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## Deconstructing the University: Contemporary DEI, Neoliberal Rationalities, and the Abolition of the Administrative Apparatus

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**Macalester College — Saint Paul, MN**

*Department of Media and Cultural Studies*

Honors Thesis, Fall 2022

**Deconstructing the University:  
Contemporary DEI, Neoliberal Rationalities, and the  
Abolition of the Administrative Apparatus**

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## **Abstract**

The following chapters attempt to develop some working theories to combat capitalist exploitation and racist and gendered oppression in the university, culminating in a call for the abolition of the university's administrative apparatus. The project is divided broadly into two parts, which are referential to each other, but maintain slightly different areas of focus. Part 1 details a preliminary critique of the political-economy of the contemporary neoliberal university, drawing influence from Marxian economics and structuralist theories of ideology, critiquing contemporary discourses of diversity, equity and inclusivity (DEI). Part 2 focuses more directly on issues pertaining to oppression and difference, maintaining a predominantly Marxist critique which situates racism and patriarchy as co-constitutive of capitalist social relations. The project's conclusion, seeks to join the theoretical developments of Parts 1 and 2 into a singular political mission: abolition.

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# Introduction

Political democracy tends towards a coincidence of the rulers and the ruled (in the sense of government with the consent of the governed), ensuring for each non-ruler a free training in the skills and general technical preparation necessary to that end. But the type of school which is now developing as the school for the people does not tend even to keep up this illusion. For it is organised ever more fully in such a way as to restrict recruitment to the technically qualified governing stratum, in a social and political context which makes it increasingly difficult for “personal initiative” to acquire such skills and technical-political preparation. Thus we are really going back to a division into juridically fixed and crystallised estates rather than moving towards the transcendence of class divisions.

- Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*

When anti-racism becomes an ego ideal, you know you are in trouble.

- Sara Ahmed, *Response to Slavoj Zizek*

The confluence of decades of neoliberalism—privatization, deregulation, rapidly growing economic inequality, unprecedented individualism and commodification—and the so-called racial reckoning of 2020, has left the American University in a strange, yet familiar place. Strange, in the sense that powerful and oppressive institutions such as the federal government, big business, the foundation world, and the academy are, at least on the face of things, on the vanguard of social justice. Familiar in the sense, that the specter of capital, however shrouded, is as dominant as ever. Developments in the financialization of capitalism, unprecedented private and public debt, and conversely a newfound expansion of multiculturalism and liberal tolerance. Emerging from these competing discourses of equity (racial equality, gender equality, and broad tolerance for the marginalized at large) and inequality (meritocracy under capitalism, the myth of the undeserving poor, and the

like), comes diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), perhaps the most dominant ideology in the elite university<sup>1</sup> today. To be clear, DEI is not entirely new, it has existed in some form for over a decade, and evolved out of previous forms of multiculturalism spanning decades before that. However, I intend to argue that the vast adoption of DEI ideology and practices following the summer of 2020, now ubiquitous throughout the academy and the corporate world, is a unique development, and one to be critical of.

Right-wing commentators have produced a deluge of bad-faith critiques of DEI over the past few years, ranging from xenophobic to mild but nonetheless insufficiently argued. (Meads, 2011) My hope with this project is to provide a comprehensive and polemical critique of contemporary DEI's theoretical suppositions and practical applications from the perspective of an anti-capitalist radical communitarianism and demand for a new world order. In doing so, I do not engage in petty culture wars, nor do I invoke the grievances of white identity politics. My main purpose is to identify the ways in which contemporary DEI—the widespread constellation of discourses and practices concerning institutional, professional and personal development towards equity, ubiquitous throughout higher education, corporate business, NGOs, and the corporate media—works to alienate broad-based class politics. Specifically, my work seeks to elucidate the contradictions of a bourgeois ideology that promotes equality—the contradictions exposed by conflicts of material interest by those who espouse it. Embraced by the ruling and professional managerial class (PMC), contemporary DEI is a fundamentally neoliberal project as it produces marketized and hyper-individualistic subjectivities while maintaining hostility to redistribution.

In the following sections, I will be defining key terms like—diversity, equity, inclusion, capital, human capital, tastes, and administrative apparatus—which I will return to throughout my analysis: critically analyzing the political and economic relations of students, fac-

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<sup>1</sup>The “elite” university is marked by reliance on prestige; the maintenance of its legitimacy is predicated on keeping the university an exclusive space.



ulty and administration within the university, exploring how the production of new codes of language and elite tastes work to stratify classes, synthesizing Marxist and structuralist critiques of the cultural and social politics of difference as they apply to our current moment; and connecting my analysis of the biopolitics of the university to contemporary DEI discourse and the process of social reproduction.

In forming this analysis, the project seeks to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the development of contemporary DEI discourse in higher education and elsewhere, its implications for the present and years to come, and proposes alternative paths for an emergent Left movement. This project is both a polemic against neoliberal tolerance, and a semblance of a remedy for the discontented Left within institutions subsumed by contemporary DEI discourse. To invoke Fred Moten and Stephano Harney, this project is an appeal to those who seek to be “in the university, but not of the university.” This project locates the university as both the heart of bourgeois ideology, but also as the potential site for organizing and liberatory theorizing. In order to change and subvert the university’s neoliberal institutional goals, it is crucial that we have a thorough and historically situated understanding of how it operates on a base economic level, producing trained managers and capitalists, and in its ideological and political superstructure, where contemporary DEI is the dominant discourse. By dissecting the university’s institutional practices and policies through an analysis of the university’s political-economy, this project seeks to develop the beginnings of a liberatory critical theory for the academe.

Elite universities embody a contradiction central to contemporary DEI, a correct observation of the urgent need for racial equality within the institution, and an ambivalence to inequality in all forms outside its gates. While the elite university fiercely protects the image of equality internally, seeking to produce an equitably diverse alumni of highly paid professionals, managers and business executives, it casually leaves the masses at the door. This is because contemporary DEI is fundamentally divorced from any consciousness of

political economy. DEI, as practiced in elite universities, major corporations, and the news media, is concerned primarily, if not exclusively, with the perception of equality among its own elite ranks. Not only does this model exclude the vast majority of workers, it fails to significantly impact issues of racism, sexism, and homophobia within its own institutions (more on this later). Perhaps the most significant failure of DEI in popular practice, is that it leaves the major sources of inequality, including the extreme power imbalance between capital (donors, employers, boards of trustees, and administrators) and workers (faculty, students, employees), entirely untouched. DEI, as a technology of the institutions that adopt it, favors symbolic power and representation and feelings of inclusion, and swiftly squanders any suggestion of the reorganization of power.

The following chapters attempt to develop some working theories to combat capitalist exploitation and racist and gendered oppression in the university, culminating in a call for the abolition of the university's administrative apparatus. The project is divided broadly into two parts, which are referential to each other, but maintain slightly different areas of focus. Part 1 details a preliminary critique of the political-economy of the contemporary neoliberal university, drawing influence from Marxian economics and structuralist theory. The chapter on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI), seeks to establish basic definitions and working terminology for what I call Contemporary DEI throughout the project. Each subchapter of this section provides a brief introduction to critiques of each component of Contemporary DEI discourse, situating them historically and discursively in the contemporary context. The chapter "On Capital," provides definitions for several theories of capital I refer to throughout the project. I begin with Marx's General Formula for Capital, as the inspiration for the other theories of capital I discuss. "Capital within the University," is a brief discussion of the role of capital, as theorized by Marx, in the context of economic relations between members of the university. "Cultural Capital" introduces Bourdieu's sociological extrapolation of Marx, which I invoke in later sections. The subchapter "Human Capital,"

is a summary of Foucault, and later Wendy Brown's theories, which become a cornerstone of analysis in Part 2 and the conclusion. "Stakeholders," is a detailed account of the varied economic and social relations between the three primary groups of interest in my analysis of the university: students, faculty, and administration. The subsequent subchapters are an analysis of how each group is produced discursively and operates economically within the university. Here I develop my theories of "managerial rationality" and the "administrative apparatus."

Part 2 focuses more directly on issues pertaining to oppression and difference, maintaining a predominantly Marxist critique which situates racism and patriarchy as co-constitutive of capitalist social relations. The chapter "Social Reproduction and Systems of Oppression," begins Part 2 by establishing Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) as the primary theoretical framework for my analysis. "Difference and Human Capital," extends the work of SRT to the production and maintenance of human capital in the university, implicating racial and gendered dynamics in the productive and reproductive processes which constitute the university. "Inclusion and Specimen-Being," builds from Sara Ahmed and Amber Jamilla Musser's works on the discourses of diversity and inclusivity in the university. Drawing influence from Marx's theory of Estranged Labor and Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics*, this chapter encourages a necropolitical analysis of social reproduction, which emphasizes alienation of the Other. The chapter on the "Ahmed-Zizek Debate," serves as a final addendum to the project, exploring theoretical approaches to reading hegemony in the context of "liberal multiculturalism."

The project's conclusion, seeks to join the theoretical developments of Parts 1 and 2 into a singular political mission: abolition. With reference to Fred Moten and Stephano Harney's work on *The Undercommons*, I conclude the project with an argument that posits abolition as the only path towards liberation from capital and racist and patriarchal oppression in the university.

## **Part 1**

## **D, E, & I**

This project is largely a critique of the discourses and practices of contemporary DEI within the university. In another section I plan to outline the history of multiculturalism broadly, stemming from the initial discourse of “diversity” that came out of the US Supreme Court’s affirmative action decision, all the way through to our present day contemporary DEI. Here, I want to take a moment to separate and breakdown the three subdiscourses that make up contemporary DEI: diversity, equity, and inclusion. In doing so, I will attempt to charitably define their intended goals, and then expose why it goes about achieving them insufficiently. The rosy premises of all three concepts have led to a lack of much needed skepticism. While one can be for a more equitable university and society at large, be committed to including all of the demos, with an interest in the redistribution of power along demographic lines, while simultaneously being against the institutionalized cooptation and capture of those aspirations, one cannot comfortably object to DEI within the university. Full-throated support for institutional DEI initiatives has become tied to a kind of moral support of egalitarianism—a pseudoreligious revival of morality in the face of senseless inequality. Conversely, criticism is associated with bad faith reactionary conservatism. In this sense, contemporary DEI, and the institutional power that supports it, has insulated itself from Left critique. In the following section, I provide a basic framework through which we can critically understand each sub-discourse of DEI which will be the basis for my analysis going forward.

### **Diversity**

In its original conception, diversity is a material program of redistributing access to the university and the white collar workforce with concern to race and gender. Out of the 60’s and 70’s student movements, a product of the rapid diversification of American uni-

versities, came a multitude of radical anti-racist and feminist imaginations for the future of the university. (Melamed, 2011, 207) These visions required programs of deconstruction, redistribution and abolition. What radical politics was once associated with diversity has been co-opted, captured and neutralized by institutions, private and public who seek to use diversity for its own purposes. Contemporary diversity bears little resemblance to the radical beginnings of Ethnic Studies and Gender Studies, treating accumulated subjects of difference as an asset to a larger institutional whole, rather than as agents with individual and collective aspirations within, but not for the institution.

