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Predatory Inclusion in Higher Education:
Labor and Financial Exploitation at a Predominantly White Institution in the Era of Neoliberal
Multiculturalism

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Abstract

In the summer of 2020, racial justice movements that emerged in response to the murder of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin passionately decried the systems and institutions at fault and complicit in still perpetuating racial discrimination towards Black people, as well as Indigenous and other People of Color (BIPOC). As a response to these racial justice demands, college institutions pushed for diversity in their student body and across college affairs in order to appear like they were effectively responding to student demands. However, this fight against racial inequality and inequity began long before during the post-Civil War era when, as W.E.B. DuBois has written, America's enduring problem of the color line continued to structure race relations in the nation. Formally, the work to desegregate higher education began in the 1960s after the Civil Rights Act was passed. Over time, higher education consequently became an increasingly popular commodity as it was framed as a necessity to access better and higher-paying jobs, where going to college became framed as an inclusive opportunity for increasing racial social mobility. As BIPOC students gain opportunities to enroll in higher education, it is important that we examine the relationship between institutions' DEI efforts and the experiences that people with "diverse" racialized bodies have within them. To further explore this relationship, I conducted in-person interviews with 14 students who self-identified as BIPOC and were currently enrolled at Macalester College, a self-proclaimed racially progressive liberal arts college located in the Twin Cities less than ten miles away from where Floyd had been murdered. Ultimately engaging with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's concept of predatory inclusion but applying it to the context of higher education instead of the housing market, my results reveal that there are two general forms of exploitation that BIPOC students reported experiencing: labor and financial. As a result, I conclude that the DEI

efforts promoted and promised by the college do not reflect the true experiences of BIPOC students who are being tokenized and exploited by the institution instead of being offered material redistribution or a fair path to upward mobility.

Introduction

With road construction barriers blocking off Macalester Street from Grand to Summit Avenue, students of Macalester fill the street with eating, dancing, laughter, and pure joy. This annual gathering is known as the C-house block party, with the Cultural House (C-House) in the center of it all, and is a formal event to kick off the programmatic year and welcome the Macalester community. The C-House is a “living-learning community for students interested in liberatory education, community engagement, and anti-racism movement building” (Macalester College. “Cultural House.” n.d.). The history of the C-House dates back over 50 years and has grown to be of cultural significance to Macalester, a self-proclaimed racially inclusive college. Adopted by the Lealtad-Suzuki Center (LSC), a center that focuses its programming to support identity collectives and students from marginalized groups including BIPOC and first-generation students, the C-House has become a core space for students to gather. Aside from the C-House block party, it also hosts “In the kitchen with...” events, an open mic, and is the residential option for first-year students. “In the kitchen” is a program that brings students together over food and conversation; it is hosted by different cultural student organizations, identity collectives, or other students who want to share a cultural touchpoint through food. The annual open mic is a traditional spoken word or open mic event that celebrates and reflects on “the significance of oral traditions in communities of color” (Macalester College. “Cultural House.”

n.d.). The C-House also becomes the home for first-year students enrolled in a first-year course whose course structure and thematic topics aligns with the core values of the C-House.

Despite being a resource for BIPOC students on campus, Macalester College's campus has continued to be a racial justice hotbed as plans for demolition of the Cultural House were announced last year. In November of 2023, after months of silence, an announcement regarding the C-house was made via the Mac-Daily, an email service that is sent out to all Macalester members (students, faculty, and staff) every day. The statement submitted to the Mac-daily stated: "C House programming will move into a renovated and expanded LSC space in Kagin Commons" (Figueroa & Salomon, 2023). Outraged by the planned demolition of the Cultural House (scheduled for summer 2025), the First-Generation, Low-Income Student Union (FSU) and the Macalester Undergraduate Workers Union (MUWU) held an open rally for students to speak out against the plans on Monday, April 8, 2024. One student voiced her worries "about finding a community as a formerly undocumented student at a PWI," as the Cultural House had become "really important for [her] and a lot of the residents as well" (Stern, 2024). The plan to demolish the Cultural House has left many students heartbroken and outraged, as it takes away the physical community space that historically has given BIPOC students and cultural organizations at Macalester, a predominantly white institution (PWI), a space of their own.

Amidst the currently on-going conversation to preserve the Cultural House between students and senior executive administrators, the question emerges: how can we make sense of what is happening in this moment as BIPOC students express their disappointment towards a college that markets itself as racially liberal and inclusive but is nonetheless choosing to demolish the Cultural House and is otherwise, from their point of view, falling short?

In order to answer this question, I interviewed 14 BIPOC identifying students about their financial situation and their social and academic experiences at Macalester. Then situating their responses within the history of desegregation in higher education, I theorize about how to understand the students' perspectives within the period of "neoliberal multiculturalism." Defined by Jodi Melamed as a political framework that combines neoliberal economic policies and multiculturalism, the period of neoliberal multiculturalism played out in higher education by seeing more BIPOC students admitted while making them vulnerable to the specific ways neoliberalism infiltrated higher education. Engaging with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's idea of predatory inclusion, this paper argues that the contradictions of students' experiences at colleges like Macalester reveal how racial exploitation is playing out in higher education in the post-civil rights era.

Literature Review

The History of (De)Segregation in Higher Education: Shifting Politics of Race

Before the Civil Rights Movement, it was legally and socially acceptable for higher education institutions to deny students of color admission. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled state-sanctioned segregation as legal under a "separate but equal" doctrine in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (163 US 538 [1896]). This was arguably one of the most well-known cases that represented *discriminatory exclusion* because it legalized racial segregation across the United States. In this case, Justice Henry B. Brown wrote the majority, which "contended that while the object of the 14th Amendment was to enforce absolute equality of the races, it was not meant to abolish all racial distinctions" (Stefkovich, 1994, p. 408). Discriminatory exclusion refers to denied access based on identities to certain institutions, rights, privileges, opportunities, etc. that results in

advantaging those who are permitted access to those opportunities. The decision of the Court upheld Louisiana's right to make classifications and decisions based upon race or color and encouraged discriminatory exclusion in education systems as it permitted all-White universities to deny African American students admission into those institutions, preventing them from receiving a higher education.

