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Multiculturalism's Genocide: A Brief History of Administrative Repression and Student Resistance

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Multiculturalism and Violence

Even the tamest forms of institutional multiculturalism on campuses today, including Offices of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, only exist due to radical struggles by social movements, particularly student movements, of the recent past. To be more specific, institutional multiculturalism as we experience it today is the product of two opposing forces: on the one hand, radical student movements, particularly those struggling against racism, settler colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism; on the other hand, the counterinsurgent strategies forged by the state, corporations, and university administrators, which aimed, and still aim, to neutralize the transformative power of these movements.[1] The struggle between those counterforces continues today.

The administrative cooptation of radical movements under the banner of "multiculturalism" has been a crucial element of the ongoing counterinsurgency against radical student movements. But there's also a more explicitly violent side to the story. For this cooptation would never have been successful if it were not carried out alongside the much more direct forms of coercion—including brutal violence—that have been aimed at students over the past fifty years. Some of this violence has been implicit, and thus perhaps not immediately visible *as* violence. Rob Nixon's definition of "slow violence" is apt here: "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all."[2]

Take, for example, the slow violence of austerity policies that have deliberately impoverished public education. Anyone teaching at a public university has experienced the results of this slow violence via decaying buildings, overcrowded classrooms, and the general deterioration of student learning conditions. There's also what Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier have described as the "curricula of austerity," created by the constant demand for public universities to do more with less. Fabricant and Brier summed up the grim landscape that resulted from this imposed austerity back in 2016: "The drive to impose efficiencies has resulted in the elimination of courses or whole disciplines not clearly aligned with concrete market needs and, thus, declared unproductive."[3] Today, an increasing number of state and federal lawmakers insist that the era of public investment in colleges that offer a humanities education to working-class students is quite simply over and done with. The violence of austerity is attritional, but it adds up to long-term class warfare against public education.

Then there is the related explosion of crushing debt imposed on two generations of students. As economist Mark Blyth noted soon after the (first) election of Donald Trump, a generation of baby boomers who "went to university for fifty bucks at Berkeley and got the greatest minds in the world coming from World War II refugees" now oversee a system in which the "privilege" of a university education, for all but the richest young people, can only be purchased via a sometimes life-long burden of student debt.[4] The almost unfathomable mountain of debt that has resulted—as of 2024, $1.7 trillion in total—is borne by two generations of students who have had to shape their lives around this burden knowingly imposed upon them. The formation of the Debt Collective, which functions as a debtors' union, is a mark of the refusal of students to bow down to this burden without a fight, but also of the fact that student debt has now become a more or less taken for granted fact of life.[5]

Austerity is quite simply the air we breathe on campus today, conditioning not just the education students receive but their very lives. At the City University of New York, where I teach, the numbers only begin to tell the story of the resultant slow violence: as of 2019, roughly 48 percent of CUNY students suffered from food insecurity, 55 percent suffered from housing insecurity, and nearly 15 percent of CUNY students were or had been homeless while attending college.[6] Today, those numbers are surely much higher. And while none of this has stopped student organizing—at CUNY and other public institutions, the students are on the move—much of their energy has been forced into demanding conditions that the boomer generation could take for granted, like affordable tuition or decent student housing.

But universities have also been sites of *explicit* violence for decades. When you step onto campus grounds, once you get past the multicultural branding, you find yourself in a heavily-policed—indeed, a militarized—space. For many readers, that may sound like an exaggeration, although at the urban community college where I teach, students entering the campus pass through a checkpoint manned by armed campus police officers, after walking a gauntlet of ubiquitous military recruiters perched just outside the gates. Most campuses on most days, however, don't *feel* like militarized spaces. But scratch the surface and many are precisely that: since 1990, more than one hundred public colleges and universities have participated in a federal program that allows the transfer of surplus Defense Department equipment, including semi-automatic rifles and armored vehicles, to campus police departments. This includes flagship public universities: Ohio State has a "mine-resistant ambush protected vehicle" that it brings out for football games, citing the need for "homeland security football missions." When, thanks to student demands, the University of Maryland finally agreed to divest from this federal program in July 2020, the equipment that it returned or sold included fifty M16 semiautomatic rifles, an armored truck, three hundred magazine cartridges, seventy-nine gun sights, two camouflage Humvees, and an armored vehicle that campus police had nicknamed "The Peacekeeper."[7]