Contemporary diversity occasionally pays lip service to the redistributive work of demographic change, but tends to function within the confines of liberal pluralism and meritocracy. Contemporary constructions of diversity often reference pluralism that is mostly, if not entirely, abstracted from marginality and oppression. For example, universities and corporations alike, will speak to the need for “viewpoint diversity,” a “diversity of voices and ideas,” or rather than speak of race, gender, or class, “a diversity of backgrounds and experiences.” (Melamed, 2011, 207) These identity-neutral proxies are positioned as attempts to be more inclusive of varied and intersectional identities, but this in itself dilutes the potential for any redistributive policy. Diversity, like DEI as a whole, returns to its liberal “equal opportunity” premises by promising the reorganization of demographics, or sometimes just viewpoints, while failing to reorganize power meaningfully.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of contemporary diversity is its fixation with diversifying within a specific constrained population within an institution and complete ambivalence to a greater diversification of power. Elite universities and corporations concern themselves with diversifying the elite (those privileged enough to attend these institutions and go on to occupy positions of status in corporate life), and providing more opportunities for people of different identities to join the elite, but leave the vast majority of inequality untouched. Implicit in this view of diversity, that concerns itself only with diversity within

the elite classes, are two major problems. The first, and perhaps obvious, is that this egalitarian mission is anti-egalitarian. By virtue of being exclusive, elite institutions, predicated on the exploitation of labor, the university and the corporation, no matter how proportionate in terms of race or gender representation, continue to support and further inequality. In this way, diversity discourse is in direct conflict with the material function of the institutions that embrace it most.

The second issue is the essentializing at the intersection of elite diversity (focusing on proportionality and representation of certain identity groups) and identity. Where the institution accounts for and promotes its diversity, it requires labor and a special kind of worker performance from the subjects who are meant to embody the diversity of the institution. As personified diversity, subjects live their identity not simply as an intrinsic part of themselves, but as capital for the institution they are within. Workers embodying diversity on behalf of the institution experience special kinds of alienation as their labor relation to their employer is deeper and more complex, requiring intimate parts of the body, mind and self in their laboring. (Musser, 2015)

Intrinsic to the importance of representation within elite diversity discourse, is the assumption that elites holding an identity will represent the interests of the most oppressed within that identity group. There is a belief that diverse representation is somehow democratic as it provides a platform for people of all constituencies to be heard. What this representative democracy model tends to ignore is the crucial role of class. The liberal consensus that willfully ignores class in its politics of race, gender, sexuality and (dis)ability, is not a liberatory politics for working class women, working class people of color, working queer people, and the disabled poor; it is a politics limited to the recognition of their elite counterparts. Cornel West refers to this as the “betrayal of the *lumpenbourgeoisie*” (Hedges and West, 2015). The elite diversity model is not only essentializing insofar as it assumes people holding the same identity must think alike, it is a terrible political strategy

for the Left. A Board of Trustees that is proportionate in its representation of race, gender, sexuality, etc. will not serve the interests of any of those groups in the way that an anti-racist, feminist, solidaristic workers' union will. Elite diversity and corporatized diversity discourses, aim to hold onto an identitarian hierarchical capitalism as not to give way to a diverse workers' movement.

## **Equity**

An extension of diversity discourse, equity is a more egalitarian-focused discourse, rooted in ameliorating certain disparities between identity groups. Where diversity is concerned primarily with representation, equity encompasses issues of representation but tends to include (superficial) engagement with issues of access. As with diversity, the material and redistributive aspects of equity, when adopted and fostered by institutions, was replaced with generalized and abstracted forms centered around neutral categories like voices. Unlike diversity, equity as a formal concept has a much less radical past and is a direct product of institutional marketing and strategy. (Melamed, 2011, 61) Even the term equity, comes out of the discourses of finance capital. Equity represents the corporatization and commodification of egalitarianism, which is, to be clear, a false egalitarianism centered around the facade of equality within isolated populations. (Bray, 2021) The foundational premise of equity, that disparities between populations should be redressed through the manipulation of standards and resources, is in alignment with the Left. In practice, because it is intrinsically an elite corporate discourse, equity limits redistribution to the liberal politics of ensuring equal opportunities while maintaining hierarchical power structures.

The discourse of equity, as used in the context of contemporary DEI, is always positioned as a (better) alternative to equality. For proponents of contemporary DEI, equality is a worn out concept championed by the Civil Rights and Labor movements of the 20th century, that is no longer sufficient, given those movements have not eliminated problems



like racism. At the center of DEI's critique of equality is an oft invoked strawman, that equality seeks to treat everyone identically, where equity seeks to meet individual needs. Despite not being true, the dichotomy between equity and equality posed by contemporary DEI, serves as a way of dismissing what has worked for the Left in the past, in favor of top-down institutionalization of social justice. Where equality lobbies for redistribution and has been traditionally supported by organizations like labor unions, equity can be established through the managerial practices of corporate mastheads and administrators. (Day, 2020) By substituting equality, the basis for political programs organized by coalitions of socialists, like the Civil Rights Movement and New Deal, for equity, a concept whose proponents include, the Biden Whitehouse, and corporate human resources managers, Contemporary DEI implicitly argues against democratic solidaristic politics and for administrative maneuvering to take its place.

Equity is far more concerned with the piecemeal elimination of disparities than the foundational change required to alter the class dynamics that produce them. This is made most apparent by the difference between inequality and inequity. Inequality speaks to the major differences between the wealthy and those they exploit (the 99 percent versus the 1 percent). Inequity hinges on particularity, referencing this inequity here and that inequity over there, each posing a need for individual treatments rather than a mass reorganization of power. Adolph Reed and Merlin Chowkwanyun explore the central problem with favoring issues of inequity to inequality in their theory of "disparity discourse." As they trace the trend within the social sciences and news media of centering research on statistical disparities between racial groups, they identify a number of recurring errors in the discourse.

Among those pathologies are a schematic juxtaposition of race and class that frequently devolves into unproductive either-or debates; the dilution of class into a cultural and behavioral category or a static (usually quantitative) index of economic attainment that fails to capture power relations; sweeping characterizations of white

Americans' racial animus and collective psyche; ahistorical declarations that posit a long and unbroken arc of American racism and that sidestep careful dissection of how racism and, for that matter, race have evolved and transformed; and a tendency to shoehorn the United States' racial history into a rhetorically powerful but analytically crude story of 'two societies', monolithic and monochromatic. (Reed and Chowk-wanyun, 2012, 150)

Notably, these pathologies tend to embrace traditionally liberal and sometimes conservative approaches to economic inequality and racism—approaches that feature ahistoricism, a selective ignorance of class and how it interacts with race, and very few substantive solutions. Decades of research and public discourse situated around disparity between racial groups has informed the institutions that embrace equity, leading them to make decisions based in ahistorical analysis and a broad lack of understanding of power.

The mechanics of equity require that one must first identify where “inequities” exist and form an equitable solution. The prerequisite step of identification and location inherent to the equity approach requires institutions and individuals to dedicate a great deal of time, energy and resources to researching and proving statistical differences between populations, and few resources to analysis of the root causes. Crudely, the equity approach identifies a difference between two data points and seeks to move them closer together, through things like greater representation. In the corporatized frenzy of finding inequities and proposing minor changes to alter them, there is no consideration of what the Left has long understood drives inequality: capitalism. Capitalist institutions (corporations, government, academia, etc.) favor equity not for its rhetorical strength, but because it asks very little of them in terms of redistribution of power. <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>My critique here, should not be read as dismissive of multiculturalism as a whole. Rather, I intend to critique the development of “equity” discourse as it relates to the development of neoliberalism and capital accumulation in the university.

## Inclusion

Inclusion, unlike diversity and equity, has virtually no connection to redistribution or redistributive policy aims and is the most neoliberal, and least radical subdiscourse within DEI. Where diversity is rooted in the structural organization of populations, and equity is concerned with disparities between groups within a population, inclusion makes no reference to the distribution of or access to resources, and focuses solely on the feeling or perception of diversity and equity. That is to say, inclusion, when coupled with diversity and equity, is the discourse of the perceived success of diversification and amelioration of disparities. I use the term “perception,” because inclusion is always discussed in estimations and abstractions; keeping track of actual markers of equality is not relevant in the discourse of inclusion, rather inclusion values individuals’ rough sense of equality.<sup>3</sup> When inclusion is situated at a distance from diversity and equity, it becomes even more vague and abstracted and makes little reference to (in)equality at all. What does it mean to foster an “inclusive environment” with respect to inequality? Institutions readily embrace inclusion, because it can be implemented and advocated for devoid of any material reorganization or specific policy change. No power is ceded in the advancement toward a more “inclusive environment.” Much like one of the central problems with diversity, to merely be included is not attaining equal access to resources. In the radical movements of the 60’s and 70’s a modicum of inclusion had been achieved through the diversification of the university, but inclusion alone was not a primary motivator behind political organizing. To be included as a minoritized population or individual, is to be recognized by the dominant power, and nothing more.

Inclusion is the technology through which institutions can use contemporary DEI to neutralize and pacify radical disruption. Through the careful cultivation of an “inclusive

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<sup>3</sup>For further development on inclusivity and its relationship to social reproduction, patriarchy, racism and the production of whiteness, see Part 2, (specifically “Inclusion and Specimen-Being: Diversity as Necropolitics”)

environment” or “an environment where everyone feels welcome,” as inclusion is often framed, institutions manage to satisfy workers, to soften alienation, to the point that we will not fight back. As such, inclusion is not simply an impotent gesture without any redistributive policy, it is the suppression of counterpolitics against centralized power. Etienne Balibar, in *Politics and the Other Scene*, explores the ways in which discourses like inclusion operate politically as anti-egalitarian “police logic.” As such, inclusion, while not repressive or violent on its face, seeks to counter and annihilate the real egalitarian politics of the oppressed. He writes,

politics proper - the politics which sets egalitarian logic against police logic (and which thereby distinguishes itself from anti-politics, which does the opposite) - consists not in the formation of a universal consensus within the demos, but in the establishment of ‘the part of no part’ [*part des sans-part*] (the poor in the ancient city-state; elsewhere, workers, immigrants or women, but the expression refers to a place - it cannot be confined to any particular sociological condition), whose existence signals the irreducible presence of a cause [*litige*] or the impossibility of constituting the demos as a totality: a simple distribution or reciprocity of parts. (Balibar, 2002, 5)

What differentiates a discourse like inclusion from “politics proper,” is that it is oriented as a means of incorporating all kinds of identity-difference and ideological dissent into a universal and docile demos. Inclusion is a totalizing discourse insofar as it tries to squander the egalitarian politics of the “*part des sans-part*.” Simultaneously, inclusion is a method through which institutions can welcome and appreciate marginality without compromising its position in upholding its exploitative practices.

Because inclusion operates within the realm of affect and perception, that is, it actively avoids accounting of equality in material terms, it requires propaganda to maintain its cultural and political relevance. Subjects who the institution seeks to *make feel included*, are subjects the institution actively compels through soft power. Inclusion makes no threats of

harm or violence; ostensibly it does the opposite. Though inclusion does not even reference domination by force, it continues to function within the realm of power and subjugation. As a bourgeois discourse, or at least part of one, championed by centralized power like the administrative apparatus within the university, inclusion is but one deft technology for the control and surveillance of the *included*. Gramsci describes the relationship between overt force and domination through discourse, writing,

the supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as “domination” and as “intellectual and moral leadership”. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to “liquidate”, or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise “leadership” before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to “lead” as well. (Gramsci, 1973, 212-3)

Clearly, inclusion belongs to the later category, “intellectual and moral leadership.” As such, those leading the charge in supporting, reproducing and implementing inclusion, be they students, faculty, or administrators, must first be hegemonic to amass the kind of power needed to implement it through managerial practices. Covertly, inclusion, with its egalitarian posturing, obscures class politics, that is the antagonism between workers and capitalists.