This racial segregation in education was a means to maintain a racial order that racially subjugated African Americans after the Civil War ended the legalization of slavery. Post-Civil War, we see a fluctuation of the racial order that shifts away from formal slavery to formal abolition although discriminatory exclusion continued into the Jim Crow era. Over the course of, what became known as the Civil Rights Movement, we see multiple attempts in fighting against injustices that upheld racial segregation. The first attempt to desegregate higher education in the U.S. was made in 1933 by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the *Hocutt v. Wilson* case, and it was the first lawsuit on behalf of an African American student who was denied admission to a college due to race. This case was dismissed due to the *Plessy* verdict, under the separate-but-equal doctrine, which made segregation in education the law of the land. Five years later, the first NAACP case, *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*, reached the Supreme Court. In this case, Lloyd Gaines was denied admission to the University of Missouri Law School, though there was no separate African American law school, but there was a practice (in Southern states) that offered to pay for the denied students to enroll at a separate institution in an *adjacent* state. This practice still gave students of color opportunities to enroll in higher education, however, the court found that “this practice placed an undue burden on students of color because they still had to pay the costs associated with living away from home” (Baber, 2015, p. 12). It was a form of racial subordination because it further exploited

BIPOC students, through housing costs, while still dictating their enrollment (or lack thereof) into certain institutions due to race.

The Civil Rights Movement sparked a movement for people to challenge the separate-but-equal doctrine. As Jodi Melamed argues, the general historical period following WWII can be understood as representing a shift in the racial order from one of formal state racism to one of formal state anti-racism, when—as Mary Dudziak (2011) argues in *Cold War Civil Rights*—Soviet attempts to characterize the US as racist prompted it to take on a more tolerant position and fostered a more receptive context for racial reforms aimed at inclusion. In 1950 *Sweatt v. Painter*, an African American student sought admission to the University of Texas Law School, in which a lower state court ordered that Texas establish a law school for African Americans. A separate law school for African Americans was quickly established; it took place in the basement of an African American college with two African American attorneys as faculty. It was argued that “the school was woefully inadequate and Sweatt again sued the state” (Lomotey et al., 2012, p. 79). The quality of the African American law school was not equal to that of the white students. This push for anti-discrimination and social justice led to arguably one of the biggest education cases to reach the Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

In 1954, *Brown* looked to address the question: Is racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional per se? This case calls into question the Fourteenth Amendment that requires equality, in which Chief Justice Earl Warren overruled *Plessy* and declared the “separate-but-equal” clause unconstitutional. Separate institutions between white and African American students did not warrant equal opportunities for African American students, and that is what the *Hocutt*, *Sipuel*, and *Sweatt* cases all shared in common—all three cases argued against

Plessy and the separate-but-equal doctrine. The Sweatt case was especially compelling because it addressed “the equality issue of Plessy in terms of the effects on students and their education opportunities, rather than equality of revenues” (Lomotey et al., 2012, p. 80). Essentially, what those cases argued was that though there was a literal and physical alternative for African American students, that alternative did not provide the same long-term effects and opportunities that all-White institutions provided for their students.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed as a response to the Civil Rights Movement. This act outlawed discrimination based on identity factors, which included race, and it was not until two years later that *Brown* was applied to higher education. With the Cold War politics being established, the white elites “could no longer support formal structures of inequality...[instead, they} promot[ed] rhetoric of equality while covertly maintaining a system of White privilege through less visible practices of racism” (Barber, 2015, p. 13). This describes the establishment of formal systems that included “multiple tiers” of higher education institutions. In 1956, several African Americans students sought admission to a law school, and when denied, led to the case of *Florida, ex rel. Hawkins v. Board of Control* (350 US 413 [1956]). Florida had already created an African American law school at Florida A&M University, which is why Hawkins and other students were denied admission. This lawsuit was originally filed before *Brown*, but did not reach the Supreme Court until after the *Brown* case decision. This led to the Florida Supreme court unanimously agreeing that the state universities must accept all qualified applicants.

Plessy, *Hocutt*, *Gaines*, and *Sweatt* were all cases that represented a period of formal exclusion, as they involved justified and legalized discriminatory exclusion and racial

segregation. The Civil Rights era initiated a period of formal inclusion. *Brown* and *Hawkins* were cases that represented the shift into the new inclusionary era—something that can be understood through Melamed’s conceptualization of the post-civil rights era of *liberal multiculturalism*.

Liberal multiculturalism is a political construct that emphasizes multiculturalism by recognizing and respecting diverse cultural and ethnic groups. A key component of liberal multiculturalism is pluralism; pluralism rejects dominant culture and pushes for a society where multiple identities coexist peacefully among society (Omi & Winant). According to Melamed, we can make sense of the period of formal inclusion as part of the timeline of racial capitalism because while the state formally pretends to be nondiscriminatory and inclusive, Melamed proposes that racial capitalism simply found innovative ways to both include and still make a profit off of historically-excluded-but-now-included racial groups.

Ultimately, all these cases led to the Higher Education Act of 1965. This act was “designed not so much to strengthen institutions themselves as to further a social case—providing equal opportunity— through higher education” (Keppel, 1987, p. 50). This act consisted of eight parts (or titles), in which title I, III, and IV dealt more closely with issues of student financial aid. The 1965 version of the Higher Education Act placed the majority of its attention “on providing college access for both the poor and the talented” (Keppel, 1987, p. 57). The 1965 act and its amendments were afloat until 1986, and it was revised during its 21 years, most notably in 1972 and 1980. In 1972, the revisions to the act led to the establishment of the Pell Grant Award, which I will dive further into in my analysis on financial aid. While the Higher Education Act laid out the framework of how institutions should provide (financial) support for students, the intended goal of the establishment was to expand higher education opportunities. Taken altogether, this period of liberal multiculturalism in education therefore was premised on

the notion that diverse inclusion and equal opportunity should form the foundation for racial reforms after the post-WWII racial break.