But even at elite private universities—as we have seen over the past year—student movements exist in a general context of violence that is always just a phone call away. A few students camping on the quad, demanding an end to their university's complicity with genocide, was enough to transform Columbia's campus from a tourist destination to a quasi-military zone, complete with checkpoints. Samuel P. Catlin, describing the suppression

of student protests at Brown University in December 2023, brilliantly captures the nature of this hidden but always-present violence:

> Brown University administrators sent in the police to arrest students, including not a few Jewish ones, who had peacefully occupied University Hall to call for a ceasefire in Gaza and university divestment from Israel. Police officers booked and fingerprinted students right there on the spot . . . The scene was disorienting, not because something was out of place, but because nothing was. . . . What was strange was not that the campus had suddenly become a police station, but rather that it turned out already to have been one all along.[8]

To sum up: institutional multiculturalism, which absorbs and co-opts student demands, acts as the velvet glove in the counterinsurgency against radical student movements; the campus police are the iron fist beneath. This has been true for decades, but the past year has put this fact front and center. The brutal repression of students standing against the U.S.-funded Israeli genocide and in solidarity with Palestinian liberation—by the most conservative estimates, over 3,000 students were arrested or detained on campuses across the country during the spring 2024 semester—represents a massive ratcheting up of direct violence by universities against student movements.[9] As I'll discuss, the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion—and, indeed, DEI offices and officers themselves—have become an increasingly important part of the administrative and police suppression of student movements. This represents a shift in the counterinsurgency tactics of universities: whereas modes of institutional DEI have for several decades functioned largely as part of a strategy to co-opt and depoliticize the demands of anti-racist and anti-colonial student movements, today we are seeing principles ostensibly derived from DEI actively weaponized against these student movements.

But this also represents, as we'll see, a moment of continuity, in that university administrators who have called the cops on their own students are, in a very direct way, doing the work of the state. In fact, from the state's perspective, the real problem is that university administrators have *not been violent enough*, as the October 2024 report issued by the Republican-controlled Congressional Committee on Education and Workforce makes chillingly clear. In a representative example of the committee's rhetoric, Virginia Foxx, chair of the committee, described university administrators as "cowards who fully capitulated to the mob"—that mob being, we can only assume, our students who have stood against genocide.[10] I'm a proud member of that mob myself, but, as history has shown, such rhetoric is almost inevitably a prelude to state violence. As a colleague who read the report put it despairingly: these politicians won't be happy until universities kill a few kids.

Killing in the Name of Tolerance: Nixon's "Commission on Campus Unrest" and the Criminalization of Students

This story has a longer history. Tracing it means revisiting the developments that have led us to today's dismal state of affairs. But it also allows us to recall the student movements of the past, whose fights in the name of decolonization prefigured and have actively inspired today's students in their struggles against settler colonialism and racism, and their unstinting stand against their institutions' complicity with U.S.-Israeli genocide.

To understand how we got our current militarized campuses, with institutional multiculturalism providing cover for, and blending seamlessly with, racist policing, we might begin by going back five decades. On May 4, 1970, four Kent State University students protesting the Viet Nam War—Jeffrey Glen Miller, Allison B. Krause, William Knox Schroeder, and Sandra Lee Scheuer—were murdered on campus by National Guard soldiers. Ten days later, city and state police officers in Jackson, Mississippi murdered two Black students—Philip L. Gibbs and James Earl Green—who were protesting against racist violence on the campus of Jackson State University, after riddling a dorm with more than four hundred bullets.