Essentially, inclusion is a discursive appeal from capital and the dominant social classes, to oppressed subjects: “we (the institution), in providing an inclusive environment, will make you feel included, and you (the included subject) will not fight for equality.” Whoever then is in charge of fostering the inclusive environment must “lead” in the Gramscian sense, doing the work of pacifying the “*part des sans-part*” (Balibar’s constellation of

dominated subjects), on behalf of the dominant social class, of capital, of the university's administrative apparatus.

## On Capital

Capital is central to my analysis of contemporary DEI discourse and practice. As I will be returning to the role of capital within the elite university, capital's interests and various forms of capital throughout my critique of DEI and the current state of affairs in the elite university, it is important to define these terms and establish a basis on which my analysis will rest. Capital plays such an outsized role in what is otherwise a discourse analysis, because as I intend to show, the productive process within the university (its political economy) is the economic base upon which ideological and discursive formations like DEI are constructed. The university, I argue, is both a site of the production of intellectual products and class engagement which can be understood as cultural, human and material capital, and a site for class formation—that is, the elite university is constantly churning out elite workers and managers (professional-managerial class). Thus, to properly dissect the university, and more importantly to strategize and change the university, Marxian class analysis is required. By utilizing theories of capital from Marx, and their extrapolations—Bourdieu's "cultural capital," and Foucault's "human capital"—I seek to develop a theory of power that contextualizes social relations within the university. (Marx, Economic Manuscripts: Capital Vol. I - Chapter Four, 1867) (Bourdieu, 1973) (Foucault and Senellart, 1979)

Capital in the case of the university can be expressed in the form of money, however my use of capital, and Marx's intention in defining the term, is a more specific social relation than money itself. He writes in Chapter 4 of *Das Kapital*, "M-C-M", the transformation of money into commodities, and the change of commodities back again into money; or buying in order to sell. Money that circulates in the latter manner is thereby transformed into, becomes capital, and is already potentially capital." (Marx, Economic Manuscripts: Capital Vol. I - Chapter Four, "The General Formula for Capital," 1867) In this definition, capital can be understood as the exchange of money for money. In the case of the elite

university, a nonprofit organization, capital is not realized strictly in the Marxian sense, however the process of accumulation, wealth and the protection of capital rooted in this exchange is a relation that bears incredible significance in all institutions under capitalism. The elite university is beholden to capital and the processes of capitalism both internally and externally.

## **Capital within the University**

Since what Christopher Newfield refers to as the “neoliberal turn,” universities, especially public institutions have been subject to increasing financialization. Public resources that otherwise allowed universities to maintain relative autonomy from private institutions and the state, including a diminution of humanities in favor of the “practical” and vocational, and increasing precarity for faculty. (Lye et al., 2011) Scholars Sheila Slaughter and Larry Leslie, have developed a working theory to encompass the broad constellation of phenomena resulting in the corporatization of the university and the commodification of knowledge in “academic capitalism.” When they coined the term in 1997, Slaughter and Leslie defined academic capitalism as “institutional and professorial market or market-like efforts to secure external monies” (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, 17). Though academic capitalism, defined as such, is a real phenomenon, it is far too narrow to grasp the breadth of the university’s commodification. Certainly, the decline of the public goods university, and increasing reliance on external corporate funding contributes to this effect, however the ideological regime which seeks to convert the social relations of education to financial exchanges expands beyond the circumstances of one funding model over another.

Rather than situating my critique in the cause and effect of governmental and private policy on the university, of which there has been a notable impact, my analysis seeks to understand capitalist labor relations in the university as the material foundation for ideological apparatuses and cultural regimes that span the political class. To understand



capital in the elite university is to understand the production of class-traitor subjectivity. The elite university specifically trains students—professional-managerial class aspirants—in proper exploitation, that is capitalist exploitation with the illusion of consent and mutuality. Students and faculty together use the tools and raw materials of the university to produce intellectual products, creative products, class engagement, and sport, all under the tacit but disingenuous assumption that the product truly belongs to the worker. If we can accept that production in today’s neoliberal academy can be understood as “academic capitalism,” then labor must be understood as “academic exploitation.”

This exploitation exists both within the context of the money system, where funds are managed and distributed directly, but also in economies of experience and legitimacy. For instance, when students and faculty produce intellectual products, be they essays, books, or scientific papers, the workers are given part of the prestige, credit and legitimacy they produce, but some portion is also attributed to the university. When a faculty member wins an award for their research, it is attributed to their name, but also to the university. In other words, the worker gets a share of the profits, and a non laboring party that merely provides the capital and tools which the laborer uses to do their work, also garners some of his profits. This is not a mutual relationship, in which the workers are in cooperation with other laborers, it is one in which the surplus-value produced by workers are distributed at the whim of capital. Capital, in this sense, being the accumulated wealth, legitimacy and control owned by the institution as an actor and center of power that is inherently adversarial to the interests of its workers. In economies of experience, legitimacy and affect, the university may be working outside of the Marxian money system, however Marx’s critique of capitalism, specifically his interpretation of the labor theory of value, provides insights into the economic and social relationship between the university and its workers, one of exploitation. Extra-economic exploitation—that is the social and psychic exploitation that extends beyond the strictly economic sphere—is central to the political dynamics of the

university. Where administration is not managing funds directly, it is managing experience, prestige and legitimacy. Entire administrative departments are devoted to controlling the affect of faculty and students, managing negative attitudes and fostering productivity. Even these seemingly noneconomic social relations within the university can be understood within a Marxian framework.

## **Cultural Capital**

Theorists following in the vein of Marx's critical analysis of capitalism have expanded the concept of capital beyond the traditional economic framework to include social phenomena and culture (Bourdieu, 1973). Cultural capital is one product of this expansion that provides insights into the ways individuals and institutions wield power through the possession and accumulation of knowledges and culture. By adopting the cultural tastes, and knowledge of exclusive domains of power, individuals can gain cultural capital. Institutions, through long term investments in prestige and cultural legitimacy, can possess cultural capital and have the ability to grant cultural capital to those with proximity to the institution. Pierre Bourdieu, one of the major proponents of the theory of cultural capital, situates cultural capital specifically in the establishment and possession of taste cultures, that is the carefully cultivated cultural preferences of different classes, and the distinction between classes indicated by differences in said taste cultures. Bourdieu connects cultural capital directly with the processes of distinction and social reproduction. In his analysis, the

object becomes the production of the habitus, that system of dispositions which acts as a mediation between structures and practice; more specifically, it becomes necessary to study the laws that determine the tendency of structures to reproduce themselves by producing agents endowed with the system of predispositions which is capable of

engendering practices adapted to the structures and thereby contributing to the reproduction of the structures. (Bourdieu, 1973, 72)

In the case of cultural capital, the production of elite taste cultures and exclusive knowledge is core to the reproduction of social and economic stratification under capitalism. The dimension of cultural capital broadens and nuances the social conditions that stratify classes and fractions within classes beyond simple differences in wealth or status.

As Bourdieu, education has always been foundational in the production and accumulation of cultural capital. Within institutions of education, especially exclusive and elite schools, subjects are given the space, tools and training in how to develop valuable tastes and cultural capital. This is expressed in everything from preferences in food, music, entertainment, body language, and linguistic codes like grammar and vocabulary. As I will argue in more detail in another section, within today's elite universities, DEI has become an instrumental discourse in the production of elite tastes and cultural capital.

## **Human Capital**

In neoliberal capitalism, human capital has become an essential theory for analyzing the economic and social relations of humans in society. Initially developed by neoliberal economists, critical theorists have adopted human capital as a theoretical framework for understanding how labor-power is ideologically configured under neoliberalism. (Adamson, 2009) First, a note on neoliberalism; to fully grasp the historical development of human capital as a materially relevant form of capital in society, one must first have a sense of the evolution of capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century. Following the collapse of public goods-oriented New Deal liberalism in the post-war era, a new economic and ideological regime of deregulated markets, the financialization of the economy, and the complete marketization of domains of private and public life—neoliberalism. Within

a neoliberal economy, social relations between individuals in private life (romance, parenting, study, etc.) are subsumed by the idealized values of market logic. That is, dating preferences, parenting choices, and self-education are all dictated by the calculated choices of a market actor. All aspects of private and public life become individualized and understood as investments. Under this logic, individuals begin to govern themselves as a discrete accumulation of experiences, knowledges, and credentials, in other words human capital.

For Michel Foucault, a pioneer in the development of human capital theory, human capital “represents two processes, one that we could call the extension of economic analysis into a previously unexplored domain, and second, on the basis of this, the possibility of giving a strictly economic interpretation of a whole domain previously thought to be non-economic” (Foucault and Senellart, 1979, 219). As noted in my brief definition of cultural capital, human capital is a theory that allows for the extension of Marxian exploitation and alienation into more broad social realms than the workplace. As Foucault begins to uncover, neoliberalism as a discursive and ideological formation, seamlessly transmits the social relations of the capitalist workplace to other domains of life. I should note, human capital is not formed through hard power, that is at the direction of a centralized authority that can threaten violence. Rather, human capital is the product of discourse, self directed governmentality in which subjects are compelled to understand themselves and others as human capital. This is guided implicitly, of course, by the precarity and inherent violence of neoliberal capitalism.

Theorist Wendy Brown in her book *Undoing the Demos*, connects Foucault’s theory of human capital to education. As financialized subjects, or to use Foucault’s term *homo oeconomicus*, subjects view their education as an investment for their future self and the value of their human capital. Brown claims,

human capital is constrained to self-invest in ways that contribute to its appreciation or at least prevent its depreciation; this includes titrating inputs such as education,

predicting and adjusting to changing markets in vocations, housing, health, and retirement, and organizing its dating, mating, creative, and leisure practices in value-enhancing ways. Human capital is distinctly not concerned with acquiring the knowledge and experience needed for intelligent democratic citizenship. (Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. 2015, 177)

Subjects, understanding themselves as human capital, and acting accordingly, do not understand their own education and education generally as a utility for the enrichment of one's moral character, knowledge, and intellectual capacities for their own private purposes or to become a more apt democratic citizen. Education is a process only valuable insofar as it can appreciate human capital.<sup>4</sup> In the elite university, human capital is appreciated partly by what goes on in the classroom, but far more substantially by the acquisition of cultural capital, prestige, accreditation, and connections afforded to graduates of such institutions. DEI does not exist outside of this dynamic. As a neoliberal discourse, contemporary DEI is merely a more intricately disguised discourse that serves to efficiently appreciate the human capital of its adherents. Through the accumulation of cultural capital associated with adopting elite taste cultures, and the value of accreditation received through the grading system, subjects utilize contemporary DEI as a technology of human capital appreciation that will benefit their transition, ascendancy and competitiveness in elite corporate job markets.

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<sup>4</sup>For engagement with human capital production in the university as it relates to racist and patriarchal capital accumulation see Part 2 ("Difference and Human Capital") where I develop these ideas in more depth.