However, as Melamed's argument highlights the racial order alterations that played out after WWII, formal state narratives espoused greater racial tolerance and inclusion via melting pot assimilation, while in practice, racial incorporation and diversification would remain constrained by the kinds of relations that were allowed to emerge under racial capitalism. Liberal multiculturalism was constituted with a Cold War ideological contest with the Soviet Union wherein the US aimed to show that racially minoritized subjects throughout the world and at home could achieve upward mobility through hard work under American capitalism. Later during the period of neoliberal multiculturalism, the racial capitalist economy would transform even more to demand that racially minoritized persons themselves become rationalized market subjects able to create abstract profit in the financialized economy. As a result, this study argues that the "racial problem" that has vexed American race relations since the end of the Civil War continues into the present in distinct and continuous ways in the context of higher education that reflect these political economic transformations. Rather than being a solution offered to help "solve" the issue of racial exclusion, exploitation, and subordination, higher education remains an unresolved site for the negotiation of the racial problem of (now) the 21st century.

Why this remains the case in higher education is a complicated question. Part of the explanation, however, involves the complex structure of colleges and universities as *racialized* organizations embedded within the larger political economic field. As Ellen Berrey shows in *The Enigma of Diversity: The Language of Race and the Limits of Racial Justice*, for example, the goal of diversity is broken down into political and organizational decisions. An organizational decision, for example, looks at how diversity is "good for organizations, good for profits, good

for learning, and even good for white people” (Berrey, 2015, p. 8). A political decision addresses the issue of racial representation. The intent of diversity is to induce racial integration, however, it “largely reflects the interests, worldviews, and experiences of powerful decision makers and their most important constituents — who may include people of color but by and large are white and well-off” (Berrey, 2015, p. 7). In this case study, the push for diversity at Michigan served the purpose of “preserving affirmative action while concealing the reality of racial inequality through legal arguments and relentless messaging,” which reinforced the racial order (Berrey, 2015, p. 11). This split between political and organizational racial logics and rationales within higher education institutions often consequently enable the pairing of seemingly inclusive symbolic rhetoric with materially exploitative or unequal organizational practices. As a result, higher education remains a place where the incomplete promise of equitable inclusion made during the post-civil rights and post-WWII era continues to stagnate and where covert forms of racism and exploitation endure and are maintained.

Predatory Inclusion in Higher Education

Given this shift from formal racial exclusion to formal racial inclusion in higher education, how can we make sense of the racial structure as it has innovated itself in higher education during this time? Turning to Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor’s theory of “predatory inclusion” in *Race for Profit*, the concept can be helpful to conceptually understand both the general character of exploitation under post-WWII racial capitalism and the particular distinction between the two periods of liberal multiculturalism and neoliberal multiculturalism. Predatory inclusion is defined as a process that offers limited opportunities for marginalized groups to access certain aspects of economic life, but is structured in such a way that exploits these groups and reinforces their subordination. During the period of racial exclusion, Taylor’s theory says

that African Americans were denied mortgages, redlined, and legally disallowed from neighborhood integration. In the post-civil-rights period absent formal legal means to segregate African Americans from White people in the housing market, Taylor argues that the state turned to predatory inclusion, which allowed integration but under exploitative and conditional terms.

During the period of liberal multiculturalism, the 1968 Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act was established. This outlawed discriminatory housing practices such as redlining, as it perpetrated discrimination and exclusion, and it had also opened up the housing market to African Americans. In the book, Taylor uses the concept of predatory inclusion to make sense of how Black homeowners were allowed to own property through the introduction of predatory lending into real estate practices, such as “homes for sale on land installment contracts (LICs), without fully resolving the conditions that gave rise to those practices in the first place” (Taylor, 2019, p. 7). Under early models of contract lending common in the late 1940s-1960s this exploitation could be understood as a form of indirect labor exploitation as many new Black homeowners were not fully aware of the harsh terms of pseudo-ownership imposed by the contracts and found themselves trapped in payment arrangements that took up a large bulk of their wages. Later during the subsequent period of neoliberal multiculturalism, however, predatory mortgages took on a financialized dimension as federal securitization of subprime mortgages resulted in not only the indirect labor exploitation of contract buyers but also the financial exploitation of them as profit-generating components in a larger market system that trades on the futures of the housing stock. Essentially, Taylor argued that while predatory inclusion opened up homeownership to African Americans symbolically and politically, there were no entities that practiced facilitating or granting actual equal opportunities or material

support for new Black homeowners, instead emphasizing how racial inclusion could still sustain racial exploitation in the post-WWII era through both labor and financial exploitation

Similar to homeownership, then, higher education can also be understood as another arena where both the “race problem” and predatory inclusion are playing out. Because a college degree has become a near requirement for relatively high-paying and prestigious middle-class jobs, higher education remains “an important tool of economic mobility in the United States” (Seamster & Charron-Chénier, 2017, p. 200; Houle & Addo, 2019). Like homeownership, obtaining a college education can be prohibitively expensive, and for those with limited economic resources, this can already be a major barrier. With the expenses of tuition and other necessities of higher education, college students with limited economic resources have turned to loans which traps them in a condition of debt that they are often unaware of until after they graduate. There is an upward trend of racial disparities in college student debt —“black young adults are more likely to default on their loans than white young adults after leaving college and report greater concern about affordability of student loan payments” (Houle & Addo, 2019, p. 563).

In a study that examined predatory inclusion via online education in nonprofit and for-profit universities, researchers established four components of predatory inclusion (Smith et al., 2024). The first component relies on the historic *exclusionary* practices that have restricted access to that good or service. In the context of higher education, this would refer back to the rejection of BIPOC students into all-White institutions. The second component looks at “an alternative provider [that] enters the market and offers ‘a close substitute,’ framed as ‘expanding access to a valuable opportunity’” (Smith et al., 2024, p. 5). This would refer to segregation, where institutions created separate schools for African American students. The third and fourth

components are the two that my study dives further into. The third component looks at “alternative providers target[ing] marginalized groups either directly or through de facto methods” and the fourth component of predatory inclusion says that it takes a cost-benefit risk analysis approach, meaning it compares the projected or estimated costs and benefits associated with an institutional decision to determine whether it makes sense from a business perspective (Smith et al., 2024, p. 5). This fourth component reflects, I argue, the shift in the racial order from a liberal multiculturalism era to the following period of neoliberal multiculturalism. During this period, neoliberal market logics transformed the rationale for racial inclusion through law that was most dominant during the period of liberal multiculturalism into a rationale for inclusion expressed through racial subjects’ utility for making profit and facilitating market exchange. Though nonprofit colleges and universities serve the purpose of reinvesting into programs and services that help students while for-profit colleges and universities serve the purpose of generating profit for owners and shareholders, research indicates that similar exploitation is present in *both* types of institutions. In my specific study I consequently examine the “quality of the product,” i.e. experiences at a higher education institution, for racially marginalized students. Looking at the ways in which BIPOC students are recruited and the quality of their experiences while in college as both products and consumers, my study looks at the gaps in what the “DEI” institution says and what it does to reveal the ways predatory inclusion is playing out in higher education today.

