history blurrier. I was told that all over the US Mexico border the poultry industry had installed signs that advertised, “If you want a job come to Albertville!” Sometimes these signs had Tyson Chicken logos on them, occasionally they were described as billboards, and once they were rumored to hang in Haiti. Though these specific advertisements have never been found, the legend of signs beckoning immigrants to specific towns in rural America has been recorded in other contexts as well (Mohl 2003; Vega 2015).

Fictive or not, that second sign represented a clear anxiety: Albertville as the white community knew it was going to change, due to industrial powers beyond their control. Change came: from 1990 to 2012 Latinx<sup>2</sup> population increased to 27.88% of the community and with it the economy grew as well. This short ethnography describes the tension between these two signs, one which beckons and one which excludes, and asks how a place with memories of a blatantly racist, exclusionary sign comes to understand its future as tied to an industry undoing its protected whiteness.

Then there are the signs that everyone can see: the “Trump/Pence Make America Great Again” campaign decals that remain scattered across Albertville months after the election. On November 6, 2016, when Donald Trump won the presidency with his authoritarian populist campaign, this third sign became significant in ways few expected. No longer a perceived fringe threat to progressive neoliberalism, these signs now voice the populist goals of the national government and 46.4% of the United States voting population.

The success of Trump’s campaign leaves us with pressing questions. What does this election mean for communities like Albertville? Does it signal a nostalgic return to the “sundown town” ideology and the exclusionary white future it gestured towards? Does a campaign promise of building a wall on the US Mexico border mean Tyson will no longer have anywhere to hang their labor advertisements? How does a town already dealing with a crisis of identity react to a government that rose to power by aggravating these very same racial fault lines? Though my research will not categorically answer any of these queries, my goal is to show how white and Latinx community members manage the tension between these national and local, past and present discourses around race, community and belonging.

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<sup>1</sup> The sign used a highly offensive racial epithet which appears in this text later as “n—“

<sup>2</sup> In this manuscript I opt to use the gender neutral Latinx instead of Latino

## 1 Introductory Materials

The landscape is littered with clues to help answer these questions. These three signs are not idle metaphors but clear attempts to appropriate the physical world and voice particular hopes for the future. The future gestured towards by these charismatic objects is clear, but I argue it is equally important to look at the politics of everyday objects for the hopes each signal towards: garden statuettes, convenience store signage or transnational botanicals. The politics of making and remaking public space is essential for understanding the nostalgic affective register of politics in Albertville, and indeed the authoritarian populist movement it supported in great numbers.

I will begin unpacking my research in Albertville by presenting an overview of the recent anthropological literature on authoritarian populism and highlighting the contested role of rural whites in its rise. I will add to this by laying out how the racialization of Latinx migrants has been essential to United States populism. This will be followed with a short history of Albertville Alabama, and its place in *Nuevo New South* to argue for Albertville's suitability as a site to examine immigration and populism. I will begin the ethnographic portion of my article by using my data to argue that white Trump voters in Albertville were not motivated by distress over white job displacement by immigrant labor. Instead, I will examine discourses around changes in Albertville's landscape to theorize their support of authoritarian populism as grounded in nostalgic notions of nation and community. I will show how this politics is enacted in the Albertville Downtown Master Plan and by community organization Keep Albertville Beautiful. Finally, I will argue for Latinx placemaking as a disruption of this narrative and a possibility for an everyday politics of resistance.

### 1.1 United States Authoritarian Populism

Many have already productively theorized the recent spread of right-wing populist activity (Gusterson 2017). In this paper, I use Stuart Hall's definition of authoritarian populism as mobilized by Scoones et all. to pin down a working definition of the phenomena (Hall 1985; Scoones et all 2017). Within this, I focus on the often-minimized affective and nostalgic dimensions of Hall's theorization.

In its broadest sense, I distinguish authoritarian populism by what I define as its two major tenets. The first is that as a political and ideological movement it aims to better represent and support the values of a populist formulation of "the people", perceived to be currently ignored by governmental interests and leftist movements by dismantling government programs and centralizing executive power. This creation requires that this formulation of "the people" is co-constituted against an Other within the country, which in the current context of Western authoritarian populism is principally made up of racialized immigrant populations. Negative sentiment is solidified over "moral panics": incited by perceived challenges of national identity by the identified Other (Hall 1985). Second, authoritarian populism is a nationalistic project that aims to combat the process of globalization through stronger borders, protectionist trade agreements and anti-immigration policies, promoted in the name of blue-collar workers who have lost jobs and stability with the advancement of neoliberalism (Klein 2016). The movement aims to accomplish these goals through strong charismatic leadership that aspires toward greater authoritarianism.

To be clear, in the United States context I take authoritarian populism to characterize the movement that has helped Donald Trump rise to the presidency, similar but not synonymous with what is now labeled as the "alt-right" movement in the popular press. The major aspiration of this political movement is to centralize political power while dismantling the welfare state, (Hall 1985) and additional tenets are as follows: 1) A focus on securing borders and removing undocumented immigrants, especially those of Muslim and Latinx descent, 2) A goal of electing leadership focused on supporting the fictive "white working class" through xenophobic and protectionist legislation (Walley 2017) 3) A support of values that protect whiteness and affirm a project of white nationalism without specifically claiming white supremacy (Keil 2017; Maskovsky 2017).

This schema coalesces in the nostalgia central to the spread of authoritarian populism (Steenvoorden, Eefje, and Eelco Harteveld 2018). In the United States this consists of a return to the economic success of the industrial mid-twentieth century “*as it actually existed*, with its racist and sexist hierarchies wholly intact” (Maskovsky 2017, 435 emphasis in original). This is succinctly symbolized in the “surreal mix of nostalgia and racism embedded in the Trump’s branded slogan ‘Make America Great Again’” (Goldstein and Hall 2017). Ana Balthazar’s ethnography adds to this understanding of this essential nostalgia with her theorization of nostalgic nationalism in pottery shoppers in the post-industrial UK (Balthazar 2017). Balthazar finds a connection between the “character” valued in pre-1970s “Made in Britain” marked handmade pottery, and the working class histories contained in these objects. She explains that this material can be scaled up to national movements, which involve “multiple forms of nostalgia, connected to diverse engagements with the past, nation, and the working classes” (Balthazar 2017, 224). This articulates well with the mechanisms Hall attributes to authoritarian populism as a movement working “on the ground of already constituted social practices and lived ideologies” and winning “space there by constantly drawing on these elements which have secured over time a traditional resonance and left their traces in popular inventories” (Hall 2017, 20). I will argue later that a similar connection with social and physical materials of the past mobilized by historical preservation, helps explain the regional appeal of the Trump regime to whites in Albertville, Alabama.