# **Stakeholders: The Economic and Political Relations of Students, Faculty, and Administration**

A way to understand DEI in practice is to identify the motivations and desires of stakeholders where DEI has taken hold. In other words, what makes DEI practices and ideology attractive to those who engage with it and tend to endorse it? What forces keep those who reject DEI from opposing it? There are a few major subject positions within the university as it pertains to contemporary DEI: students, faculty and administrators. Within these major categories are many individuals with varying aspirations, self-conceptions of their place in the university, and ultimate affinity to and for contemporary DEI. However, I contend these general categories are helpful reductions. Though individuals have many conflicting interests and orientations socially and economically, within the university, subjects are employed and restricted to certain functions defined by these three categories. Students are primarily consumers of the college experience and prestige, which they pay for. Faculty are primarily workers who produce intellectual products and services for students and on behalf of the university. Finally, administrators manage and surveil faculty and students; they are managers of the labor process and financial managers of funds. Perhaps most importantly in the context of contemporary DEI initiatives, administrators are responsible for marketing the university (that is managing the attitudes of those external to the university, managing prestige) and managing the attitudes and voices of students and faculty. In the following sections I will explore how each of these major stakeholders interacts with DEI discourse and practice, situating them as social, political and economic subjects.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>My focus in the following subsections pertains primarily to elite colleges. Other types of universities and institutions have differing relationships to the nation-state, corporate sector, and capitalist economy.

## Students

Undergraduate students at the elite university occupy a unique position, as young adults in the transitory stage from children of their families to becoming independent adults in their own right. As such, students enter college stratified. Some are able to do their studies debt free, while others accrue debt and work as wage laborers part-time to pay for tuition through work study.

This stratification aside, all students have to contend with a central contradiction, simultaneously occupying the role of consumer (paying tuition for a college education/experience) and the role of a worker (laboring at their studies to produce intellectual products and class engagement). Thus, the student exists at the intersection of these two positions within the university. This consumer/worker dichotomy is central to how the university, and by extension its endeavors in DEI work, understand, and make meaning of students as subjects to manage. With the dichotomy comes the tensions of the discursive rights of the consumer, in which the *customer is always right*, and the unfreedoms and responsibilities of work, where the worker has no control over what is done with the fruits of their labor. Discourses of consumer rights may guide policy and provide the illusion of freedoms and entitlements among students, but their material reality as workers within the institution remains unchanged.

Given this dynamic, why might the institution seek to engage in DEI discourse and practice? Everywhere, from administrative directives, to curricula oriented around inclusion, to the mission statements on the university website, DEI discourse fixates on students' experience as consumers in need of consumer satisfaction, while eschewing their status as workers. The work of creating an inclusive environment, is in most cases, the work of managing and maintaining customer appreciation. Much of this is masked in the language of "providing a holistic experience for students," in which academic work is but one part of the shaping and building of a complete and well-rounded individual. While this mimics the admirable work of bettering work conditions for students, by deemphasizing coursework

and what goes on in the classroom, the primary site of student labor, this kind of discourse denies students recognition as workers. Contemporary DEI discourse largely operates in this function; the university encourages and promotes diversity among its population, equity more generally, and fosters the aesthetic of inclusion in its practices, all as a means of fully recognizing and appreciating students as loyal and worthy consumers of a product, while systematically denying the reality that the product they are purchasing is one they labor to produce.

To the extent that the institution recognizes student labor, it does so in discrete ways. The primary compensation for students' labor is the degree that is awarded to them upon graduation. But even this degree does not fully belong to the student that possesses it, for it is in the university's interest to maintain a high graduation rate and it is up to the university's discretion to reward diplomas as it desires. The diploma may be the most substantial form of compensation for students' intellectual labor, but the routine compensation which the student works for everyday are their grades. Unlike a wage, the quality or value of students' grade compensation is variable and completely dependent on the evaluation of their labor. Through the grading system, the university structurally commands the quality and quantity of labor produced by the student. The entire exchange of student labor for grades and accreditation is underwritten by a discourse of choice. The narrative goes, "students are free to work as much or as hard as they choose, and that will be reflected in their grade." We know the falsehood of this narrative from the most rudimentary Left critiques of liberal capitalism; workers' so-called freedoms to participate in the marketplace are but an illusion under the coercive pressures of capital.

In recent years, left-liberals have begun to embrace equity, a core tenet of contemporary DEI ideology. In the name of equity, these liberals seek to ameliorate disparities between actors in a market by increasing accommodations and changing standards to facilitate more equitable outcomes. Ostensibly, there is nothing wrong with this, however the attempt at



establishing equal access to a competitive market leaves intact the structure, stakes and inherent inequality of the market itself. In this sense, equity is an “equal opportunity” discourse. Equity engages in the core false promises of liberalism, espousing a democratic discourse while maintaining undemocratic systems of political economy. Through equity-centered initiatives and curricula, the university puts a human face on exploitation, merely softening the edges of alienation.

The institutional credit system of evaluation and its counterpart in DEI discourse, equity, which seeks to distract students from their function as laborers, is the primary site of alliance between capital and DEI within the economic relationship of students to the university. Broadly speaking, the relationship between the student and the university is an economy of legitimacy. The student, by virtue of association with the institution, garners legitimacy and human capital, the value of which is determined by their grades and honors, as well as the institution’s relative prestige among peer institutions (more on that later). Along with the direct exchange of tuition funds, the student also assists in the maintenance of the institution’s legitimacy. High graduation rates, and placement into competitive careers in the private sector, public policy, and academia, are ways that high-achieving alumni produce and maintain the university’s elite status. In an era of “multicultural capitalism,” in which entry to the elite social class is predicated on literacy in elite multicultural taste cultures, contemporary DEI in the university plays a crucial role. The university is not only a site for training in the technical skills to be effective and competitive in the job market, it is the site of acculturation for the elite.

The production and reproduction of cultural capital in elite universities is not at all unique to contemporary DEI discourse. The ivory tower has always been a school for the acquisition of refined taste cultures necessary for survival and acceptance in elite circles. Pierre Bourdieu made note of this phenomenon in his 1973 piece “Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction.” Explaining the role of a sociological approach to analyzing class

relations and education, he writes,

The specific role of the sociology of education is assumed once it has established itself as the science of the relations between cultural reproduction and social reproduction. This occurs when it endeavors to determine the contribution made by the educational system to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbiotic relationships between classes, by contributing to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among these classes. (Bourdieu, 1973, 71)

Sociology has taught us, the distinction between social classes—an intimately related process to the economic formation of class fractions—is produced and reproduced in capitalist societies with the accumulation of social capital. Institutions like elite universities, are sites where subjects can acquire the knowledges and symbolic goods necessary to distinguish themselves from the lower social classes. For generations elite universities have taught not only the liberal arts and sciences, but also the etiquettes, attitudes, tastes and lexicon of class distinction.

At some point in the second half of the twentieth century, the taste cultures in the standard left-centrist liberal universities began to include, at least the performance of, liberal tolerance of difference. As Jodi Melamed articulates in her book, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*,

U.S. universities socialized future members of the professional-managerial class, whether white, of color, or international, into progressive constituencies for regressive public policies and a grossly unequal system of global capital accumulation. That is, it taught them to perceive themselves as antiracist and multicultural, which was in line with the period's corporate humanism, in a manner that allowed the material conditions for a new apartheid between haves and have nots to flourish. Students received pastoral care that integrated liberal multicultural concepts into their sense of self-actualization and

prepared them to manage populations abandoned to the punitive effects of postKeynesian policies. (Melamed, 2011, 114)

Especially in discourses of race, but in all discourses of difference, elite universities have made multiculturalism and a kind of paternalistic tolerance a core feature of PMC taste-culture. Contemporary DEI, is perhaps the most virulent iteration of multicultural discourses like these in elite spaces. Students have come to closely associate evocations and performance of tolerant attitudes toward marginalized groups, with personal achievement on levels ranging from professional to spiritual. With these performances, most notably for those belonging to dominant social groups (whites, the wealthy, men, heterosexuals, etc.), is an attempt to elevate oneself through distinction. That is, for instance, white elites perform their opposition to racism, sexism, or homophobia, in order to claim their relative enlightenment compared to the otherwise degenerate bigoted, uneducated whites. Rarely are exhibits of distinction explicitly framed as such. Rather, performing one's virtues as an enlightened master of tolerance is typically portrayed as a selfless defense of the marginalized. I intend to argue these performances that claim to serve marginalized individuals or communities, in action perpetuate the realities of marginality itself, that the very discourses that claim to value inclusion actively exclude all but the privileged few who have gained literacy in these discourses.

Casual attacks on the moral character of the working class are common in elite institutions where contemporary DEI is popular, though more common are signs of symbolic goods of distinction, exhibitions of cultural capital. Part of adopting contemporary DEI as a community, is the adoption of new lexical codes of neoliberal tolerance. Entire vocabularies of new terms have come into circulation on elite college campuses that signify social class distinctions. Those who can effortlessly use "BIPOC," "Latinx," and "intersectionality" in conversation, signal their bonafides as enlightened multicultural subjects, and thus differentiate themselves from the less privileged masses. These linguistic codes

of contemporary DEI and its accompanying taste cultures extend far beyond the usage of a short list of buzzwords, to entire modes of communication and a shared conception of *equity*. The production of codes as such is not incidental; they are central to the process of social reproduction in education. Bourdieu describes this process as

the fact that the apprehension and possession of cultural goods as symbolic goods (along with the symbolic satisfactions which accompany an appropriation of this kind) are possible only for those who hold the code making it possible to decipher them or, in other words, that the appropriation of symbolic goods presupposes the possession of the instruments of appropriation, it is sufficient to give free play to the laws of cultural transmission for cultural capital to be added to cultural capital and for the structure of the distribution of cultural capital between social classes to be thereby reproduced. By this is meant the structure of the distribution of instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed. In order to be persuaded of the truth of this, it must first be seen that the structure of the distribution of classes or sections ('fractions') of a class according to the extent to which they are consumers of culture corresponds, with a few slight differences such as the fact that heads of industry and commerce occupy a lower position than do higher officestaff, professionals, and even intermediate office staff, to the structure of distribution according to the hierarchy of economic capital and power. (Bourdieu, 1973, 73)

I include the vast majority of theorizing about the production of contemporary DEI's codes and taste cultures in the section on students, because it is the students for whom gaining fluency (that is coding and decoding, learning to perform one's class distinctions) is most crucial. Students are in this sense truly students, they come to the university to be trained and gain access to the knowledge needed to be successful managers of labor, finance capital, and affect. Though they may be acquired through osmosis, fluency and mastery of

the codes of contemporary DEI are not merely byproducts of an elite education. If one truly aspires to have a career in any of a number of fields in which the language of DEI is a part of the corporate culture, they must incorporate tolerance into their professional identity. In this sense, performances of commitment to inclusion, antiracist performances, and other displays of the cultural capital of liberal tolerance, is not as it is sometimes characterized—the self-indulgent impulse to flaunt one’s moral superiority—it is economic and political self-aggrandizement in direly competitive markets of influence.