Case Study: Macalester College

Macalester is a left-leaning, self-proclaimed racially inclusive nonprofit small liberal arts college located in the Twin Cities. As they value and encourage student-activism on campus grounds and beyond, Macalester has a history of student activism that still plays out today. In

recent past years, there was a student-organized protest that forced the senior administration team to hear the cries of students, faculty and staff on the mistreatment of BIPOC and international students on campus. In November of 2021, Macalester students, faculty, and staff staged a four and a half hours sit-in in the Kagin ballroom and described the themes of racism and racist incidents that speak to the academic pressures, financial struggles, and lack of institutional support for BIPOC members of the community. Students felt that administrators did not respond appropriately. During the sit-in, some senior staff members walked off the stage and exited the building after only an hour. After the sit-in, the President and Provost sent out an email about future plans in response but did not address the immediate needs of the BIPOC students who issued grievances there that day.

This event became widely known on campus as the “Kagin sit-in,” as students used it as an opportunity to call *in* the college about the inequality and inequity within the institution. That is because Macalester College explicitly promotes its core values as “internationalism, multiculturalism, and service to society”. In practice, one might expect Macalester to also place an emphasis on institutional support for the student bodies who make up the internationalism and multiculturalism it markets as central to its identity. However, as the Kagin sit-in showed, despite the college’s claim to be a racially diverse, inclusive, and equitable institution, racial tensions that erupted during the uprisings in 2020 continued to spill into life on college campuses as the “racial problem” remained unresolved both in schools and in the wider city.

In response to the Kagin sit-in, Macalester renamed the Department of Multicultural Life to the Lealtad-Suzuki Center for Social Justice (LSC) in order to include two significant BIPOC women in the history of Macalester. Dr. Catherine Deaver Lealtad was Macalester’s first African American graduate and Esther Torii Suzuki was the first Japanese-American student at

Macalester. Additionally, Suzuki came to Macalester at the age of 16 after being released from a Japanese detention camp because of her acceptance to the college. Macalester has a history and current practice of embracing liberal multiculturalism. The college currently still has the Kofi Annan Institute for Global Citizenship (IGC), which is a collaborative space for “reimagining what a world that is focused on equity and justice *could* look like” (Macalester College. “Kofi Annan Institute for Global Citizenship.” n.d.). The building is named after Kofi Annan, who was a Macalester alumni that went on to become a Ghanaian diplomat and serve as Secretary-General of the United Nations. The building includes the Center for Study Away and the Community Engagement Center.

As part of their anti-racism initiatives, the college also is an active member and a co-founder of the Liberal Arts College Racial Equity Leadership Alliance (LACRELA), which “unites Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities across the United States to collectively address issues of racial diversity, equity and inclusion on their campuses” (University of Southern California. “Liberal Arts Racial Equity Leadership Alliance (LACRELA).” n.d.). A former anti-racism initiative is the Expanded Educational Opportunities (EEO) program. This program began in 1968 as an effort to expand the diversity of the student body, and it essentially “changed the Macalester campus and culture through changing student demographics, [and] increased awareness around issues of race” (Macalester College. “Multiculturalism at Macalester College: EEO.” n.d.). Overtime, administration continuously made budget cuts to the program that led to one of the most well-known and intense student protests in Macalester history: the Student Takeover of 77 Mac in 1974, in which 21 students barricaded themselves inside the business offices from September 13th until September 24th. In 1983, Macalester *voluntarily* sacrificed the federally funded Special Services Grant that supported parts of the Minority programs office,

demolishing the EEO program as an active part of Macalester. The EEO program essentially led to the establishment of the Cultural House. Initially, the C-House began with the opening of the Black House in 1969, the American Indian Center in 1970, and the Hispanic House in 1973. In 1984, these cultural houses suffered from the financial cut of the EEO program, as they were reduced to a few rooms. Finally, in February of 1987, the Cultural House that was previously located on Cambridge street, consolidated all the previous cultural houses into one house. All that is left is the Cultural House that now resides on Macalester street. However, the plans for deconstruction of the C-house becomes a plan of demolition to physical embodiment of Macalester's core value of Multiculturalism, leading to believe Macalester to be a strong case study.

Method

In order to investigate Macalester as a case study, I conducted two rounds of in-person interviews. As a fellow BIPOC student, I was able to build a rapport with participants during interviews. This led to participants being open and honest about their college experiences as BIPOC students at a predominantly white institution. The first round of interviews was conducted in the fall semester of the 2023-2024 school year, and looked to examine the question: as demands for racial justice have been made of organizations since 2020, what do BIPOC students' experiences reveal about DEI efforts that began in response at higher education institutions? Upon analyzing the data collected from those interviews, the second round, conducted in the spring semester, looked to examine a refined version of the question: how can we make sense of what is happening with BIPOC students expressing their disappointment in a college that markets itself as racially liberal and inclusive but is nonetheless falling short? I chose to conduct face-to-face interviews opposed to anonymous online surveys because it was an

opportunity to provide BIPOC students a *personal* chance to reflect on their college experience in light of their racial identities. As I was seeking information about sensitive issues within an institution they are still currently enrolled in, I wanted to build a level of rapport with participants that they might have otherwise lacked from the institution itself.

The total participants from both rounds of interviews was 14 BIPOC students. Seven of the students were currently in their senior year, four were in their junior year, and three were in their sophomore year at the time of the interview. Majority of the participants identified as domestic BIPOC students. Half of the participants identified as multiracial, while four participants identified as Black only, two participants identified Latinx only, and one identified as Asian only.