Finally, I approach politics as a performative practice, which draws up and engages with various publics through discourse (Rutherford 2012). These publics are self-organized, potentially infinite, and exist “*by virtue of being addressed*” (Warner 2002, 50 emphasis in original). Due to this orientation, I don’t consider differences between national political beliefs and local actions as contradictions nor do I focus on parsing the reality of certain social groups (such as the white working class) as others have already productively theorized (Bessier and Bond 2017; Hartigan 2005; Smith 2017; Walley 2013). Focusing on politics as performative leads me to center more on questions about *how* the nation is being defined against internal and international Others and *why* this definition is envisioned or resisted by different publics.

### ***1.2 Academic and Popular Discourse on Rural America***

Conversations around authoritarian populism in the United States have pivoted around the rural white working class, either by outlining its composition and concerns or by critiquing its role and importance. Quick analyses after the British exit from the European Union and the election of Donald Trump’s populist regime, have both placed responsibility on the votes of this constituency. Whether or not this group was responsible for either result—questionable at best—they are important to focus on because of the ways they have been depicted in the media, and how they have been affectively claimed by the multifaceted movement that elected Donald Trump as United States president, an essential tactic of populist regimes and a “strategy certainly intended to show that a billionaire businessman could defend regular folks” (Hall 1979; Smith 2017).

Attempts to outline the voting motivations of the white working class focus on: continual losses of working white economic prosperity due to neoliberalism, xenophobic fears of immigration or international competition, and revivals of overt white racism. Among these studies *Strangers in Their Own Land*, Arlie Hochschild’s ethnographic work on whites in Southern Louisiana (2016) has been widely cited as a central text. Hochschild’s ethnographic analysis is centered on what she defines as the “deep story” of the right. Hochschild describes this story from the perspective of lower class whites who feel as though they have been standing stagnantly in line where “just over the brow of the hill is the American Dream” (Hochschild 2016, 101). While waiting in line, these whites become frustrated by observing other groups “blacks, women, immigrants, refugees” cut in front of them through the support of the national government (Hochschild, 2016, 103). According to Hochschild, for generations these whites have gotten no closer to the American dream and scapegoat their disappointment on those they view as having unfairly moved ahead of them through government assistance. Though Hochschild’s original focus was to attach these sentiments to tea party politics, she also explains how they help clarify the rise and popularity of Donald Trump.

Centering white working class priorities on this feeling of stagnation has also been productively described as a response to the decrease in the value of the “wages of whiteness in the absence of wages” (Narayan 2017, 2488). By this logic, supporting the Trump regime helps perpetuate the division between working class whites and nonwhite laborers, which provides white workers with greater racialized “dignity” despite their material poverty (Roediger 1991). Other analyses focus on the transition in the United States and the United Kingdom to post-industrial economies, and the white working voters left behind in this transition (Evans 2017; Vance 2016). Nancy Fraser theorizes this distinctively by arguing that Trump and Brexit voters were rejecting a doctrine of “progressive neoliberalism” which combined progressive charisma and liberal individualism with deindustrialization and neoliberal reform. This combination led to a white working class that felt the “injury of deindustrialization . . . compounded by the insult of progressive superiority, which routinely cast them as morally and culturally “backward” (Fraser 2016, 282).

These diverse characterizations pivot around shared feelings of cultural, political and economic loss. They help explain why the nostalgic platform offered by Trump’s regime was so appealing and why simple depictions of white voters motivated by economic loss are insufficient. Authoritarian populism trades in on the entire package of loss felt by the white working class of which economic distress is only one piece.

### ***1.3 Latinx Immigration and United States Authoritarian Populism***

In the run up to the 2016 United States presidential election, the Trump campaign identified ending unauthorized immigration across the US-Mexico border as one of its central goals. From a policy standpoint, the Trump campaign argued that stopping unauthorized immigration was a necessary priority for helping to reverse the blight of American unemployment and increasing crime. Popular support for this goal was solidified by stoking xenophobic fears, racially Othering Latinx immigrants and deploying rhetoric focusing on the building of a US-Mexico border wall. As Kaifa Roland notes: “[i]f Donald Trump was nebulous about nearly every policy he proposed during his campaign, two remained clear and constant: Mexicans and Muslims would be treated as threats to his great America” (Roland 2017, 443-444).

In public discourse much was rightly made of Donald Trump’s racializing references to Mexican migrants as “bad hombres” and “criminals, drug dealers, rapists etc.” multiple times in public comments (Mendoza-Denton 2017; Lee 2015). These comments have been critiqued for their support of the very questionable connection between crime and undocumented immigration (Camarota and Vaughan, 2009). The social life of this campaign rhetoric has already been documented in repeated cases of public school students chanting “build the wall” towards Latinx youth, including one reported “isolated incident” in the Albertville, Alabama public schools (Treadwell 2017). As chants like these make clear, this rhetoric is used to target documented as well as undocumented Latinx Americans and helps contribute to a greater project of creating Latinx “illegality” and protecting the exclusivity of “American” national identity and citizenship as white (De Genova 2005).

Along with being criminalized, undocumented Latinx immigrants were also held responsible for hurting the economy by supposedly taking jobs that should be worked documented citizens and suppressing wages, a speculation I refer to as the “folk theory of immigration”. Debating the folk theory of immigration was a theme of the 2016 presidential debates and a question that divided United States voters yet found broad support among Republican voters, 63% of whom thought immigrants had a negative impact on the economy, jobs and healthcare (Pew Research Center 2015). Once in office, one of the Trump government’s first actions was an executive order for a travel ban of immigrants from a list of Muslim majority countries, followed by introducing the Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment act, aiming to cut legal immigration in half to ostensibly increase employment opportunities for native workers (Nakamura 2017). The uncompromising support of these laws by the Trump regime is consistent with the nationalist goals of

authoritarian populism and marks a notable rupture from the discourse (but not reality) of the slow liberalization of immigration under the Obama administration.

## 2 Albertville, Alabama

Albertville is a small Northern Alabaman town of 22,000 located at the foot of the Southern Appalachians. The area was inhabited by the Cherokee people until their forced removal in 1830 as part of the Trail of Tears. It was first inhabited by whites in 1850 shortly before the beginning of the United States Civil War, and experienced significant growth in 1870 after it absorbed residents from neighboring states leaving areas where intense fighting had occurred. In 1891 the town was officially incorporated and named for the early town leader Thomas A. Albert (Foscue 1989). For much of the town's history, Albertville has been mostly white with a small Black minority (estimated at 1.9% percent today). Albertville has historically voted for Republican candidates, and hasn't voted for a Democratic candidate for president since 1976. In the 2016 presidential election, 82.8% of voters cast ballots for Donald Trump (In Marshall county where Albertville is located), a notably strong majority and a 3.56% increase from the 79.24% vote for Mitt Romney in the 2012 elections<sup>3</sup>. By voting patterns, Albertville was the 11th strongest supporter for Donald Trump in Alabama, his 4th most popular state in the country.