This is not a moral argument. While the PMC, under contemporary DEI’s sway, tends to make evaluative claims about the moral character of its enemies (particularly the white working class), deeming speech acts or people “problematic,” I do not intend to make any evaluation of the moral character of DEI’s subjects. (Lange, 2020) The people who engage in these performances of tolerance, do not do so because they are evil or selfish, they are simply acting rationally. They aspire to be capitalists or high earning PMC elites because our society makes being working class excruciatingly difficult. Students at the entrance gates of elite professional adulthood, are in a crisis morally and economically. Many PMC aspirants are burdened with student debt; the stakes are rather high. Even for those without debt, the fear of relegation to the unenlightened rank-and-file social classes is immense. By ensuring access to the elite through its exclusive taste cultures, and constantly providing opportunities to feel morally superior to the working class, DEI promises relief from these crises. In combination with the personal and professional promises of DEI is an implicit commitment to capitalism. Contemporary DEI’s facial egalitarianism is underwritten by a Fukuyamist tendency to only challenge power insofar as one can eliminate interpersonal bias while remaining loyal to the profit motive and the material satisfaction of PMC wealth. Catherine Liu captures this PMC subjectivity in her book *Virtue Hoarders: The Case Against the Professional Managerial Class*, writing

Although the PMC is profoundly secular in nature, its rhetorical tone is pseudo-religious.

While the PMC infuriates conservative Christians with its media monopoly on liberal righteousness, it finds salvation, like most Protestant sects, in material and earthly success. In liberal circles, talking about class or class consciousness before other forms of difference is not just controversial; it is heretical. They call you a “class reductionist” if you argue that race, gender, and class are not interchangeable categories. They pile on with the legalistic and deadly term intersectional to accommodate the materialist critique of their politics. The PMC simply does not want its class identity or interests unmasked. Young people wanting to enter what the Ehrenreichs called the “liberal professions” and gain positions in academia and the culture and media industries have had to adapt themselves to the Procrustean bed of PMC-dominated networks of influence. (Liu, 2021, 201)

As a vehicle of cultural capital accumulation and social class distinction, contemporary DEI discourses implicitly support students’ striving for professional ascendancy while separating them socially and economically from the working class. Explicitly, contemporary DEI is hostile to class analysis, focusing on issues of bias and misrecognition and seldomly challenging the capitalist system of production. Thus, both mechanically and ideologically, contemporary DEI discourages its left-liberal adherents from engaging in solidarity with the working class or participating in anything resembling traditional Left politics.

## **Faculty**

In the neoliberal academe, faculty occupy an increasingly strange position, one that is shifting discursively as the meaning of the university as a whole adapts to new economic and political conditions. Scholarship on the public university has identified the ways in which neoliberal economics and discourse “promotes a consumerist view of education that resignifies it as a private investment instead of a public good. It repositions the university as a business whose primary purpose is to drive economic growth and whose activities are

expected to be profitable” (Lye et al., 2011, 1). I argue that, albeit to a lesser extent, elite private colleges and universities have adopted similarly neoliberal discourses that favor corporatism and profitability over public goods. Contemporary DEI, I contend, is the latest manifestation of corporate interest in the development of human capital and subjectivities suitable to capital’s preferences. As such, the elite university professor is an integral part of educating and shaping future corporate elites. By embedding discourses of contemporary DEI, (one that promotes a capital-friendly form of multicultural tolerance) into curricula, faculty in elite universities are made to do the work of priming students for a corporate culture that values diversity and mercilessly exploits workers for profit.

Many faculty are not strict adherents to contemporary DEI, or at least reject the corporatized and commodified aspects of the discourse, however immense pressure from students, other faculty, and most importantly administration, fuse the practices of DEI to the job of teaching.

The consumer/worker dichotomy of the student, in which the student is positioned either as a laborer who works for the university, or a consumer of the “college experience,” alters the discursive and economic position of faculty, insofar as whichever side (consumer or worker) is favored determines the relationship between students and their professors. If the student is a worker, who labors on behalf of the university, the professor is a fellow laborer, potentially a manager of some sort, but nonetheless someone for whom solidarity with students is a possibility. If the student is a consumer, faculty are merely service workers who tend to the desires and “consumer rights” of students for whom they labor. In the consumer model, faculty are relegated to a position of lower status to both students and the administration in a hierarchy of power. In this dynamic, students and administration together are the class enemies of faculty colluding to extract their labor (intellectual, affective, and physical).

The consumer model functions similarly to that of a restaurant. This analogy may seem

crude, but is effective at illuminating the brutality of the relationship between students and their professors. The students are patrons of the restaurant, transitory actors who spend a short while in the institution to receive a specific service. Faculty function like wait staff, workers who have a more long term commitment to the institution, but in the time that they serve the customer are in some respects more beholden to him than their own bosses and managers (administration, board of trustees). The relationship between the customer and server may appear casual and collaborative, but under the veneer of niceties is the reality that the relationship is transactional, coercive, and the server's livelihood depends on the customer's satisfaction. At any point in the meal, if the customer is dissatisfied with the service, they are free to complain to a manager. The manager will capitulate to the customer's grievances, as administrations often treat students, and punitive action can be taken against the server, as can happen to faculty. After the meal, the server gives the customer their check and the customer sits with the anonymous and discretionary choice to tip. In the university the "tip" comes in the form of end of course evaluations, an opportunity for students to praise, critique or otherwise rate their professor's performance. The end of course evaluation, much like a tip, is a fleeting and low stakes situation for students with serious consequences for non-tenured and tenure track faculty.

If we understand students to be workers, the end of course evaluation is nothing more than an instrument to disrupt solidarity and alienate workers from one another. Through the end of course survey, students are required to do the administrative work of evaluating and managing faculty, and through the grade system, faculty are required to do the administrative work of evaluating and managing students. Both technologies, grades and end of course surveys, encourage workers to side with managerial practices and capital over their interests in protecting and advocating for one another. The worker discourse allows for a truly intellectual environment to flourish, one in which students and faculty can labor collaboratively.



For students, contemporary DEI discourse not only endorses the consumer model, it is adversarial to the worker model.

Under the consumer model, faculty are required to participate in the management of the student experience, which extends beyond the bounds of their relationship in the classroom. Faculty are responsible for maintaining students' feelings of comfort and their psychological well being more generally. Often these notions (comfort, safety, wellness, etc.) which faculty are meant to manage in their students, are housed in the discourse of inclusion, and to a lesser extent the discourse of equity. When race, gender, class and ability are abstracted from DEI, as is often the case, inclusion or equity can be a stand in for the general demand that faculty construct an environment in which students feel comfortable. Where the specter of difference remains is the threat administration and students can lobby against faculty in instances of non compliance. Because these consumer oriented quality control measures are attached to DEI, however faint the relevance of marginality to the initial claim of inclusivity, a professor accused of not fostering an inclusive environment (that is not maintaining the feeling of comfort and wellness for students) is immediately associated with discrimination. In other words, inclusion and equity are constructed as abstracted, almost ontological categories, outside of the particularity of issues of race/racism, gender/patriarchy, class/capitalism, ability/disability. When applied this way the management of comfort, stress, and wellness can constitute inclusion and equity. However the multicultural foundation of the discourses of inclusion and equity allow for the invocation? or connotation of the moral horrors of bigotry in instances in which faculty's professional performance is not deemed satisfactory.

## **Administration**

Within the non-profit university, administrators play a similar, but not entirely identical role, to the capitalist in a profit-driven enterprise. As functionaries, administration must,

like a capitalist, be in control of the profit derived from the product of workers' labor, and like a capitalist they must own the tools and raw materials used in production. Unlike a capitalist enterprise, administrators are not strictly responsible for obtaining profits on behalf of shareholders. Though materially there are some distinctions to be made between administrators in a non-profit university and capitalists in business, I contend that the social relations in the university (worker-administration) and the corporation (worker-capitalist) are largely alike. The most notable difference between administrators and capitalists –the one that informs discursive production within the university–is that administrators, though they are managers of capital, are not the owners of capital themselves. While the administrative apparatus as an institution functions like a capitalist, as subjects, administrators are professional managerial class (PMC) not ruling class.

Administration is functionally and discursively the greatest producer of managerial rationality. That is to say, the administrative apparatus is responsible for enacting managerial practices, representative of those practices, and administering is often the work of producing discourses in which managerial qualities are valued above solidarity. Managerial rationality is the contradictory ideology of workers who side with the interests of capital instead of other workers. As role models of the managerial wing of the PMC, administrators not only exemplify the PMC's subjectivities, they are institutionally responsible for producing young PMC aspirants—and not just any members of the PMC, the elite university is constantly competing to cultivate the most elite well-qualified strain of young professionals and managers possible.

As Barbara Ehrenreich notes, the PMC are “all those people whose economic and social status is based on education, rather than on the ownership of capital or property” (Ehrenreich, 1989, 12). The PMC relies on education to give them meaning in the class structure, the most important dimension of which is differentiation from the uneducated working class. In the case of administration, subjects who simultaneously exemplify what

it is to be an accomplished PMC, and are responsible for marketing the university to students and donors, reliance on the consumer model is essential. Because administrators must buy-in to the values and virtues of PMC status (social and economic), and seek to reproduce it in students, for personal and institutional reasons, and as Barbara Erenrich shows, education is the technology through which subjects acquire the credentials to enter the PMC, maintaining the university as the site of production for PMC's becomes a primary initiative for administration.

With this in mind, let us return to the consumer/worker dichotomy. In the worker model, the production of PMC values, the most important of which is the dissociation and subjugation of the working class, is unlikely. While students in the worker model may ultimately be training to be professionals and managers, they have little reason to side with capital over their own interests and worker solidarity. Under the consumer model, which the administration seeks to foster, administrators can manage and facilitate the cultivation of their own subjectivities and values. That is to say, a major selling point for the university, as marketed expertly by the administrative apparatus, is the promise that graduates will enter the PMC and be spared the brutality of belonging to the working class.

Where individual PMC's can be identified as those white-collar workers who abandon worker solidarity in favor of their bosses and capital, the university administrative apparatus functions more like an institutional PMC. Larger and more powerful than PMC subjects, the administration is the mass producer of PMC subjectivities. Through its facilitation and organization of the university, the administrative apparatus designs the university as a nursery for the betrayal of Labor's interests. I argue the relentless push for the consumer model that runs through institutional directives on every level throughout the administrative apparatus, is the primary technology for the production of elite PMC subjects. Embedded in the administrative apparatus' design of the university is an institutional embrace of corporate interest (the production of workers loyal to capital) and that is necessitated by the careful

management of affect and production of self-control within those subjects they manage. In this sense, the disciplinary power of the administrative apparatus, is the same disciplinary power of the corporation. (Foucault, 1975) Students and faculty are subjected to a normalizing gaze that separates workers from their identity and makes them docile under the fear of slipping into the uneducated ranks of the working class.

If Marx was correct to claim “workers of the world unite; you have nothing to lose but your chains,” managerial rationality serves to convince students and faculty alike, if they keep their chains well polished and clean, one day they can sell them. (Marx and Engels, 1848) The nature of academic exploitation, indeed what necessitates the role of the administrative apparatus in the neoliberal university, is to produce the class-unconscious subjectivity of managers. What constitutes a manager materially is their role in the process of production: between capitalists and the workers they manage, but a worker nonetheless. Good managers are constituted ideologically as those who derive their sense of power and agency in the workplace, not through solidarity with other workers, but through their ability to dominate those they manage. In the context of academic exploitation, the administrative apparatus offers workers manager status, or at least the potential to be managers, as consolation for the alienation they must experience as workers within the university.