The first round of interviews consisted of 13 BIPOC students who had either completed or were currently in their sophomore year. Seven of the students were currently in their senior year, three were in their junior year, and three were in their sophomore year at the time of the interview. The interviews were on average 33 minutes, ranging between 17 and 55 minutes. In the first attempt to recruit participants, I posted a social media post to Instagram, a fairly popular form of social media that connects students together. In my second attempt in recruiting more participants, I reached out to department chairs and directors of concentrations, asking them to forward the message to all students who have declared a major, minor, or concentration in their department. This ensured that I would reach a greater population as all students have to declare a major by the end of their sophomore year. The first round of interviews consisted of questions broken into three sections: racial identity and background experiences, Macalester's official DEI rhetoric and student experiences, and the cultural and material dimensions of belonging and support at Macalester.

In the second section regarding Macalester's official DEI rhetoric and student experiences, three statements directly taken from sections of Macalester's official website were separately presented to the participants. The first statement was taken from a segment of the website labeled "*Diversity & Inclusion.*" The second statement was taken from a segment labeled "*Multiculturalism.*" The last statement was taken from a specific segment of Macalester's website, discussing one of Macalester's recently established anti-racism initiatives, the Liberal Arts College Racial Equity Leadership Alliance (LACRELA). This statement is not as easy to navigate to from the home page of Macalester's website. I was able to find it due to prior knowledge of this specific resource. See Appendix A for all three statements included in the interviews. Each statement was presented one at a time, right before the questions that were directly related to that statement were asked.

The second round of interviews included eight interviews. Seven of the eight interviews were with participants from the previous semester, who volunteered to participate in a follow-up. These interviews were on average 21 minutes, ranging from 12 minutes to 35 minutes. The new set of interview questions were broken down into two sections: social and economic. The social questions were warm-up questions to remind participants of the context of my study. The economic questions were the main focus of the second round as they were constructed based on the findings/analysis of the initial round of interviews that saw students identify economic exploitation as a major theme.

Results/Discussion

Students' responses revealed that a cost-benefit analysis was being broadly applied to draw in "DEI bodies" to the college. Based on student responses, how a cost-benefit analysis has been applied at Macalester to the detriment of BIPOC students can be broken down into two

major thematic categories: labor exploitation (through work study, clubs, and classroom participation) and financial exploitation (through financial aid and student debt).

Labor Exploitation

Work Study Jobs

Oftentimes what is included in students' financial aid packages is a work-study award. According to Macalester's website, the student employment program exists to provide employment opportunities that offer students both financial assistance and professional development. It is arguable that there is a low cost-benefit risk because of a few different reasons: first, there is the potential for the college to receive some of the money back (dependent on if the student has their award going back towards their tuition); and second, a work-study award entails that students will need to work and thus provides the college with labor for a minimum wage price. However, it is only a low cost-benefit risk for the institution.

I do [my] work study at the *on-campus employment*. And I'm also looking at some positions to do yoga teacher, yoga teaching right now. [Interviewer: Are you looking for an outside job just because? Or do you feel like it's necessary?] Necessary. I'm going to be here over the summer. So I could keep working at Macalester over the summer, but I'm thinking I'm going to need another job, or I'm hoping to at least, to pay rent.

– *Multiracial (Afro-Latinx & White) Sophomore*

And I work about four times a week for like nine hours a week. I want to work more but my offer didn't— they will not let me. I need money for groceries and money in a budget for the week type deal. And um, the max I can work a week is nine hours. And that ain't cutting it.

– *Black Senior*

These two students described the lack of financial stability, despite working and making their full work-study award. The lack of stability has led the first student to seek out alternative job opportunities *in addition* to working their work study. This will take up even more of their time

outside of their academic schedule. In fact, when the second student was asked about their ability to make their full work-study award, they responded saying that they were—they didn't know how many hours, but they were “working a lot more hours [the] last semester. And [they] were very, very tired all the time. And it was hard to keep up with [their] schoolwork.” The work-study program is posed to be beneficial and supportive for BIPOC students, however, it is showing to be insufficient for BIPOC students' financial situations *and* it is becoming a barrier to their school-work life balance.

Diversity Work in the College Classroom and Student Clubs

BIPOC students at PWIs are also victims of labor exploitation because while they are supposedly the “consumers” of the educational “products” the college is selling, the reality is that they are often the ones doing the labor. BIPOC students described being the ones doing “diversity work,” which I define as labor performed to give the impression of a diverse, inclusive, and equitable reality that is not given but must constantly be performed and reproduced, both in and out of the classroom. Diversity work therefore describes the work done within the college that supports the people, the cultures, and the spaces that make up the diversity and make the college feel welcoming and fair. It can be as “simple” as holding conversations about global and racial issues or creating the spaces for BIPOC students to have as their own.

In the case of student organizations, student organizations are communities on campus that act as alternative spaces for the student body, and Macalester writes (on their website) that these student organizations are “as diverse as [their] student body.” These organizations are strictly run by students who *volunteer* their time to take on these leadership roles and responsibilities, in order to keep the spaces going. Specifically in the case of the student

organizations that are racially and ethnicity identity-based, it is important to maintain these affinity groups because they are for supporting marginalized groups so they can create a space that is *their own*.

I feel like the biggest thing is that we're expected to create our own communities and own orgs that make us feel welcome —make BIPOC students feel welcome. And I feel like that's really difficult because, first of all, they don't get paid. Like org leaders, identity collective leaders, don't get paid to create those orgs. They're simply doing it out of the pure desire and need to feel included in something. Whereas, like, there isn't like a white identity collective like that is just Macalester in itself. It's a predominantly white institution.

– *Multiracial (Latinx & White) Senior*

This student hinted at the pressure BIPOC students might feel to step into these leadership positions in order for the organization to remain active for returning and future members. The active existence of these organizations play a huge role in BIPOC students' experiences as students have described the organizations as the main place of connecting with students who identify with each other.

I would say most prominently would be like, the affinity spaces, like I'm in [racial identity-based student organization], and that's mainly where I see multiculturalism take place. I think it's yeah, I think it's primarily in the like, affinity led spaces, like the student, the student orgs.