Whatever stock images of "Trump's America" emerge from this data, would likely be complicated with a quick walk down Albertville's main street past businesses "El Sol King Pollo" "La Popular" or "Tienda El Sol" buzzing with Latinx and white shoppers. In the 1990s the racial makeup in Albertville began to change as the poultry industry expanded and started employing more Latinx immigrant labor. This pattern is consistent with a regional increase in Latinx immigration to the South which scholars have dubbed as constituting the *Nuevo New South* (Fink 2003). Demographic data from 2010 estimates that Albertville is now 28.7% Latinx, a 112.3% increase from 2000<sup>4</sup>. This growth is consistent with that seen in rural areas nationally, where in fact 83% of rural population growth is due to international immigration (Johnson 2012). Albertville public schools are now 41% Latinx, a percentage that is expected to grow (Toner 2016).

### 2.1 Albertville and The Nuevo New South

The demographic shift in Albertville is part of a nation wide trend of increasing Latinx immigration away from "traditional receiving areas" such as California and Texas and towards the South: from 1990 to 2000 the Southern United States experienced a 104% increase in Latinx immigration, a growth of 2.25 million people (Furuseth and Smith 2006). This transition is argued to be the result of a combination of economic crises in Mexico and Central America, and a need for a larger low wage labor force during this period of Southern economic development (Striffler 2007). The physical mechanisms of this transition are unclear. But although there are dramatic cases of busses across the borders or help wanted adds placed in Mexican newspapers, most migrants simply follow family to where they have found advantageous work (Shwartzman 2013).

This transition has been widely studied as a force that has complicated the black/white binary that has structured the South, and upset the "Southern regionalism" the area is famous for (Furuseth and Smith 2006; Winders 2005). Though this larger shift involves a "Latinxization" of labor across many different sectors, the story of Latinx immigration in Northern Alabama is deeply connected to the poultry industry and how since 1993 "about half of all poultry processing has come to be concentrated

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<sup>3</sup> These numbers would lead one to assume that a large number of Latinx community members voted for Trump and some certainly did. Unfortunately, there is no data on the racial breakdown of the county votes. However, as will be addressed later in the paper I have reason to believe that many Latinx Americans abstained from voting for many reasons—including fear from intimidation.

<sup>4</sup> This number is likely even greater as the census tends to undercount minority groups and does not record any undocumented immigrants—the 2000 census number for Latinx population in Alabama was estimated to lower by at least 24,000 (Mohl, 2003).

in four low-wage, anti-union southern states—Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina” (Mohl, 2003).

In the 1950s, the South became the most dynamic poultry production region in the entire United States (Striffler 2005). This regional domination emerged from a combination of powerful southern poultry producers, an abundance of affordable land and a large quantity of cheap labor. Steve Striffler notes: “[t]he common feature of future poultry-producing regions in the South was poverty, enduring poverty” (2005, 36). As the popularity of poultry continued to rise in the United States over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to concerns over red meat consumption and increases in fast food chicken usage, the South became even more densely occupied by all of the links of the integrated poultry supply chain (Watts 2004). Poultry labor is low-paying, repetitive, difficult, dangerous and until the early 1990s African Americans were responsible for the majority of it (Schwartzman 2013). But citing “labor shortages”, and “Latinx work ethic” in the early 1990s poultry plant managers across the South began hiring more and more Latinx migrants to work in their plants. It has since been shown that this transition had much more to do with a suppression of Black pro-union labor in favor of a more exploitable workforce than simple labor shortages (Schwartzman 2013; Stuesse 2016). Transitioning to a more easily exploitable Latinx workforce (many of whom were undocumented) helped poultry integrators beat the notoriously thin margins of poultry production (Shwartzman 2013). Poultry integrators also benefited by having a workforce unfamiliar with United States labor laws and less likely to report injury—a necessity in the industry with one of the highest rates of injury in the country (Quandt et all 2006).

Void of major manufacturing and surrounded by hilly small-yield cotton fields, Albertville has many of the qualities that make for a good poultry town. After WWII, Albertville was chosen by the Alabama state legislature as the location for the first major poultry processing plant in the state. As the industry grew across the South more processing moved to Albertville and poultry became central to the economy: currently the top four employers in town are all poultry plants including massive integrators Tyson Foods and Wayne Farms. During the influx of Latinx immigration in the 1990s, local poultry plants followed trends seen regionally in the poultry industry and began to hire a higher portion of Latinx workers. Though poultry labor in Albertville was originally mostly white, by 2012 it was widely considered to be a job worked by primarily Latinx residents (Constable 2012). This reliance was made clear in 2011 when Alabama HB56—widely considered to be the harshest immigration law in the United States<sup>5</sup>—passed, and poultry processing plants emptied out overnight while Latinx labor relocated to neighboring states. Plants dealt with massive labor shortages, until eventually news of the widespread non-enforcement of HB56 spread. Latinx families quietly returned and new workers arrived to work the poultry lines. When Latinx community members were interviewed about the new populist Trump regime, many expressed the sentiment that they would weather the Trump government like they weathered HB56. Despite how the industry is frequently criticized by white residents for its smell, negative reputation and role sustaining the changing demographics of the town it is an undeniable economic pillar. As one interviewee stated frankly: “without poultry, Albertville wouldn’t exist”.

### **2.3 Ethnographic Methods**

In my preliminary ethnographic research, I spent one month living in a small trailer park in Albertville and working an internship in an early childhood head start center in a nearby town. While living in Albertville I met with many interlocutors, and used semi-structured interviewing tactics to ask general questions about life-histories and town changes, as well as more specific questions about the Trump election, the poultry industry and race relations in town. I used snowball style sampling, where I utilized an initial set of contacts to help me identify additional interviewees and then asked these secondary interviewees to help me identify more. I complemented these interviews with landscape

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<sup>5</sup> This designation is usually attributed to parts of HB56 that criminalize renting or providing transportation for undocumented immigrants and those that required schools to collect information on the documentation status of their students.

walks, where I recorded the vernacular landscapes built through everyday activities in different parts of town and logged details about continuities and disjunctions within the town's built and natural environment (Jackson 1984). As I spent more time walking, I began to integrate more questions about the town's landscape into my interviews, which opened a productive dialogue that was even more revealing than direct questioning about race or town politics.

My findings are roughly divided into three parts. Part one is shorter and addresses the inadequacy of using the folk theory of immigration to understand local support of Trump's presidency. Part two is more extended and examines how discourses of nostalgia and change were grappled with in conversations about the built environment and in political/personal movements to manipulate the landscape in different ways. Part three looks specifically at how Latinx placemaking resisted dominant nostalgic movements in Albertville.

In the following text I only use pseudonyms and avoid using any identifying personal information. In certain places I have changed non-essential details in order to preserve the anonymity of my interlocutors. This was especially important for my more vulnerable Latinx contacts, who I usually refer to in aggregate in order to prevent them from being individually identified<sup>6</sup>. It is also important to note that these conclusions are drawn from preliminary fieldwork and although I generally refrain from making large generalizations, I hope and plan to complicate my findings in the future when I complete additional fieldwork.