Interpellated as consumers, students are always meant to feel they are managers-in-the-making. One might think the student is distressed, as they are essentially a manager with no one beneath them in the corporate structure to manage, however the administrative apparatus is keen on reminding students that they are primarily managers of themselves. Under managerial rationality, early every problem the student encounters by way of their oppression and exploitation, is an individual pathology in need of self-management. The alienation of students from their labor within the university, that leads them to sleep deprivation, depression, and general unhappiness, under managerial rationality is one’s mental health, or even more broadly a concern of (un)wellness. Where the condition of academic

exploitation can be remedied through solidaristic action and bargaining, wellness is achievable through lonely techniques of self-management. Managerial rationality ensures the maintenance of efficient laboring in the university while simultaneously further atomizing workers. Such wellness techniques expand managerial practices from the sphere of the workplace to every sphere of private and public life in which distress is experienced, and thus manageable. Under a regime of managerial rationality, the most intimate parts of private life (sleep, exercise, friendship, romance, etc.) are reducible to activities in need of monitoring and managing, so that one can be healthy or well enough to labor.

## **Part 2**

# **Social Reproduction and Systems of Oppression:**

## **Bhattacharya in the University**

The following chapter uses the work of Thiti Battacharya et al. to apply the analytic framework, Social Reproduction Theory (SRT), to the university directly. The chapters, “On Capital,” and “Stakeholders,” in Part 1 lay the groundwork for a Marxian political-economy approach to the university; in “D, E, & I,” I provided a brief discursive analysis of Contemporary DEI as it relates to racist and gendered capitalist social relations in the university. Part 2, and in particular this chapter on SRT, seeks to synthesize the structuralist class analysis and discursive analysis of these two sections to provide a rich exegesis of the university as a site of multiple oppressions. My analysis seeks to understand the university (a place of work and residence) as a site of social reproduction in which the exploitative labor process extracts from, and oppresses, subjects through gendered and racialized means. I chose Contemporary DEI as the technology-of-focus in my analysis in order to capture the complex mapping of race, gender and ability on labor and production in the university today.

Before introducing SRT in the context of the university, we must first develop a working definition of social reproduction and Social Reproduction Theory, and how this framework is applicable to the university. Social Reproduction Theory seeks to expand upon traditional approaches to Marxism by emphasizing forms of labor and surplus-labor extraction often excluded from the rigidly defined category, “work.” Proponents of SRT claim that they employ “a ‘thick’ description of the ‘economy’ and ‘political process’” (Bhattacharya and Vogel, 2017, 5). SRT developed out of the Marxist-feminist tradition which seeks to include the domestic and reproductive labor, (traditionally) of women, as necessarily subject to the same scrutiny by the Left of other capitalist labor relations. (Vogel, 2013) Thus, SRT uses a radical understanding of work, that transcends vulgar economism, to form a more

comprehensively anti-oppression anticapitalism.

SRT's inherent innovation, which makes this achievement possible, is a return to the centrality of the commodity fetish. (Marx, Economic Manuscripts: Capital Vol. I - Chapter Four, "The Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof," 1867) As Battacharya writes in the introduction to *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentering Oppression*, "simply put, while labor puts the system of capitalist production in motion, SRT points out that labor power itself is the sole commodity—the 'unique commodity,' as Marx calls it—that is produced outside of the circuit of commodity production" (Bhattacharya and Vogel, 2017, 7). It is in this light, that I recognize the utility of SRT in building a comprehensive view of capitalist production and reproduction in the university. As noted previously, students' productive labor—the work of producing class engagement, intellectual and creative work, attendance, etc.—does not result in traditionally consumable commodities. However, once students' reproductive labor—most easily summarized as the reproduction of the university itself—is fully accounted for, one can begin to theorize students as subjects, affected and interpellated by the totality of oppressions. (Althusser, 1970)

Much like the architects of SRT, I see it necessary to apply a *thick* understanding of work to the academic and intellectual labor of students. Expanding beyond this productive labor, accounted for in the classroom, through assignments, and on the sports field, SRT gives insight into the psychosocial labor of discursively reproducing the university. When considering the work of social reproduction in the university, I suggest we focus our attention to two interrelated and crucial sites: the reproduction of the University itself, and the reproduction of the subject (the student-self). As noted in previous sections, the discrete discursive relations that reproduce the university are largely predicated on factors like prestige and legitimacy. This relationship is made reciprocal, insofar as students rely on the institution for legitimacy and prestige as the institution relies on students. Here, SRT,



and its proposed goal of recentring oppression, provides the meaningful intervention of questions of race, gender, and ability, into these class dynamics.

Mapping social reproduction in the university uncovers the racism and patriarchy at work. As the neoliberal university seeks to market its diversity and multiculturalism, it requires those diverse bodies to do the work of reproducing the university as such. Under a discursive regime, which holds-up diversity and multiculturalism as an ego ideal, exploitation along axes of difference (that which marks bodies as diverse), can be seen clearly. (Ahmed, *Liberal Multiculturalism is the Hegemony*, 2008) When diversity is understood as a major component of the prestige and legitimacy exchange described above, two imperatives arise. First, the university, as a whole, must be diverse, multicultural and tolerant; second, students must become multicultural and tolerant subjects. Note, where the university, as an institution can become diverse, merely through its pluralism, it is some particular students and faculty who are *hailed* as diverse bodies, and not others. (Althusser, 1970) Here, the institutional discourse—Contemporary DEI—is a technology through which diverse bodies must reproduce the diverse, multicultural university, and in turn, the university attributes the prestige and legitimacy of multicultural liberal tolerance to the white, male, straight, and able-bodied individuals of the university who played no part in producing it.

The logic of Contemporary DEI is doubly oppressive and self reinforcing. Primarily, through the legitimacy economy, Contemporary DEI extracts labor from diverse subjects and disproportionately distributes its product. Secondly, Contemporary DEI seeks to invisibilize the very labor of diversity, claiming instead that the primary purpose of the diverse, multicultural and tolerant university is to create more equitable and egalitarian campus communities. Contemporary DEI presupposes that the university (and its perceived diversity and multiculturalism) is not produced through the labor of its constituents, but rather appears naturally through the virtues of liberal tolerance and managerial rationality. Thus, like many cultures of neoliberal capitalism, Contemporary DEI serves to perpetuate

capitalist exploitation, whilst disappearing awareness of phenomena as labor relations, or work entirely. Utilizing SRT, the following chapters explore how topics such as human capital production, the discourse of inclusion, and multiculturalism read as hegemony, are constitutive of racism, patriarchy, and ableism intrinsic to social reproductive processes in the neoliberal university.

## Difference and Human Capital

To examine the conditions of subjects under the regime of Contemporary DEI, we must situate it firmly in neoliberalism. Cultural theorists of neoliberalism, beginning with Foucault, have focused rigorously on neoliberalism's effects on subjectivity. (Foucault and Senellart, 1979) *Homo oeconomicus*—the fully economized subject—to more generally, the “neoliberal subject,” as theorized by Wendy Brown and David Harvey, among others, has unique perceptions of their intimate sense of self, ego, desire, and self-esteem. My analysis of students as neoliberal subjects extends from Brown's nuanced description of neoliberal subjectivity, which claim

We may (and neoliberalism interpellates us as subjects who do) think and act like contemporary market subjects where monetary wealth generation is not the immediate issue, for example, in approaching one's education, health, fitness, family life, or neighborhood. To speak of the relentless and ubiquitous economization of all features of life by neoliberalism is thus not to claim that neoliberalism literally marketizes all spheres, even as such marketization is certainly one important effect of neoliberalism. Rather, the point is that neoliberal rationality disseminates the model of the market to all domains and activities—even where money is not at issue—and configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus*. (Brown, *Undoing the Demos*. 2015, 31)

I have described the interpellation of subjects in the neoliberal university as the production of “managerial rationality,” an assemblage of subjectivities deeply entrenched in neoliberal individuation, market rationality, and professional-managerial class (PMC) values. But how does managerial rationality manifest itself in relation to racial oppression, gender oppression, ableism, etc? Simply put, how can we understand managerial rationality (the ideology) as integral to the social reproductive totality of work in the university? This

chapter attempts to answer these questions, by mapping difference and oppression within the production and reproduction of symbolic value (human capital).

The ideological attachment to the value of human capital is central to the university's legitimacy economy. Utilizing Michel Feher's expansive reimagining of human capital, in which, "it is arguably, the psychological discourse of 'self-esteem' that is the most accurate correlate of practices and policies that aim at maximizing the (self-)appreciation of human capital," orients the production of human capital in the realm of subjective ego-ideals. (Feher, 2009, 28-9) (Freud, 1925) In other words, once the primary mode of human capital production is self-appreciation and psychic returns on investment, the cultivation of self-esteem, the mechanism by which human capital accumulation is possible, is the realization of ego-ideals. In the case of Contemporary DEI, in which multiculturalism and tolerance are the ego-ideal, human capital is appreciated by the production of tastes, attitudes and symbols of prestige which are legible as multicultural, tolerant and diverse. (Bourdieu, 1973)

Access to the production of this human capital—derived from the realization of the multicultural "ego-ideal"—is restricted along lines of race, gender, sexuality and ability. (Ahmed, *Liberal Multiculturalism is the Hegemony*, 2008) Those whose labor (physical, mental, affective, and emotional) goes into reproducing the multicultural university, cannot achieve the self-appreciation (accumulation of human capital) from belonging to a diverse university. It is, for instance, the white student, who can appreciate their own racial tolerance, and appreciate their value as a multicultural subject through proximity to the university's project in DEI. Here, the surplus value produced by those who embody diversity, is enjoyed as self-appreciation by a mutually exclusive population of others.

Managerial rationality, that is, the neoliberal ideology of the administrative apparatus, compels students to aspire to self-appreciation in all facets of their lives. In the residential university, the economic and social life (private and public) of the student are collapsed.

In this sense, the labor of being surveilled and the production of human capital through all social processes, inherent to regimes of managerial rationality, is panoptical, totalizing. (Foucault, 1975) SRT suggests that if, “the spatial separation between production (public) and reproduction (private) is a historical form of appearance, then the labor that is dispensed in both spheres must also be theorized integratively” (Bhattacharya and Vogel, 2017, 9). In doing so, we must understand the production of human capital, which, in the university, occurs in productive (public) and reproductive (private) domains, as fully entrenched in the multiple oppressions that compose it. Meaning, wherever human capital is appreciated, in the university, it is intrinsically connected to the racist and patriarchal extraction which motivates the legitimacy economy of the university.

In Jodi Melamed’s analysis of what she calls “neoliberal multiculturalism,” perhaps the immediate predecessor of Contemporary DEI, she details how institutional policies like the construction of a new multicultural literary canon, serve racial capitalism. Melamed uses the example of books to highlight the ways in which the intellectual labor of racialized subjects is misappropriated in universities’ legitimacy economies. She writes, “a work of multicultural literature was understood to be an example of the value of different racialized cultures and a commodified form of racialized cultural property. The idea of culture as property owned by people of color functioned within a consumer economy in which anti-racism could be expressed by a desire for diversity, which consuming racialized cultural property presumptively fulfilled.” (Melamed, 2011, 74) Using literature as one discrete example, when applying the “thick” understanding of work, central to SRT, we can understand multiple oppressions to be intrinsically tied up in the many intimacies that comprise social life on campus.

In underscoring my argument, which suggests, the university’s social reproductive totality includes the constant production of human capital through surveillance, labor extraction and the self-appreciation of its subjects (students), I utilize SRT as a means of avoiding what

David McNally calls, “social Newtonianism.” In this theoretical framework, “things—be they entities, processes, or relations—can only be understood as utterly discrete atomic bits whose identities exclude the co-constituting effects of others,” a critique which he applies doubly to liberalism and strains of intersectional theory. (McNally and Vogel, 2017,97) The omnipresence of human capital production (self-appreciation) in campus life, necessarily means the production of surplus value, during which, according to SRT, “categories of oppression (such as gender, race, and ableism) are coproduced in simultaneity” (Bhattacharya and Vogel, 2017, 14).