– *Latinx Senior #1*

The student therefore describes how a specific racially-affiliated student organization was important to them because that's where they see multiculturalism take place—a core value of Macalester that the college says “inherently means a commitment to cultural competency, building bridges, and reaching out across differences” as “Macalester’s commitment to a diverse student body began more than 100 years ago” (Macalester College. “Building a Diverse and Inclusive Community Starts Here.” n.d. / Macalester College. “Multiculturalism.” n.d.).

Students who choose to step into these leadership roles do so with the belief that student organizations will not exist without their labor. Their labor includes (but is not limited to)

planning and organizing club events. These events could potentially cost the college money to put on, however, the bulk of student organizations are funded through a separate student activities fee. Therefore, from a college standpoint, there is a low cost-benefit risk. Additionally, they benefit because they are still able to promote diversity and say that there is DEI work being done at the college (despite being done in large part by unpaid student labor). Meanwhile, for BIPOC students, this is a high cost-benefit risk because they have to commit extra time outside of their class, work, and other extracurricular activities in order to do the diversity work for these student organizations.

Moreover clubs and social events are not the only places where diversity work is being done by BIPOC students. As a progressive liberal arts school, Macalester holds different classes that look to acknowledge and educate others about the diverse backgrounds and cultures both in and outside of the college. Teaching about topics as such can be a sensitive and contentious matter. However, Macalester wants to include those classes; to have those conversations. In an attempt to have the proper tools to teach those classes, Macalester co-founded the Liberal Arts College Racial Equity Leadership Alliance (LACRELA) with five other liberal art colleges/universities as part of their anti-racism work. The goal of LACRELA was to “provid[e] professional development tools for employees to lead more effectively on issues of racial justice and addressing racial and equity issues” (Macalester College. “Six Founding Members of the Liberal Arts College Racial Equity Leadership Alliance (LACRELA).” n.d.). Despite this initiative, BIPOC students still described incidents where they felt discomfort or awkward in how classroom situations unraveled.

I’ve had conversations with the chair of the department about like...of how we can make the space more inclusive. And it felt, it just felt kind of weird at times when professors ask me “as a BIPOC student.” And I know they’re coming with the best intentions, but also, it feels like it’s kind of my job to like help progress be like, be made I guess.

– *Multiracial (Black & White) Junior*

This student described feeling tokenized in the classroom setting and in the wider department.

The chair of the department wanted to diversify the classes and wanted to use the student in the process to do so. The desire to diversify the classrooms of their department was placed on the student simply because of their BIPOC identity.

Once in the classroom, addressing sensitive issues regarding racial matters can be tricky, especially with people who may have experienced those issues or resonate with those who have experienced those hardships. Macalester values being “a community that intentionally leans into challenging conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion” (Macalester College, “Building a Diverse and Inclusive Community Starts Here.” n.d.). Despite this expressed value, however, there are still instances where students are being denied the opportunity to have hard and honest conversations about when DEI efforts fall short. When asked about how they felt about and after challenging conversations regarding DEI at Macalester, a student said:

I felt that it was kind of...it was weird how the teacher didn't, I don't think the teacher's here anymore, but it was weird the teacher, like, like, was trying to avoid the question and stuff like that. And the students were challenging it. And I— I respect the students for challenging the teacher on these issues, because they're important to them. But the teacher just kind of got defensive about it. And it was really weird.

– *Multiracial (Black & Latinx) Junior*

The abundant effort to *not* address a sensitive issue, one in which students were actively looking to discuss, goes against Macalester's alleged commitment to lean into challenging conversations.

This led to the frustration that the student described of *other* students. However, the lack of addressing certain topics and issues is not the only problem that is seen taking place in the classroom. There is also the issue of forcing BIPOC students to be the ones to essentially guide the conversations taking place in the classroom.

Like, for example, I remember my first year course we went and saw this play called weathering, and it was, it was an all Black cast. And there was, other than me, there was only one other Black girl in the class. And she didn't, she couldn't go to the play. But when we were talking about like, Black trauma, the teacher was just like, so do you want to weigh in your like, your thoughts? And it was very like on the spot and she had—See, there's the place where she was very confused like, why she was being called on, and I don't know, it was just very uncomfortable for everybody.

– *Multiracial (Black, Latinx & White) Sophomore*

For this student, they were forced to hold the conversation because they were put on the spot by the professor. In this incident, the professor upheld Macalester's intention of leaning into challenging conversations, but they forced the labor of doing so onto the student. The approach to having this conversation was essentially detrimental for the student; they described feeling uncomfortable and felt a sense of pressure. This student's experience contradicts LACRELA's purpose to provide the developmental tools to "lead more effectively." Instead of utilizing those alleged mechanisms given to professors to approach these conversations, this professor turned to those students solely for being BIPOC. These incidents revealed the tokenism being displayed through the diversity labor being done by students in the classroom and through student organizations. Racial tokenism is the practice of making a symbolic effort to include people from historically marginalized racial groups in order to give the appearance of racial openness and respect for difference but doing so in only superficial ways.

Macalester is an institution that outwardly promotes multiculturalism and diversity, and maintaining a certain level of BIPOC and international student enrollment is important. In order to maintain, or surpass, that level of BIPOC student enrollment, Macalester needs to not only recruit potential BIPOC students but in addition make the college seem appealing to these prospective students.

I did a fly-in program in 2019—I spent two nights on campus, and it was the multicultural fly-in program. So it was targeted towards domestic students—BIPOC.

And they gave us specialty programming so what it means to BIPOC at a predominantly white institution. We got to interact with BIPOC students; we got to go out into the Twin Cities and visit BIPOC spaces like [this] market. And so I really appreciated that Macalester made space for BIPOC students, but also recognizing that we were a small minority. And I really saw myself, like I remember like —I always remember being in Weyerhouser on my last day visiting and I was like ‘I want to go here’ because I do think that like academically I can be successful. But also, there are people who look like me. And also there are people who don’t look like me at all, and I valued that just as much.