### **3 Economic Motivations of Albertville Voters**

Albertville is an ideal site to test theories claiming Trump's populist regime was popular in part due to the folk theory of migration: that migrants take low wage jobs that could be worked by citizens, and drive wages down by working for lower pay. Albertville experienced massive migration, yet still 28.3% of the town lives under the national poverty line (US Census 2015). After migration sped up in the 1990s, the unemployment rate for whites without a High School degree continued to grow, and wages for whites without a High School degree have fallen slightly (Peri and Wiltshire 2018). These rates are consistent with trends in counties without migration, and thus do not signify that downward motion is due to new migration. However, this trend of falling wages for unskilled white workers led me to expect that the folk theory of migration would help explain part of the reasons why county members voted so strongly for Donald Trump.

My first interview began on the front porch of my trailer before I had even taken my bags out of my car. It was a clear night and surprisingly cool for an Alabama summer, the sky void of light pollution and full of stars. The pleasant din of cicadas mixed with the acrid smell of poultry waste. Jason approached me as I pulled into the trailer park, noting the unfamiliar car and offered to help me with my moving. I immediately got flack for wearing my University of Georgia hat (my alma mater) in what Jason described as "Auburn Country" (the two schools are major Football rivals). Jason jocularly self identifies as "just a redneck" and he noted that he looked the stereotypical part: shirtless and patterned with tattoos. We got into talking about my research goals and Jason expressed that indeed the poultry industry was vital for much of Albertville, including the feed industry that supported it. I had difficulty suppressing my surprise when he claimed that immigration was not hurting the economy, but that immigrants and immigrant business were in fact adding to the tax base and helping the community.

In a full interview Jason expressed this view even more strongly by saying: "the Latinos in my opinion have saved the city of Albertville". Jason posited that Latinx immigration has kept the essential poultry industry afloat and helped positively impact population. He argued that with this increased population came increased business: "that's money to businesses, restaurants, rental properties, buying

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<sup>6</sup>This decision has the negative potential of homogenizing the Latinx community. However, I consider this risk less damaging than the potential of one of my Latinx interlocutors being identified based on real or imagined connections to pseudonyms in my work.

properties, to me the plant has opened up smaller towns". Jason went on to explain that this immigration pattern helps sustain established small businesses, create new businesses in different parts of town and prevent chain businesses from dominating the local economy. Shockingly, in all our conversations Jason expressed diametric opposition to folk theory of immigration.

Other townspeople expressed similar economic views about local migration. When I spoke with Jane who managed a public service she explained that despite having some reservations about the social effects of immigration to Albertville: "[migrants] are putting back into our community and I don't have a problem with it at all". When explaining how Latinx community members were helping the town economically, she laid out that "the [Latinx] businesses downtown are very industrious and they have contributed a lot to our economy here" and that "well not only do they patronize their own business, but they shop here". Val a self-employed babysitter explained that even her elderly father who she knows harbors some racist sentiment says "we would no longer have a poultry industry if it weren't for the Spanish" (referring to the Latinx immigrants).

Comparable sentiments were expressed in interviews with white business owners. In these conversations, my interlocutors argued that immigration had a strong "secondary effect" on the town economy, boosting the sales of business where migrants shopped. In interviews with realtors, I learned that migrant rentals pulled their businesses through the 2008 housing crisis, and that new migrant buyers had become essential sources of revenue. Jerry, a realtor from a prominent town family and recognized as one of the first realtors to rent to Latinx migrants, explained to me that though he had to get past his internal biases at first, Latinx migrants have now become most of his income source and in his opinion were preferable to white renters. He was pleased that many Latinx renters have gone on to buy properties (though he realized a dip in interest after the election of Donald Trump) and publicly supports the migrant community despite receiving threats for his initial renting to Latinx community members. Dave, another long time Albertville realtor said that he hired new Spanish speaking staff to help cater to the emerging market of second-generation Latinx home buyers, explaining that they are now striving towards an older version of the American dream: "they want a nice home, they want what we wanted in the 50s and 60s". When speaking more generally about poultry and immigrant labor he explained if one were to "take [away] the jobs, take [away] the immigrants, you take that economic base from us and we would be a ghost town". Andy, a used car salesmen corroborated this and remarked that his business now sells most of its cars to migrant workers. He concluded that "we pull a lot of good money off em" claiming that "before the Hispanics got here I was in the car business but it wasn't anything like this, it is what made my kickoff come".

Across all interviews, community members refuted the false hypothesis that immigrants have taken jobs from Albertville workers, citing the constant availability of poultry jobs as evidence that work was still available. Though many expressed negative racialized sentiment towards the Latinx community, when explaining why white unemployment was still high in the county, interviewees commonly blamed welfare programs as disincentives to low paying work, or attributed unemployment to regional drug issues with heroin and crystal methamphetamine within the white community<sup>7</sup>. Many people also argued that as better jobs became available white laborers became unwilling to work grueling poultry jobs any longer and thus didn't compete with migrant labor directly. Andy laid out this view particularly bluntly, saying: "the honest truth is our white generation is too damn lazy to work there and the Mexicans [sic] had to come in there and do the job".

Town attitudes about the economic benefits of immigration cohere with previously described economic models for Albertville, and other economic studies of the benefits of immigration for rural towns (Partridge 2008). Although this should not be surprising, it contradicts what many have claimed to be one of the main motivations of white rural support of Trump's authoritarian populist regime. This is especially significant considering Albertville has experienced a particularly dramatic influx of immigration *and* voted significantly in favor of Trump's government. If Albertville is indeed a useful

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<sup>7</sup> Opiod overdose deaths have risen 200% in the period between 2000 and 2016: this rise is significant in white populations in across the eastern half of the United States and in Alabama specifically (Rudd et all 2016).

case study to examine anti-immigrant discourse as I argue, then belief in the folk theory of immigration does not adequately explain the popularity of authoritarian populism in this area—and perhaps in other regions as well. Considering this, it is more useful to theorize motivations of authoritarian populist voters in regards to their nostalgic and affective attachments to certain larger conceptions of nation and community.

## 4 Nostalgic Attachment to Albertville Past

I learned a lot about Albertville while simply driving and walking around. By honing an art of noticing presences and absences I was able to begin to understand how this town chooses to remember its past—a process I followed up on in personal interviews. The obvious signs were all I could see at first. Confederate and Gadsden flags<sup>8</sup> hung from many porches and the staid downtown contained a surprising amount of Spanish signage in front of brightly colored businesses. The chamber of commerce celebrated the local Mueller fire hydrant factory with a 4,800-pound nickel-plated fire hydrant declaring Albertville the “fire hydrant capital of the world”. Yet, I had to drive away from the center of town to find commemoration of the more influential poultry industry in a four-foot fiberglass chicken (donated by Albertville Quality foods) placed in front of the indoor soccer fields. Though I saw multicultural optimism in a colorful mixture of English and Spanish on signs for businesses, I hit a personal emotional wall at the Confederate national flag and granite civil war memorial in the center of town. In encounters with and conversations about the local landscape with Latinx and White community members I gained essential information to understand how different actors were building contrasting stories in the material landscape. These conversations helped link community member beliefs with authoritarian populist ideologies, some in support, others in resistance.

