

# Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities

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## "We Are the Crisis": A Few Words from the Tapestries Editors

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## **“We are the crisis” : A few words from the Tapestries Editors**

As young people, Millennials, and student scholars raised and educated in the United States, we are used to hearing the word “crisis.” For us, crisis is no longer special; it conjures up images of natural disasters, explosions, shootings, people in the streets. This last visual – large numbers of human beings congregating loudly and purposefully in public space to interrupt the status quo – sparks our curiosity and fuels our imagination for this Tapestries volume.

Our cover design gestures to a world in which we, as students who question the purpose and effects of oppressive systems of domination, are portrayed as a source of crisis. Focusing on the phrase “we are the crisis” allows us to surface the contradictions in how we are seen and treated by those who manage, support, and defend oppressive systems. In an everyday sense, we are “the crisis” because so many of the adults around us see us as problems, as incomplete human beings whose feelings of despair and anxiety about the future need to be addressed and managed by mental health counselors and other specialized staff. Which of these counselors would admit that anxiety is not just a private problem, or that it has a true basis in the crisis of the world? Also, college and university administrators always worry about not having enough students to populate and finance their campuses. So in a different way, tuition-paying students represent a specific kind of business crisis to be dissected, predicted, analyzed, and solved.

Dissent is often labeled as crisis when in reality, rebellions are often responding to the real crisis. In 2009, tuition hikes across the University of California campus system provoked a series of student rebellions. Student activists pointed out the irony of California’s prioritizing prisons while cutting the budget devoted to the state’s public universities. The worldwide Occupy movement evolved in 2011, partly fed by the university campuses in California. In 2014,

students nonviolently protesting tuition increases at the University of California, Davis were pepper-sprayed by campus police. At private liberal arts colleges like Macalester, tuition increases are not seen as a public crisis per se. Instead, those of us who experience financial hardship, food insecurity, or other personal difficulties at Macalester are encouraged to find solutions and support as individuals with separate and unique needs. It is very difficult to organize and create solidarity with other students in this context.

This semester, our eyes have been opened to the ways that we exist and participate in a capitalist, colonialist, extractive society that is itself in crisis. We ask ourselves: Who is responsible for the extreme inequalities and injustices that we see around us? What role do we play in this situation? Through our scholarship and our activism, we are beginning to name and understand the situation into which we have been born. As far as we can see, we were born into a society and a system that is about to destroy itself – and everyone else.

In each of the articles in this volume of *Tapestries*, we focus on the many sides of a world in crisis. This crisis is multifaceted and manifests in lots of different problems – unregulated corporate power, climate change, racialized mass incarceration, to name a few – and we have come to see that they represent some of the failures of a political and philosophical approach called “liberalism.” Liberal institutions and power structures reproduce themselves and give themselves legitimacy by promising us “the American Dream” in the form of freedom, rewards, and prosperity. Neoliberalism exacerbates the crisis by privileging the free-market instead of freedom and ensuring that the already powerful and prosperous get exclusive access to further wealth.

Worse, neoliberal power structures combine administrative authority with the threat of (and sometimes actual) violence to sow division within communities and to breed hyper-

individualism. The result they desire is to prevent people from being able to express our shared oppression, to instill fear, and to stop organizing – among workers, students, land defenders, and water protectors – to create real, radical, and long-lasting change. Their goal is to distract and hypnotize us with small incremental changes that ultimately maintain the status quo. For example, instituting punitive measures for perpetrators of sexual assault on college campuses distracts from the larger issues of misogyny and entitlement that are the roots of sexual violence (see “Neoliberalism Goes to School: Neoliberalism’s Influence on Responses to Sexual Violence in Higher Education Institutions”). Creating busing programs to desegregate public schools distracts from the fact that mainstream schooling in the United States is designed to benefit white children, never mind the school funding and housing policies that create unequal school conditions in the first place (see ““Busing did not fail. We did.”: Doublespeak, Whiteness, and the Contradictions of Liberalism in Public Schooling”). Creating risk assessment technology to more “accurately” predict criminal behavior distracts from the history of criminality being racialized and reduced to individual deviance, which has contributed to a prison state that must be dismantled (see “At the Nexus of Neoliberalism, Mass Incarceration, and Scientific Racism: The Conflation of Blackness with Risk in the 21st Century”).

These distractions are part and parcel of the overarching system. There is a reason that society’s attention is deflected and reoriented away from misogyny, heteropatriarchy, racist schools and housing segregation, and the prison state. This neoliberal era is all about focusing our minds away from systemic problems and framing system flaws as individual problems – ones that can be easily solved through the economic and political structures that are already in place. And if those superficial solutions don’t make us “happy,” we can just buy something new. Distraction and consumption ensures that the myth of meritocracy central to the American

Dream stays intact. That's why it can be difficult to keep sight of our real goals, as large and "politically unfeasible" as they may be.

Our exploration of the phrase "we are the crisis" leads us to the discovery that this "crisis" comes from the perils of the liberal democracy within which we are situated. Our projects were inspired by our lived experiences and our desire to understand the world around us. Ranging from risk assessments to land return, our projects encompass the topics that we have become passionate about through our American Studies scholarship. We want our work to go out into the world and be a resource that can inform and help others.

Thank you to Professor Karín, for guiding us and pushing us to think deeply about our projects through this process. Thank you to Christina Buckles and Louann Terveer, the professional research librarians who have helped our class to establish the logistics of putting together a journal and have been accessible for all of our questions. Finally, thank you to our peers for offering encouragement and constructive critique, both of which are necessary to creating a piece of work that will not just inform others who look at this journal, but also ourselves.