– *Latinx Senior #2*

On the surface, this Latinx student described what she felt as appreciation for Macalester for creating the efforts to show the existence of a BIPOC community within and outside of the institution. However, this student also described tokenism. The multicultural fly-in program is a program at Macalester in which Macalester flies out admitted students of all different backgrounds to provide a broad look into life at Macalester. During this program, current BIPOC students talk about their experiences at Macalester and help admitted students make a college decision that is right “for them.” However, this program that is all about promoting diversity and inclusion at Macalester heavily relies on the diversity work of members of its marginalized communities that work and study on campus. As a cost-benefit analysis, the multicultural fly-in program costs Macalester some money in order to fly students out, but benefits them a significant amount more as it encourages BIPOC students to enroll at Macalester, which allows for them to further promote and labor for diversity at the college.

While the multicultural fly-in program displays tokenism at Macalester subtly, there are ways in which it is displayed more directly. In the 2022-2023 academic year, student-athletes made up nearly 20% of the overall student body. Generally, student-athletes are recruited by athletic coaches to apply and enroll to Macalester, and upon acceptance, commit to being on an athletic varsity team, representing Macalester as an NCAA Division III institution. While

typically, coaches recruit players based on their talent and skills in relation to their sport, there are other factors that can play into a coach's decision to recruit an athlete.

And [the coach] was talking about, 'Yeah, there's not a lot of Black people here. We're trying to change that, and you could be a big part of that. And I felt like I was coming here to try to be of something bigger than me. Which I thought would have been really cool...But yeah, applying to college, I was thinking about coming here and trying to increase the Black population —on the team in particular— to try to make more community, especially since I really liked the coach.

– *Black Junior Athlete*

This Black student-athlete voiced their experience as actively being recruited in part for their racial identity. This recruitment for racial diversity is more direct than the multicultural fly-in program, however, it is still more tokenism. In this situation, the athlete was told that their enrollment was desired to increase the Black population, but what was not told was what the increased population of Black students represents and means for the college. The increased population of a marginalized community is correlated with an increase in diversity at the institution, and just as the fly-in program, this further helps their case of recruiting future BIPOC students. Recruitment of BIPOC student athletes has a low cost-benefit risk because it does not cost the institution any additional money. The college already pays athletic coaches to coach and recruit players for their sports team, and so recruitment of BIPOC athletes is cheap but the institution has a high benefit with BIPOC athletes enrolling at Macalester.

Financial Exploitation

Tuition and Room and Board

Another component that plays a role in prospective BIPOC students enrolling at Macalester is financial aid. It is undeniable that higher education has become increasingly expensive over time, and access to higher education can be affected by students' financial

situations. As changes to college tuition and affordability during the period of neoliberal multiculturalism dramatically increased the cost of getting a college degree, higher education has become at the same time more available to students of marginalized communities via financial support from federal loans and from the institutions themselves. Most participants that were interviewed voiced that the financial aid package that was offered to them by Macalester was the best offer, and was essentially the reason they chose to enroll at the college. This is a low cost-benefit risk because Macalester is a non-profit college so the college receives federal grants from the government in order to offer students financial aid in addition to having a sizable endowment. Thus, the college is not necessarily losing money and is still receiving high benefits from BIPOC students enrolling at Macalester.

Macalester is a need-based financial aid institution, and thus turns to Pell Grants. Pell Grant is a need-based financial aid program offered by the U.S. federal government. They are typically awarded to eligible low-income students pursuing their first bachelor's degree (and other special exceptions). One way in which a college can pay a Pell Grant to a student is through crediting the student's account for any outstanding education expenses. Pell Grants "pay charges for tuition, fees, and room and board with the student's permission," in which the school may also apply the grant to fund other educational expenses if the student gives written authorization (FSA Partners. n.d.). Additionally, there can be different processes in which the payment can be distributed from the school to the student, but it is all contingent upon the student's eligibility of receiving the grant. Another way a college can pay a Pell Grant to a student is paying the student directly via check or EFT or cash dispensed to the student. This is all to say that the college has more control over the distribution of financial aid than the student

who is receiving it and that the funds are prioritized to cover tuition and room and board expenses directly funding the college rather than the student's other everyday living expenses.

Financial aid packages attract BIPOC students to Macalester, however, the gesture is misleading in the sense that it does not cover all sufficient necessities that are incorporated into the higher education experience. At Macalester, there is a two year on-campus living requirement, and because on-campus living arrangements do not include a private kitchen or such, it also requires a meal plan. There are on-campus (or near campus housing provided by the college) options that do include a private kitchen, and thus make being on the meal plan not a necessity. However, then students are responsible for their own groceries and meals. As one senior described her living situation at Macalester, she explained how she received financial aid for housing, but only for *on-campus* housing. She described her experience as non-traditional, as she never lived in the traditional dorm rooms: possible roommates, communal lounges, communal bathrooms, communal kitchens, etc.. She has only lived in the additional on-campus (or near campus) options in which private kitchens are included, and so they're slightly more expensive than the dorms, but you don't need a meal plan. When questioned about her living arrangements, she said she had "purposefully done that" (Latinx Senior #2) because her housing would get paid, and it still allowed for her to be in control of her own food-board situation. Though this student found light in her situation, she was restricted in her housing options due to her financial aid with Macalester. Traditionally, Macalester students will move off campus after their sophomore year into some house or apartment relatively close to campus. For this student, because her financial aid was only for on-campus housing, she chose to stay on campus for her entire Macalester experience. This is beneficial for Macalester because it has the financial aid going back to the college.

Debt

What primarily connects higher education to Taylor's concept of predatory inclusion in homeownership is debt. In *Race for Profit*, Taylor proposes this idea that when African Americans were welcomed into the American housing market it "was not the fulfillment of the American dream; it was the beginning of an American nightmare" (Taylor, 2019, p. 3). It became a "nightmare" because there was no additional support or knowledge for African Americans who did not completely understand the terms of their mortgages or the financial demands of homeownership. The idea of homeownership for marginalized people did not make sense as an antipoverty program because it involved "taking on thousands of dollars of debt for ownership of [property] while also being tied to a community with few prospects for reinvigorating its job market" (Taylor, 2019, p. 169). Essentially homeownership is a false promise in fulfilling the American Dream because it is supposed to signify socioeconomic status, but there are other factors involved in homeownership that keep low-income people from buying *and keeping* their homes so that upward mobility is difficult to achieve

Similar to homeownership, higher education is supposed to act as a bridge for social and financial mobility. A college degree has practically become necessary for relatively high-paying and prestigious middle-class jobs (Houle & Addo, 2019). However, tuition prices have become increasingly expensive over the years due to Reagan-era reforms hoping to quell political dissent on college campuses, leaving many students turning to student loans to allow them access to enroll in these college institutions. However, just as the new African American homeowners experienced exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous realtors, many BIPOC students do not fully understand the realities of enrolling in college and taking on thousands of dollars of debt ro

receive a college degree. In fact, one student responded, “Umm...I don’t know. Do you know what the average, like, pay off?” (Multiracial, *Black & Latinx*, Senior) when asked how long they thought it would take to pay off their student loans. This lack of knowledge about debt this student displayed touches upon predatory inclusion because essentially Macalester recruited him to enroll at the college without fully educating him what accepting his financial aid package entailed.