### 4.1 Nostalgia in Conversation

I met Janice during “Main Street Music Fest”, Albertville’s country music summer celebration. Janice is white, middle aged, and was dressed head to toe in Alabama football apparel (including houndstooth shoes). She was working the Albertville Historical Society’s exhibit of local artwork of “historic places” in Marshall County where multiple paintings of barns and Albertville’s historic train depot celebrated Albertville’s agrarian past. When I explained that I was interested in the town’s history and the industry here, she finished my sentence by asserting, “so in other words then, why you’re in Albertville focus[ing] on poultry is [because] the Hispanics being here.” However, what followed was a more of a conversation about her experience of growing up in Albertville in the 1950s and 1960s, and the changes that have affected that reality.

In my conversation with Janice, I received a consistent image of past Albertville as a post WWII enclave without many of the “problems” facing the town today. This construction is resonant with Paulla Ebron and Anna Tsing’s theorization of the enclave, a 1950s Cold War suburban modernizing emergence where “[t]he good life was new made as white, protected from people of color; domestic rituals, and work-home separations were the guarantee for other barriers” (Ebron and Tsing 2017). Janice explained to me that Albertville used to be the town in Marshall County where all the elite families lived. Their houses were located on East Main Street, also called “Million Dollar Avenue”, and many of them could display their wealth by the black labor that “came everyday and stayed all day and did all the cooking and cleaning”. Other residents later added that today, many of these historic families have since moved to Guntersville, a neighboring town. Janice told me that in the past Albertville was a predominantly white town, and that the few Black people who lived in town “didn’t live out just anywhere. They all lived in one little section . . . [which was] called n—town” a term that she explained her father used until his death despite her advising him not to. Janice highlighted the safety of Albertville in the past, claiming children “could walk to town, ride your bicycle, no one would bother you” and that “people didn’t really worry about someone trying to pick you up or sell you something”. Both these short sentences, foreshadow two main changes that Janet associated with Latinx migration to Albertville: dangerous driving, and an influx of drugs and crime. Janice

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<sup>8</sup> Flag associated with the Tea Party and Libertarian movements

emphasized the lack of crime in Albertville's past by stressing that "at that time in the early mid 1970s no one even locked their doors at night" and that "a lot of people would leave their car keys in the car." Later she added, "everyone trusted everybody because everybody knew everybody". Janice finally gave a full theorization of Albertville's enclave and breakdown when she explained that:

"as the saying goes growing up and until the Hispanics got here, Albertville is a white Anglo-Saxon community that was filled with families, and hard working individuals, and law abiding citizens, community leaders, church leaders and everything—and very progressive for their time. It seemed like when the Hispanics started coming is like we just became stagnant. I think it's kinda like everybody was in shock and everything started happening and like I said the crime and all this stuff, and it's like "what do we do!" you know. It took a few years to try to get a handle on things until then. Not long before then people were leaving their keys in their car and keeping their houses unlocked!"

Janice presents past Albertville as white, prosperous, and safe. The few non-white residents were relegated to particular neighborhoods, and grand houses on East Main Street were symbols of town prosperity. The influx of Latinx immigration challenged the whiteness and safety of the enclave and the presumed prosperity that came from downtown and home aesthetics.

Janice explained that this rupture of the enclave could be now be seen across the town in the changing aesthetics after Latinx migration "as the overall appearance of the town started looking trashy and unkempt". This description was attributed to the densely populated trailer parks where many Latinx migrants originally lived in the early 1990s. Janice described these places as "like another world, another time zone", when families would butcher chickens and goats in the front yard—a clear contradiction of Albertville's modernizing enclave ideals. However, most of Janice's feelings of loss focused on the downtown area, which she explained used to be the heart of the city: crowded with businesses and shoppers. For Janice, downtown contained the history of the Albertville in each of its shops: "those stores, when the sons or daughters got of age, they went into business with their parents and then maybe when the parents retired, they took over, so it would be several generations of the same family having the business." A combination of big-box stores on the highway and a downtown renewal project that turned Main Street into a traffic-free mall caused many of these businesses to close. When Latinx migrants later took advantage of the empty storefronts and opened businesses on Main Street, Janice expressed her dismay saying, "one block was all Hispanic businesses, they just kind of took over, and took over what was the heart of downtown and that was discouraging to everybody." In this quote Janice, used a construction of "everybody" that excluded Latinx community members, and later used a similar construction to express her hope that more "local" businesses would continue to help change the face of the downtown.

Janice's viewpoints showed remarkable similarity with many of my other white interlocutors who I spoke with about the town. Though perhaps this can be attributed to my questioning style, Albertville was consistently described in terms of the town before and after migration. This assertion is supported by the materials in the Albertville Museum, which only reference the poultry industry in a few sentences, despite lengthy write-ups of small town businesses. Interviewees frequently expressed nostalgia for the Albertville of the past, which was safe enough for children to walk around unaccompanied and property to remain unprotected. The town was remembered as white, tight knit, prosperous and aesthetically pleasing with a busy downtown filled with (white) businesses and stately elite residencies on major roads. Latinx immigration was seen to have disrupted this trajectory. According to white respondents, crime and drugs were introduced into the community, and strange businesses opened up where long time Albertville residents didn't feel welcome.

Following Jeff Maskovsky's analysis of the Trump election as a desire to return to an earlier time, I argue that Janice's nostalgic desire to return to this enclave trajectory explains Albertville's strong support of Trump platform better than an economic hope of returning migrant jobs to the unemployed. This desire to "Make Albertville Great Again" is centered on a longing to return to a past America

with its racial and gendered ideologies attached (Maskovsky 2017). Though in economic terms, most white community members expressed ambivalence or support of the Latinx migrants, when speaking about the legacy of the town, white community members described a hope that the effects of Latinx migrant would be reversed or erased. This hope was embedded in the creation of the Albertville Downtown Master Plan and its enforcement by Keep Albertville Beautiful.