## **Inclusion and Specimen-Being: Diversity as Necropolitics**

Using Sara Ahmed's *On Being Included* and Amber Jamilla Musser's "Specimen Days: Diversity, Labor, and the University," as guiding primary texts, this chapter intends to discuss the critical insights from feminist-of-color critiques of diversity and inclusion in the university. Elaborating on the previous section about difference and human capital, our critique of inclusion as an institutional mechanism may begin with a premise provided by Ahmed: "an institutional image is produced in part for external others. The investment in diversity images might teach us about the importance of diversity as a way of managing the relationship between an organization and external others" (Ahmed, *On being included*, 2012, 33-4). In the realm of images, and their material consequences, insofar as they are the basis of affective labor and meaning-making, the work of being included inevitably coincides with the labor of reproducing the university's diversity. Synthesizing Ahmed and Musser's work, we begin to map inclusion in institutional life as the labor assembled by a multiplicity of embodied intimacies and affective labor. ("Affective Economies," 2004)

Deconstruction and critique of the grammar of diversity and inclusion is a common approach to analysis of institutionalized diversity. Recently, particular emphasis has been placed on criticism of institutional discourse on decolonization. (Tuck and Yang, 2012) Ahmed returns to diversity discourse in institutional policy throughout *On Being Included*, in which 'diversity work' is defined as the institutionalization of diversity. (Ahmed, *On being included*, 2012, 22) The language of inclusivity in the university sets the preconditions for what forms of difference are recognized, in other words, how difference is legible in the institution's symbolic order. (Lacan, 1953-4) While official language sets the stage, the intimate social relations in which subjects are interpellated for, bodies marked as, diversity, is a more totalizing phenomenon of biopolitics, penetrating beyond the explicit institutional discourse of inclusivity. (Althusser, 1970) (Foucault, 1975)

Achille Mbembe's theory of the "production of Negroes" in *Necropolitics* more effectively captures the interplay of late capitalism and subjectivity, under which, racialized interpellation occurs, as it does in the university.

Producing Negroes no longer consists exactly in manufacturing a social link of subjection or of a *body of extraction*, that is to say, a body integrally exposed to the will of a master and from which one seeks to extract maximum profit. In addition, if, yesterday, the Negro was the human being of African origin marked by the sun of his looks and the color of his epidermis, today this is no longer necessarily the case. We are now witnessing a tendency to universalize the condition previously reserved for Negroes, but this condition is undergoing a reversal. This condition consisted in reducing the human person to a thing, an object, a sellable, buyable, or possessable commodity. The production of "subjects of race" presses ahead, certainly, but using new modalities. Today's Negro is no longer only the person of African origin, marked by the sun of his color ("the surface Negro"). Today's Negro is a "depth Negro," a subaltern category of humanity, a *genus of subaltern humanity*, which, as a superfluous and almost excessive part for which capital has no use, seems destined for zoning and expulsion. This "depth Negro," qua genus of humanity, is making its appearance on the world stage even though, more than ever, capitalism is establishing itself in the modality of an animist religion, as yesteryear's flesh-and-bones human yields to a new digital-flux human, infiltrated from everywhere by all sorts of synthetic organs and artificial prostheses. The "depth Negro" is the Other of this software humanity, the new figure of the species and typical of the new age of capitalism, in which self-reification constitutes the best chance of self-capitalization. (Mbembe and Corcoran, 2019, 178)

Under today's capitalism, "subjects of race," are produced as an Other of humanity, for which self-reification (being hailed and made visible as diversity) is the means through which self-capitalization (self-appreciation; human capital) is made possible. The necrop-



olitical framework asserts bodies are marked (for death), as inclusivity, insofar as it necessitates the commodification of diversity, marks bodies for invisibilized labor.<sup>6</sup>

Inclusion discursively produces a visibility paradox–difference (color amongst whiteness; queerness amongst heteronormativity; disability amongst ability) is made visible, insofar as it can be commodified and used as an institutional status marker for the university. However, the intimate and affective labor that underwrites the production of diversity, is invisibilized. Musser notes, “inclusivity means that certain bodies are more desirable because they make visible an impulse toward change, even as they do not necessarily produce any movement beyond this visibility. Their presence confers status, because they are rare, desirable, and visible” (Musser, 2015, 5). Referring to institutional life in the university, Ahmed claims, “recruitment functions as a technology for the reproduction of whiteness. . . [as]...the act of recruiting new bodies can restore the body of the institution” (Ahmed, *On being included*, 2012, 39). Within this visibility paradox, certain bodies are recruited or hailed as diversity the spectacle, and covertly and phenomenologically marked for labor. (*On being included*, 2012) (Althusser, 1970)

The marking of bodies for labor, or interpellation brought on by the discourse of inclusion in the university is captured in Musser’s theory of the “specimen.” As told by her, “identity politics within the institution and within sexuality studies conspire to produce me, a queer Black woman, as a specimen—that is to say, a commodity, static and rare” (Musser, 2015, 1). The commodification and call to extractive labor built into the specimen, I argue, can be thought of in terms of alienation. As is the case with social reproduction theory (SRT), recentering oppression does not necessitate dispensing with Marx—precisely the op-

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<sup>6</sup>My intention here is not to imply that subjects marked as diversity are subalterns, or *necropolitical* subjects. Rather, Mbembe’s theoretical work in developing necropolitics is useful for understanding how racialized assemblages are formed or produced. While those hailed as diversity do not occupy non-human status, the damages and exclusion of access to capital are maintained through necropolitical means. That is, bodies marked for labor are not merely regulated biopolitically. Inclusivity is necropolitical in its production of racializing assemblages, not in the production of “an absolute biopolitical substance.”(See Weheliye, 2014, 55)

posite. (Bhattacharya and Vogel, 2017) When thinking of the “production of the specimen” in terms of surplus-labor extraction—in the case of the university, the production of alienated human capital—I suggest we contrast *species-being* from *specimen-being*. Alienation, in Marx’s terms, states, “tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labor tears from him his *species-life*, his real objectivity as a member of the species and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him” (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, “Estranged Labor,” 1844). In the totality of oppressive social relations, alienation, in its material and ideological form, dehumanizes those expropriated of their labor. In the university, where certain bodies, through their (affective) labor, are made to produce diversity, from which they are estranged, the necropolitical institution marks bodies for *specimen-life*.

## Ahmed-Zizek Debate

In 2007 Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek and Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed engaged in a fleeting debate on the topic of “liberal multiculturalism,” the broader umbrella or at least predecessor to Contemporary DEI, and hegemony, in which Zizek argued “it is an empirical fact that liberal multiculturalism is hegemonic.” Needless to say, Ahmed disputes Zizek’s assertion. Before I begin to argue my stance on this point, which I have hinted at previously, but has been ambiguous until now, I want to characterize and contextualize Zizek and Ahmed’s positions appropriately. At least cosmetically, Ahmed and Zizek disagree over how to read hegemony in the context of liberal multiculturalism. For Ahmed, the suggestion that a discourse or politics of inclusion is, in itself, hegemonic is ridiculous, as liberal multiculturalism does not directly reflect social reality. In this sense, “the hegemonic position is that liberal multiculturalism is the hegemony. This is why, [in Ahmed’s opinion,] the current monoculture political agenda functions as a kind of retrospective defense against multiculturalism” (Ahmed, *Liberal Multiculturalism is the Hegemony*, 2008). Zizek rejects the premise that such a “monoculture” political agenda exists. I intend to show this dispute is rooted in the formal pretenses that Ahmed and Zizek use to understand subjectivity-production and hegemony, respectively. Consequently, despite these differences, the essential arguments proposed by Ahmed and Zizek are more likely co-constitutive of a comprehensive theory than simply at odds with one another.

Perhaps the divide between Ahmed and Zizek can be described as a rift of two structuralisms. Ahmed, in her work on multiculturalism, develops a theory of the “recruitment” of the Other, inflected by Althusserian subject-formation (hailing). (*On being included*, 2012, 39) (Althusser, 1970) Zizek, a proponent of the Lacanian theory of subject-formation (symbolic-imaginary-real triad; “barred subject”), favors a construction of the Other in which the subject is necessarily produced as incomplete. In Judith Butler’s words, “the

notion of the uncompleted or barred subject appears to guarantee a certain incompleteness of interpellation: 'You call me this, but what I am eludes the semantic reach of any such linguistic effort to capture me'" (Butler et al., 2000, 12). The hurdle presented by the barred subject, complicates reading hegemony, as the discursive precondition of hegemony, in the Althusserian logic (interpellation), is made impossible. Insofar as the Lacanian subject cannot be articulated, hegemony—its political relevance a product of concrete historical and material context—is interpretable, not as that which organizes discrete historical-political blocs and manufactures the consent of the governed, but that which disciplines the symbolic order. (Gramsci, 1973) (Lacan, 1953-4)

What does this mean for “liberal multiculturalism?” A Lacanian reading of hegemony does not necessitate the totalizing interpellation of entire historical blocs. Rather, in institutional contexts, governmentality becomes hegemonic when it qualifies speech acts in terms of citizenship, thus disciplining the institutional symbolic order. (Foucault and Senellart, 1979) For Žižek, hegemony need not condition the Real, in fact it cannot. Žižek clarifies this point in his response to Ahmed, stating, “when I claim that multiculturalism is hegemonic, I claim only that it is hegemonic as ideology, not that it describes the reality of the predominant form of social relations—which is why I criticize it so ferociously” (Žižek, 2010, 44).

Despite a legitimate disagreement between Ahmed and Žižek on how to read hegemony, or at least, how to read liberal multiculturalism as a discourse, to an extent, Ahmed and Žižek make parallel arguments. At the heart of the conflict is a real danger, in essence the danger this entire project perpetually flirts with: declaring discourses of tolerance and discourses of equity hegemonic from the Left, necessitates constant attempts to distance ones arguments from the vulgar reactionary discourses of the Right. Ahmed rightly notes that the position that interprets the speech act “we must support the other’s difference” as offensive, is that of the reactionary Right, one that accepts and encourages hegemonic

xenophobia. Conversely, this does not fully negate Žižek's original assertion, for, as I have tried to show in my analysis of Contemporary DEI in the university, "liberal multiculturalism," however constructed, can remain hegemonic insofar as it dominates discourse and aids in social domination, while simultaneously offending the reactionary Right for other reasons. This is all to say, the dispute between Ahmed and Žižek is more semantic than it presents itself on its face. Whether we read "liberal multiculturalism" or Contemporary DEI for that matter, as a kind of hegemonic discourse, or simply "a fantasy which conceals forms of racism, violence and inequality," as Ahmed argues, a range of leftist critiques lead to similar conclusions. (Žižek, 2010)

Without collapsing Ahmed and Žižek's readings of liberal multiculturalism, I want to draw on a composite understanding of their critiques that leads to an argument more suited for 2022 than 2007. As corporate monopolies, the US security state, and the liberal press have unilaterally adopted a superficial notion of "equity," which permeates the discourse from all directions, "liberal multiculturalism" is no longer a niche discourse of elite institutions and academia. It is an expansive, perhaps hegemonic, regime of tolerance underwritten by the violent hegemonic social relations of capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy. In this sense, never has Ahmed and Žižek been more in agreement than in a future which materialized both competing arguments in synthesis. The reactionary Right continues to reiterate its claim that the mere aesthetics of tolerance, "supporting the other's difference" on the most surface level, is an affront, a trap the Left in our critique of Contemporary DEI must never endorse. Additionally, Contemporary DEI's hegemonic grip over institutions like the university has expanded to its foreseeable limits.