Other students displayed some knowledge of their financial aid and student loans, but not a deep understanding of what debt after college would look like.

Well...my parents didn’t really, they’ve been paying for my tuition for my time here. And they told me like, after college, the loans are gonna be on me, which makes sense. But I have to speak with them about like, specifically, how much loans are gonna be.

– *Multiracial (Black & Latinx) Junior*

This student understood to some degree that he was going to have to pay his student loans back after college, but was not completely (or even relatively) sure how much it was going to be, and in turn how long it was going to take. These are important factors for college students to know because these are things that can and will affect their life after college. Paying back their student loans and how long it will take is contingent on what job and how much money the student will make after college. This is an important factor for students to know as they decide what they will study in college. In a cost-benefit analysis, aside from their interests, students need to consider if what they want to study will lead to high paying and middle-class job opportunities, socializing them into market workers ready to contribute to the neoliberal economy. For jobs that are not as high-paying, such as non-profit work, students will have to decide if they are willing to take on jobs in the future that may not pay as much, which will in turn make it so that they will take longer to pay off their student loans.

Access to higher education is supposed to act as a bridge into high-paying jobs, which *in theory*, would bridge the racial disparity and wealth gap. However, with the racial gap in student debt, it becomes predatory inclusion because BIPOC students enroll in higher education institutions with the assumption that it will provide opportunities for higher-paying jobs, but instead are left with student debt they will need to pay off after they complete their postsecondary degrees.

Conclusion

Higher education is a feature of American society that is viewed as a necessity for high paying jobs that are meant to give people social and financial mobility. Historically, access to higher education was withheld from BIPOC students, specifically African American students, as a means to reinforce a racial order that benefited white people. The Civil Rights era was a significant moment in American history as it initiated the shift from formal racial exclusion to formal racial inclusion. It challenged the precedent cases that legalized and justified a separate-but-equal doctrine that promoted racial segregation and ultimately led to the Civil Rights Act, which was used as a means to disavow *Plessy* and any cases that formally discriminated and excluded people simply because of their race.

The post-Civil Rights era signified the transition into a new political period that emphasized multiculturalism. In an immediate response to the Civil Right Act, we see a shift to formal inclusion that represented a liberal multiculturalism era. During this era, we see many attempts in fighting for racial justice that focuses mostly on including formerly excluded groups. Later during the period of neoliberal multiculturalism, higher education institutions turned to making college even more exclusive and unaffordable while still marketing themselves as inclusive through offering antiracism and antidiscrimination initiatives within their institutions.

Looking at a left-leaning college located in the Twin Cities, the same cities where George Floyd was murdered, in many ways serves as a microcosm for looking at the status of race relations at PWIs today. Through this research I showed how BIPOC students voiced their experiences to reveal how predatory inclusion is playing out in a post-Civil Rights era in higher education. Specifically they detailed how a cost-benefit analysis was being applied to shape students' experience through labor and financial exploitation. At Macalester College, the Cultural House represents a convergence of multiple things I have discussed: finances, housing, and also a lack of investment of resources that BIPOC students use to help them feel included. This is not to say that there is no effort being done by the college in relation to their value of multiculturalism. However, based on students' reporting, the testimonies provide an opportunity for institutions like Macalester to further explore ways in which they can provide more effective institutional support, especially for the students who both make up the diversity and do a large bulk of the diversity work on campus.

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Appendix A

Statement 1.

Macalester is a community that intentionally leans into challenging conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Mac's value of multiculturalism inherently means a commitment to cultural competency, building bridges, and reaching out across differences.

Statement 2.

Macalester's commitment to a diverse student body began more than 100 years ago. In 1915, Catherine Deaver Lealtad became Macalester's first African American graduate. In 1942, Esther Torii Zuzuki was admitted to Macalester, freeing her from the camp where her Japanese American family was interned during World War II. She later became a social worker and human rights activist. The college's lealtad-suzuki center for social justice honors their journeys and provides opportunities for current students to explore cross-cultural communication, identity, and multicultural education.

Statement 3.

Six U.S. liberal arts colleges have come together to found the Liberal Arts College Racial Equity Leadership Alliance (LACRELA) with the goal of providing professional development tools for employees to lead more effectively on issues of racial justice and addressing racial and equity issues. In addition to Macalester, the founding colleges include: DePauw University, Oberlin College, Occidental College, Pomona College, and Skidmore College. Fifty-one institutions have signed on as inaugural members, and the group is in the process of engaging other U.S. liberal arts colleges to join them.

This work is one component of Macalester's anti-racism work.

Working in partnership with the University of Southern California's Race and Equity Center, LACRELA will offer member liberal arts colleges and universities a number of tools to support their racial equity work including:

- A monthly racial equity eConvening series beginning in January 2021. The sessions will be delivered by the experts from USC's Equity Institutes.
- An online portal of equity-related resources and tools.
- Workplace climate surveys, administered by USC's Race and Equity Center that will measure a range of topics related to how employees experience their work environment.

In addition, presidents of member colleges will meet regularly to share strategies, seek advice, and brainstorm ways to leverage the Alliance for collective impact on racial equity in higher education.

“This alliance was created out of a circle of new presidents and presidents of color,” said President Suzanne M. Rivera. “A tight bond between these particular presidents led to the idea of an alliance between our colleges to advance racial justice and I’m very proud to have Macalester be among the founding members.”