#### **4.2 Albertville Downtown Master Plan and Keep Albertville Beautiful: Strategic Historical Preservation**

In 2015 the City Council passed the Albertville Downtown Master Plan (ADMP) “to boost economic opportunity and job creation, restore retail and commercial activity, and revitalize [Albertville’s] downtown—the site of many community activities” (ADMP 2015, 17). The 235-page plan presents a variety of suggestions to return downtown to the state that it was in when Albertville was still considered to be “The Heart of Sand Mountain”. Though the document claims that Albertville “has been fortunate, however to experience population, industrial and economic growth even in the midst of a recession” it makes no mention of modern immigration in its text (ADMP 2015, 41). The part of this plan I focus on deals specifically with the aesthetic revitalization of downtown, most of which has been initiated by community organization Keep Albertville Beautiful (KAB). KAB is the entity most focused recreating the visual marker of the enclave through their goal “to increase economic and community development opportunities by enhancing the visual appeal of the city to citizens and visitors alike” (City of Albertville Website). This goal is supported through their role as unofficial enforcers of town ordinances, many of which are focused on returning Albertville to its “historic” look, which often means erasing or “spatially cleansing” the visual markers of Latinx homes and businesses in the town (Herzfeld 2006). This type of control over how people operate in public space, is an example of one of Michele De Certeau’s *strategies* through which the powerful exert their control over the weak (1998). These strategies aim to control how individuals progress through their routines by imposing a “grid of discipline” on everyday life (De Certeau 1998, xiv). Specifically in Albertville, they function to create a conceptualization of history “that is not a “return” to the past so much as an invocation of the past to justify the present” (Herzfeld 2006). De Certeau’s theorization of strategy and Michael Herzfeld’s concept of spatial cleansing are helpful for understanding the ways in which the ADMP and KAB attempt to regulate the affective dimensions of public space.

#### **4.3 Blight, Compatibility and History In the ADMP**

“Downtown is a different kind of retail area because it reflects the character of the town... When you’re in downtown Albertville you’re supposed to know you are here. It is unique. It is the heart of the community... And that’s’ what everyone hopes we can *recapture*.”—Nathan Broadhurst, Council President (ADMP 2015, 29; emphasis added).

The ADMP uses various persuasive tools including the concepts of *blight*, *compatibility*, and *history* to cast the downtown as a space in need of revitalization despite the success of the Latinx businesses that operate there. A major focus of the plan involves defining the downtown area as blighted because of its “irregular” growth patterns after 2000 (a period that coincides with the growth of Latinx business downtown). Though in certain sections of the report blight legitimately refers to condemned businesses, others particularly target the new Latinx businesses and their aesthetics by asserting in one case that “[o]n first inspection, downtown Albertville looks anemic and chaotic which is a major contributing factor to its blight” (ADMP 2015, 69). Other community members also picked up this coded language and described Latinx neighborhoods as “blighted” in daily speech. The ADMP deploys the concept of compatibility to argue that different businesses in the downtown must be compatible and cater to overlapping communities in order for the space to be a successful business district. This definition targets the current Latinx tenants downtown that run businesses that cater specifically to migrants by arguing that Latinx migrant shoppers aren’t compatible with those who would use other businesses downtown. Finally, the most powerful tool the ADMP leverages is its goal to restore downtown to its historical identity, a history that is articulated to include the cleansing of Latinx aesthetic changes in town. The ADMP does this by using persuasive language that reinforces the town’s supposed white identity by claiming that downtown must be returned to its original state

because: “[s]uccessful downtowns are those that leverage their unique history to draw visitors in who want to experience and celebrate that heritage with the town” (ADMP 2015, 42).

The ADMP also includes public visioning surveys that helped form the basis of the plan. Though the ADMP’s sample selection is not specified and statistics were not collected on the race of participants, data provided showing only 13.17% of participants as non-homeowners and 72.6% of participants as residents of Albertville for 10+ years makes it reasonable to assume that Latinx community members were underrepresented (although the document shows flyers in Spanish as part of its outreach plan). In survey results, most participants valued the aesthetics of the downtown space as the main priority: voting “façade improvement” as the most important infrastructure priority and “building an attractive community” as the value that should be most prioritized. This helps explain why the proposed “town color palate” has gotten the most attention in early phases of the plan. An additional part of the survey contains an aggregate of quotes expressing hopes and dreams for the downtown. Other than one notable exception (“Embrace our multiculturalism. Celebrate it.”), most expressed similar longing for a return to past success (ADMP 2015, 198-201). One participant claimed “I’d like to see an overall change in attitude around town. We are starting to see the blight takeover and it’s getting to be bad conditions in some places and we’re starting to get a bad reputation for a dying rundown city”, and another hoped “We want to be the heart of Marshall County and the heart of Sand Mountain again” (ADMP 2015, 198-201)

This justification for aesthetic and spatial cleansing has clear resonance with the rhetoric of Donald Trump. Just how describing Albertville as in “blight” creates the urgency to take radical steps to change the trajectory of downtown; the affective charge of Trump’s call to “Make America Great Again” contains within it the assumption that United States has reached a blighted state. Trump’s authoritarian populist rhetoric describing current politics as flawed, weak and inefficient allows his regime to argue for authoritarian measures to save the nation and return it to its former glory. This stance is well expressed in visual descriptions of blight in Trump’s inauguration speech such as his claim that “America’s infrastructure has fallen into disrepair and decay” and that “rusted out factories [are] scattered like tombstones across the landscape of our nation” (Inaugural Address). In interviews about the spread of street gang MS-13 in Long Island, Trump has used even more drastic racialized illustrations: “They have transformed peaceful parks and beautiful quiet neighborhoods into bloodstained killing fields. They are animals.” (Nakamura 2018) Both Trump and the ADMP rely on a redefinition of the (multicultural, liberalizing) present as blighted, to return to a more prosperous past. These rhetorical similarities are not coincidental. They gesture towards the affective nostalgia driving Trump’s authoritarian populist regime and the ADMP alike by stoking identity based moral panics to in turn justify governmental overreach. Although much milder than the Trump administration’s utilization of executive orders in early months, KAB has also contributed to overreach through their extralegal ordinance enforcement.

#### ***4.4 Keep Albertville Beautiful Ordinance Enforcement***

Danny is white, owns a business downtown, and has lived his entire life in Albertville. He has no shortage of town pride and sells Albertville High School paraphernalia alongside his other goods. Though Danny is famous around town for speaking his mind, due to his prominence I didn’t expect him to complain that the town business council was “too damn white” or argue that the council needed to “take the Hispanic community out of their crosshairs”. Danny explained to me that most of the downtown area around his shop died out and became abandoned when big-box stores took business away from Mom and Pop shops like his. He recounted that when these storefronts were finally filled with Latinx businesses in the mid 1990s people complained, to which he would reply “hell they were empty [before]!” but to no avail.

Danny had a cynical opinion of the ADMP and KAB, “it was more or less directed at Hispanic businesses,” he said. He was particularly annoyed at the enforcement of the town color palate (before it was even law), which caused many Latinx businesses to change their bright facades to dull earth

tones advocated in the ADMP. In resonance with my analysis, Danny claimed that the plan wasn't "put in place to help downtown move forward. It was to help downtown to go backwards".