In her 2006 book, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, Wendy Brown rigorously analyzes the foundation of liberal multiculturalism: tolerance. At the center of the liberal American project in the 21st Century is a steadfast and ever evolving commitment to the value of tolerance. The surface level reading, which liberalism

has given its own project, attributes little more to tolerance than “supporting the other’s difference.” However, as a composite analysis of Ahmed and Žižek, and the title of Brown’s book indicates, as early as the mid-aughts, prominent critics on the Left were exposing the underbelly of tolerance—that the project seeks to consume and incorporate difference into hegemonic power structures; that it always serves as cover for violence lurking beneath the surface. Brown implored her audience in 2006 to ask “‘What is tolerance?’ or even ‘What has become of the idea of tolerance?’ but, What kind of political discourse, with what social and political effects, is contemporary tolerance talk in the United States? What readings of the discourses of liberalism, colonialism, and imperialism circulating through Western democracies can analytical scrutiny of this talk provide?” (Brown, *Regulating aversion*, 2006, 4). In revisiting the Žižek-Ahmed debate, I intend to call on a similar discourse analysis for 2022, that can situate Contemporary DEI appropriately within the hegemony of liberalism, colonialism, imperialism, patriarchy and white supremacy.

Whether read in Žižek’s Lacanian fashion, or in traditional Gramscian terms, Contemporary DEI as an iteration of liberal multiculturalism is hegemonic discourse by virtue of the maintenance of tolerance as a multicultural ego-ideal. (Ahmed, *Liberal Multiculturalism is the Hegemony*, 2008) In the preceding chapters I have shown where, and how, Contemporary DEI is embedded in the racist and capitalist social relations which make up the university. In the shared space occupied by Žižek and Ahmed’s readings of hegemony, is a rejection of the color-blindness and false universality of the liberal multicultural project. Here, Ahmed’s Althusserian and Žižek’s Lacanian insights into subject-formation, and their implications for institutional discourse, may be co-constitutive as radical theories for liberatory politics.

## Conclusion: Human Capital and Imagined Futures

With an intrinsic link to the interest of capital and the perpetuation of the capitalist organization of labor, the managers of the administrative apparatus seek to financialize the university's subjects. Through surveillance and the production of managerial subjectivities, the administrative apparatus primes students to think and organize their lives in terms of human capital accumulation. Of course, the elite university has always enticed students with the prospect of capital accumulation, that is a well paying job after graduation. In an increasingly precarious economy, ravaged by neoliberalism, the promise of material capital is slipping away for many graduates of even the most prestigious institutions. With loads of student debt, a feature of higher education brought on by neoliberal policy, students are subjected to academic capitalism, and with it academic exploitation and alienation. In the face of the compounding factors that make up this bleak picture, managerial rationality continues to promote a hallmark of neoliberal subjectivity: human capital.

As noted in the section on human capital, the financialized subjects of the neoliberal university (*homo oeconomicus*) are compelled through discourse and ideology to always appreciate their value, embodied as human capital. In the neoliberal university students may no longer have the promise of capital accumulation or the appreciation of their material wealth, instead, they are promised the accumulation of human capital, an ultimately immaterial product whose value is determined by the prospect of future capital. In lieu of material compensation, *homo oeconomicus* values the building of human capital—an investment—as intrinsically linked to their self-worth, perhaps more important than material wealth. (Feher, 2009) The core problem being, one cannot eat human capital. This financialization compels students to forego their immediate material interest for prestige and human capital.

As I have attempted to show in my analysis of the university's political economy, under

managerial rationality, students have come to conceptualize all aspects of campus life, that is their private lives as campus residence and their labor as students, in terms of human capital accumulation. Under the governing rationality of the administrative apparatus, the production and accumulation of knowledge that occurs in the classroom, is not a public or democratic good, but the appreciation of individuals' human capital. Students' labor can be reconstituted as the college experience, only because of the financialization of the subject. Under this regime all kinds of unpaid and unaccounted for labor can be justified as an investment for the enrichment of the student. Not only is the labor produced in class merely accounted for as productive experience, one's creative activities and engagement in sports can be absorbed into a larger development project—the college experience. Participation in institutional social justice projects, are also subsumed by the individualized goal of appreciating one's human capital through an investment in the college experience.

Desperate to accumulate human capital wherever possible, students subject themselves to increasing surveillance and scrutiny. The rise of student surveys and the demand that students' *voices* be heard, contribute to an environment of mass surveillance and the expansion of the administrative apparatus. Nowhere is this more evident than in institutional DEI initiatives. For the administrative apparatus to produce a more equitable and inclusive environment, or at least the appearance of it, it launches a mass surveillance campaign in which the institution collects data on students and faculty routinely to monitor progress towards its equity goals. Entire systems are routinely established to aid in reporting instances of perceived discrimination among various other disciplinary measures necessitating more administrative oversight. Perhaps most importantly, the administrative apparatus across universities has used DEI initiatives to further expand and reproduce itself, adding more administrative positions to manage progress.

Human capital within the university and the expansion of the administrative apparatus are thus reciprocal discursive formations. In order for students to fully realize their human



capital there must be an administrative state to account for, measure and surveil the student body and the faculty they work with. As students rely on human capital accumulation as a necessary return on the investment of the college experience, they permit, if not encourage, the expansion of an oppressive administrative apparatus. The administrative apparatus, in turn, to reinscribe itself within the university produces managerial rationality and further ingrains the consumer model and students' reliance on human capital.

In response to the amassing power of the administrative apparatus, and the increasing significance of human capital, the workers in the university (students and faculty) are left with few resources. As my analysis of the political economy of the university shows, students and faculty have an inherently antagonistic relationship with the administrative apparatus, their alienation the product of the administrative apparatus's power to manage, surveil, and extract labor from them. The radical Left within the university, those students and faculty who strive for a democratic and autonomous university in which their labor is unrestricted by the panoptic gaze of the administrative apparatus, must organize to abolish the structures that oppress them. To labor freely and regeneratively, to return learning to its role in producing communitarian values of freedom and democracy, we must form solidarities to abolish the administrative apparatus. This will mean giving up human capital and prestige as ego ideals, in exchange for something far more valuable—liberation.

Joining the Marxian, political-economic analysis of Part 1 and the focus on developments of oppression and cultural politics of difference in Part 2, in this concluding passage I intend to discuss how abolition<sup>7</sup> in the university opens possibilities for liberation across social relations. Here, I call for a radical revisioning of *alienation*, as a total social theory for emancipatory politics in the university. Drawing from the work of the Edu-Factory Col-

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<sup>7</sup>I intentionally avoid being too detailed or prescriptive in my definition of abolition or the abolition of the administrative apparatus. Given the varied nature of universities and colleges and the need for flexibility in organizing strategies, it would be inappropriate to outline a singular path to abolition in the university. My intention is not to be opaque or imprecise; rather I want to create room for collective and grounded theorizing outside of my work as an individual.

lective, an explicitly autonomist vision for the university and academic labor, is a necessary development in the socialist and anti-oppression work of abolitionist praxis. As Fred Moten and Stephano Harney suggest, “the only possible relationship to the university today is a criminal one” (Moten and Harney, *Toward a Global Autonomous University*, 2009, 145). In this spirit, the subversion of the racist, patriarchal, exploitative dynamics of the neoliberal university, depends on collective theft, fugitivity, and the abuse of the official channels it provides.

Central to the abolitionist project in the university is the discursive abolition of “hospitality.” Hospitality is a tool of the administrative apparatus which seeks to provide comfort to those who labor under it. A joint theory of antiracism and anticapitalism is necessary to dismantle the exploitative (productive) and othering (reproductive) dimensions of hospitality. As I have attempted to prove in the preceding chapters, institutional hospitality—that comfort one feels in association with the university *community*—serves as a foundational component of managerial rationality. In “the university: last words” Moten and Harney describe this attachment as “co-branding.”

Because the university is an integral part and prime example of the experience economy. It is integral because it is where students and faculty learn to subordinate necessarily shared experience to the collective individuation machine of the experience economy, and it is a prime example because it incorporates so many aspects of the experience economy—sports, dining, dwelling, socializing, and co-branding (i.e., the student brands himself as, say, Northwestern’s and Northwestern, through the student, brands itself repeatedly as Northwestern). (“the university: last words,” 2020, 6)

Within the “experience economy,” or as I have termed it, the “legitimacy economy,” individuation as subjectivity, is produced through the reciprocal association of the student and the university. As ideology, in the Žižekian sense, hospitality is hegemonic. (Žižek, 2010,

44)

Ahmed too provides a salient critique of the university's "hospitality." Here, hospitality is a kind of double-bind, which seeks to include, while simultaneously subordinate, difference.

The logic often used when diversity is institutionalized could be described in terms of "conditional hospitality" (Derrida 2000: 73; Rosello 2001): the other (the stranger, foreigner) is welcomed with conditions or on condition. Rauna Johanna Kuokkanen describes how the academy "presents itself as a welcoming host but not without conditions" (2007:131). When diversity becomes a form of hospitality, perhaps the organization is the host who receives as guests those who embody diversity. Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home. Conditional hospitality is when you are welcomed on condition that you give something back in return. The multicultural nation functions this way: the nation offers hospitality and even love to would-be citizens as long as they return this hospitality by integrating, or by identifying with the nation (see Ahmed 2004: 133–34). People of color in white organizations are treated as guests, temporary residents in someone else's home. People of color are welcomed on condition they return that hospitality by integrating into a common organizational culture, or by "being" diverse, and allowing institutions to celebrate their diversity. (Ahmed, *On being included*, 2012, 42-3)

The commodified discourse of inclusivity which exists in the university today—that which produces *specimen-being*—is an Othering hospitality that privileges whiteness as host. (Musser, 2015) Thus, "abusing hospitality," that which abolishes the administrative apparatus, doubles as praxis which opposes capital, and deconstructs racial hegemony.

So, how is this accomplished? Where does abolition begin? As Moten and Harney argue, the labor force of the university (students and faculty)

cannot reproduce itself, it must be reproduced. The university works for the day when it will be able to rid itself, like capital in general, of the trouble of labor. It will then be able to reproduce a labor force that understands itself as not only unnecessary but dangerous to the development of capitalism. . . students must come to see themselves as the problem. (Moten and Harney, *Toward a Global Autonomous University*, 2009, 148)

The barrier to an autonomous university is the inorganic work of labor reproduction—that which necessitates administrative work and its ideological state apparatus (managerial rationality). Human capital production, as noted, is thus the scheme of labor reproducing itself in contradiction. As is the case with capital, the administrative apparatus seeks to “rid itself of the trouble of labor” (*Toward a Global Autonomous University*, 2009, 148). Labor in the university must wage an equally militant movement to abolish the administrative apparatus that interpellates labor as *trouble*. The transition from the consumer model to the worker model, in which the student body begins to wiggle out of the grip of managerial rationality and managerial subjectivity, is the first step towards a collective exodus from the neoliberal university to the Undercommons. (“the university: last words,” 2020)

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