KAB helped enforce this "backwards" vision through their historical renovation plans, which in early stages consisted in repainting facades in historic colors. I argue the main intention of this is to erase the visual presence of Latinx businesses. My argument is partially confirmed by "current" photos of downtown in the Albertville museum and on the 2006 town map which avoid clearing displaying Latinx businesses—a difficult feat considering the compactness of the downtown area. In interviews with one Latinx business owner I was told that a representative of KAB informed them that their newly repainted neon lime storefront "hurt their eyes", a claim that the owner found suspicious considering the bright red included in the color options the KAB representative recommended. Though KAB offered to provide the paint and labor to repaint the building, the business owners declined and repainted it themselves in an approved muted blue. In another interview I learned that KAB had also pressured the pink Latinx ice cream shop to repaint, because "they want a more uniform look" in town. KAB's actions also show similarity to the intentions behind an 2009 ordinance declaring English the town language, and pressuring Spanish language signs to all provide English translations. Though possibly unenforceable, it caused one business downtown aimed at providing services to immigrants to change their name to "Economy Tax", despite this name having only tangential relations to the actual business. The sign still stands, and it took me a few weeks to identify "Economy Tax" as a place where I might interact with immigrant interlocutors—a clear example of successful visual whitewashing.

KAB is also responsible for assessing the state of different neighborhoods in town. One interviewee described this process as problematic recounting how his partner "was really troubled by some of the really derogatory comments about places that were obviously not [occupied by] people who had grown up here" when she traveled with KAB in a van to do a community assessment. This was even more troubling considering the ordinance officer was one of the individuals she traveled with. Unsurprisingly, predominantly Hispanic neighborhoods received worse assessments than white ones. This same person also remarked that the town ordinance prohibiting residents from using indoor furniture outside was unfairly enforced focusing on Latinx neighborhoods.

Finally, KAB presents a monthly beautification award to those who "maintain clean and attractive properties in our community" (City of Albertville Website). The award celebrates normative white Southern lawn aesthetics—winners usually have a large lawn with tightly trimmed greenery. Based in their publicity, since 2012 I can only find evidence of one award being presented to a non-white family. Significantly, I spoke with local herbalists who argued these aesthetics had nothing to do with plantings from the past, but in-fact were motivated by modern techniques of chemical treatment, industrial plant development, and aesthetics advocated by "Southern Living" magazine.

The work of KAB pressures Latinx community members to change their presence in town and encourages a form of assimilationism that requires cultural aesthetic cleansing. They do this through a combination of strategies including positive reinforcement and active erasure leveraging the concept of history as justification for their actions. Although KAB has been described as harboring some racial animosity, I do not wish to argue that this is the main thrust of their actions—I met many KAB members that would argue the opposite. The racial politics of KAB and the ADMP are both more subtle and involve what I would characterize as a subconscious desire to promote aesthetics that redefine the community out of an assumed shared desire to return to its historic roots. This mobilization is not sterile but is an example of "heritage" that "creates aesthetic forms, historical narratives, politics of transmission, and, more generally, new social configurations" (Berliner 2012, 771). This recreates the visual and ideological markings of the enclave and represents a hope and longing for an Albertville that still maintains its white exclusivity.

## 5. Tactics of Latinx Resistance Through Place

Despite this strategic erasure, Latinx presence can still be felt around town, from footdragging businesses that haven't adopted the ADMP to Latinx homeowners that raise chickens and plant rows of corn in their front yard to the chagrin of KAB. In this final section, I will examine how Latinx community members resist their erasure through daily acts of political placemaking that allow them appropriate space and resist the narrative of the city being written through the ADMP and KAB. I do not wish to argue that these are intentional acts of resistance, or examples of Jim Scott's "weapons of the weak". Instead I return to De Certeau's theorization of *tactics* to describe the ways that subjects resist hegemonic control and unbeknownst to them simply by moving through their daily existence contribute "to contradictory movements that counterbalance and combine themselves outside the reach of panoptic power" (De Certeau 1998, 29). Similarly I argue that quotidian Latinx placemaking helps counterbalance aesthetic power in Albertville.

### 5.1 Few Opportunities for Outright Resistance

It is important to avoid the romance of resistance, and initially examine Latinx placemaking as a diagnostic of the power being resisted (Abu-Lughod 1990). Small acts of resistance by Latinx migrants speak to the power of hegemonic erasure waged by Albertville's government and more generally about the danger and impossibility they felt about any outright resistance of the national government or promotion of Latinx rights.

All Latinx and white community members against the Trump regime expressed that they were afraid of speaking out or publically organizing. In 2006, an immigrant march was organized in Albertville by community members and business owners to support immigration reform. However, Latinx marchers were shocked when they were met with open hostility: anti-march demonstrators outnumbering the marchers came from many neighboring towns to protest the parade. The march organizers left feeling frightened and defeated, and one white marcher told me she had been threatened to be fired for her participation. Editorials in the Sand Mountain Reporter the week after claimed they wished there was a counter march and one argued that "this is not immigration this is an invasion" (Sand Mountain Reporter 2006) (though there were other letters in support). Voting was also not considered a safe way to exercise political power. Many interviewees hoping to resist the election of Donald Trump felt apathy for voting, knowing the composition of the district and unlikely chance that their vote would count. Others expressed outright fear about not voting for the conservative party. Voting in Albertville happens on open tables where interviewees feared being seen voting for a liberal candidate. In one interview I was told one wouldn't be able to safely walk across downtown wearing a Democratic t-shirt.

But the most important power limiting outright Latinx resistance is the national and local discourse of illegality and deportability (De Genova 2005). All Latinx community members who I interviewed were at least close to someone who was undocumented. Once Trump was elected, a new fear about increased ICE raids and emboldened racist actions passed through the Latinx community. Many people compared the fear to that felt after the passage of HB56—a dark moment when even after tornados ravaged the town, Latinx families were too afraid to leave their damaged houses or seek out aid. Memories of the increased checkpoints and deportations during this period still weigh heavy on many in the Latinx community. In an interview with a worker at the Latinx Catholic church, I learned that for the first time churchgoers had started using the congregation's free immigration services program not to help move towards obtaining a United States passport, but to help their children become Mexican or Guatemalan citizens. Similarly, I learned that after the election of Trump, ESL class numbers had significantly dropped and fewer Latinx residents were buying property. One interviewee tied this to other subjugation in the South explaining that "for a long time to be honest with you we didn't feel the fear that African Americans did. We were like sort of in the background. The issue of race is between you two: black and white. But now [after the election of Donald Trump] it's like, it is inclusive over everything . . . now we can feel in our own skin what African Americans have been telling us they feel." This racial connection was corroborated in an interview with a

sympathetic white homeowner who explained that sadly “all the n— jokes that I’d heard when I first came [are] now Mexican jokes”.

Clearly in this setting, any opportunity for public resistance of the government was seen as dangerous and foolhardy. Latinx community members would have to find a different way to assert their presence and argue against their erasure. This helps to explain why Latinx residents have opted for their covert tactical resistance through place. Overt resistance is too risky and placemaking specifically counteracts erasure and forges a sense of permanence in a reality that is becoming more and more unstable.

### **5.2 Homes and Gardens**

Despite the best efforts of KAB, the presence of Latinx settlement still remains in the planting and decorations of front yards and gardens of residents. Though in this case these actions are read as tactical resistance, creating sense of place is a common trait of immigrants during the process of home making (Mendoza 2006; Smith and Winders 2008). Planting transnational botanicals, changing home colors or reworking yard space is a way of connecting to past history and memory (Krase 2013, 279; Nazarea 2013, 22) and appropriating space to build fields of knowledge in a new environment (Low 2009).

The most visually obvious marker of Latinx place and most likely to be commented on negatively by white community members, was the tendency to repaint homes in similar color to those used in Mexico and Guatemala. Latinx homeowners repainted in a variety of bright reds, pinks, greens, and in one often remarked upon case—neon orange. The colors formed an exciting pattern popping out unexpectedly within the sea of whites and earth tones preferred by white community members. One white interviewee involved in the historical preservation society lamented that the house of a historic Albertville family was now painted bright pink, and another realtor claimed that it becomes more difficult to sell houses next to brightly colored ones to white buyers, though it became easier to sell them to Latinx buyers.

The sentiment of the realtor expressed an interesting after effect of Latinx home decoration, in that it turns white enclave ideals against themselves. In this sense “white flight” can also be read backwards as Latinx neighborhood development, and placemaking can be viewed as an agent motivating neighborhood change. By shifting landscape norms through the daily process of homemaking, Latinx community members “use” white racism to help create denser Latinx neighborhoods.

Normative Southern front lawn aesthetics usually feature neat pruning and slight uses of color that accentuate a large grassy front lawn and save their more extensive flower gardens for behind the house. Usually lawns like these are chemically treated to prevent the spread of weeds and promote a carpet like quality. Latinx gardens challenged this by featuring an array of colorful plantings in the front yard, spilling out of planters or raised beds as well as a lack of focus on lawn grass propagation. Latinx gardens also frequently made prominent use of materials and featured statues of the Virgin Mary or assemblages of significant items such as trophies, toys and figurines. One Latinx interviewee expressed that she could still keep track of all the different places she had lived by spotting the rose bushes that grew outside of all of them, highlighting the role of plantings in resisting erasure even in precarious housing conditions.

Additionally, many Latinx interviewees described planting vegetables (especially corn) in front yards of houses as markers of Latinx placemaking. Many houses in town had thick rows of corn on one side, often extensive enough that an entire portion of the property was obscured. Jane (quoted before) said she believed that her mother’s house had become nearly impossible to sell because of the field of corn her neighbors had planted in their front yard. Chickens and sometimes-even goats could be spotted wandering around Latinx yards challenging the sonic enclave environment with their squawks and bleats. On tours around Latinx gardens, I was able to get the stories of plantings, some of which had traveled across the border with their owners and others of which were planted because of their similarity to native Mexican botanicals. Certain plantings—avocado and mango trees for instance,

were pursued even despite their difficulty fruiting in the Alabama climate. Prickly pear cactus, considered a weed by native Alabamans, yet pictured centrally on the Mexican flag was planted profusely by Latinx gardeners. There was a surprising coalition between white heirloom gardeners who didn't use pesticide and Latinx gardeners who admired the "pigweed" and "goosefoot" that grew as weeds in their yard, but are valued as grains and leafy greens in Mexico. When a Latinx neighbor asked them for these "weeds", they obliged and began propagating them for sale at a Latinx grocery store. In this particular cases two parties that resisted normative Southern lawn aesthetics were brought together to encourage greater challenges to the norms.

This nostalgic bricolage was not created to combat the Trump regime, and yet it directly challenged the desires of authoritarian populism and powerful town strategies of erasure by gesturing towards an entirely different future. Though revering this placemaking may appear to be naïve multiculturalism—I argue that at this moment it is a powerful way to resist the hegemonic redefinition of Albertville and the United States as white. If we believe that a large part of the authoritarian populist movement operates through the mechanisms of nostalgia, then recognition of the integration of the "Other" in what gets deployed as the "we" becomes essential. Indeed in this dark political moment rightly critiqued multiculturalism and recognition (Taylor 1994) begins to look more productive. This is not an optimistic politics, but a desperate one where visibility and recognition of the history of non-white members of the United States becomes a challenge to national politics.

## **6 Conclusion: Nostalgia and Resistance in the Age of Trump**

On one particularly pleasant day, I found myself with some open time to do some walking—my usual activity when I didn't have impending interviews. I strolled across town noting the different things that caught my eye, empty lots that plants had begun taking back and cactuses bearing large crops of prickly pear were my main focus until I reached the town graveyard. Walking under the shade of the large water oaks, I examined the oldest graves in the cemetery. Many were decorated with confederate iron crosses of honor and displayed small confederate flags buffeting in the slight breeze. Walking outward from this old center where the confederate graves lay I watched the makers become larger and more polished as death dates became more recent. Newer tombstones with modern sandblasted engraving technology had photos and favorite activities imposed on to them: music notes, horses, cars, and dance shoes. As I continued to explore this section I began to spot more and more traditionally Latinx names. Design of plots shifted too—many of them now had shrine like quality with objects scattered around a central marker and flowers emanating out of the middle. They formed as pleasant swell of color within the sea of grays. Wandering around the graveyard it was hard not to feel a little hopeful about the future of Albertville. Despite town struggle, things *were* changing in insuppressible ways. Despite how people might try—it is nearly impossible to grip the past tightly enough to prevent change. As I started to make my way back to town, the high school cross-country team ran into the yard to train under the protection of the tree cover. While they passed me, the diversity of the team was notable and I watched the racially mixed groups of runners chatting and laughing together. Though I entered the yard expecting to find well-celebrated confederate graves, I left thinking much more about the team that circled around me and the future they were enacting.

Counteracting the forces that helped support the rise of authoritarian populism means working against the nostalgic construction of the nation that the movements center on. This necessitates recognizing that "the people" imagined by the liberal secular project is not hegemonic but just "a we like any other" (Harding 2017), and that the new rendering of the nation by authoritarian populism must be combated. Any emancipatory politics must reckon with this project and though this may have a higher-level strategic solution, a redefinition begins with simplest acts of resistance—even ones that are unintentional. Demonstrations that reveal marginalized communities can "alter our perceptions about who *the people* are, [by asserting] fundamental freedoms that belong to bodies in their plurality" (Butler 2017). Public expressions of multiculturalism defy the whiteness of nation and challenge the existence of the white enclave imagined by right wing movements. Though these major projects rely on unconscious tactical resistance, they contain a rare possibility of counteracting the dangerous nostalgic machinations inherent in the current spread of authoritarian populism.

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## About the Author(s)

**Brian Walter** is a doctoral student cultural anthropology at the University of California-Santa Cruz. His research is broadly concerned with the connection between humans, landscape and the built environment and more specifically: the cultural memory held in the material world and its ramifications for community formation, identity and future politics. He has an undergraduate degree in anthropology and philosophy from the University of Georgia and entered academia after two years of teaching high school in the Arkansas Delta, and two years working in a high school based social work agency in South Brooklyn.

The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI) is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless ‘growth’, climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

For more information see: <http://www.iss.nl/erpi>  
or email: [emancipatoryruralpolitics@gmail.com](mailto:emancipatoryruralpolitics@gmail.com)