The precedent of unleashing state violence against student protesters certainly didn't begin with Kent State and Jackson State. For example, in February 1968, three students from South Carolina State College were murdered and twenty-eight more were injured by the state police during a peaceful protest against racial segregation in Orangeburg, South Carolina.[11] Nevertheless, those two weeks in May 1970 mark a turning point in the development of today's multicultural-militarized university. In particular, the aftermath of the Jackson State and Kent State killings helped lead to the development of two forms of institutional coercion—one subtle and covert, the other violent and overt—that we would all recognize today: the rhetorical commitment to multicultural diversity by university administrations, and the simultaneous militarizing of universities through the creation and augmentation of heavily armed campus police forces.

A key element in this process was President Nixon's "Commission on Campus Unrest," established a few weeks after the Kent State and Jackson State killings. Ostensibly set up in response to these "great tragedies," the commission's report rewrote the story so that student protesters were themselves the *source* of violence—erasing, in the process, the fact that students had in fact been the *victims* of massive and murderous state violence. [12] The rhetoric of the Commission's report could just as easily be used today by a college president or politician (from either party) describing Palestine solidarity protestors. In the Commission's version of reality, overwhelmingly non-violent student protests immediately become equated with acts of property destruction (including the vague accusation of "trashing"), which are directly attributed, albeit without evidence, to

protesters; on the other hand, the passive voice comes into play when it comes to the "killing we have witnessed." No one actually did the killing, it seems (certainly not the state); it just happened, as the inevitable outcome of those disruptive protests. In effect, the protesters unleashed the violence that killed them; the students, it appears, killed themselves. That basic sleight of hand is still in play fifty years later. We watch as students standing in solidarity with Palestine, engaged in non-violent protests, are brutalized by the police, attacked by right-wing thugs armed with clubs, dragged off their own campuses in handcuffs, and are then informed soberly by our administrators: student protests turned violent!

The aftermath of the murders at Kent State and Jackson State marks the emergence of on-campus police departments that are now all but mandatory at both public and private universities. When Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest issued its report in 1970, universities by and large did not have their own police forces. Today, thanks to lobbying by US college presidents and the work of local, state, and federal legislators, virtually all public universities, and more than 90 percent of private universities, have their own police departments. Most of these university police departments allow campus officers to carry guns and to patrol and arrest not just on campus but also in off-campus communities.[13]

Unquestionably, the move to set up armed police forces at colleges and universities was a direct response to the student movements of the 1960s and the work these movements did to open up universities to communities that had previously been excluded. Put plainly, the fight to desegregate public education led the state to put cops on campus. Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest (which included both college presidents and police chiefs) declared as much, recommending the formation of campus police forces as the key to fighting "disruption" on campuses: "A fully staffed and trained campus police force at its best can perform the functions of a small municipal police department with respect to campus disorders."[14] When student movements took up the fight to decolonize their universities, the state called the cops.

The Repressive Tolerance of the Administrative University

In addition to its role in bringing the cops onto campus, Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest has another dismal legacy that plays an important role in the suppression of student movements today. As we've seen, the Commission's report used the occasion of deadly state violence against student protesters to portray students as themselves responsible for violence and disorder—in short, as criminals. The militarized campus built in the aftermath of this report takes this logic to its conclusion: since any student could potentially be a protester, it follows that any student is potentially a criminal. More specifically, the Commission's report accuses student protesters of creating *disorder*, which it defines as part of a continuum that begins with "disruption," extends to "violence," and ends in "terrorism." By collapsing this continuum into the single word "disorder," the report provides a powerful rhetorical weapon that can be wielded against student protesters.

This logic, by which students are criminalized based on their potential to create disruptions, continues to govern campus policing. *Disruption* is explicitly defined in the Commission's report as "any interference with others to conduct their rightful business." Examples of such "disruption" are said to include "sit-ins, interference with academic activities, the blockading of campus recruiters" (the Commission likely had military recruiters in mind), and "interference with the rights of others to speak or to hear others speak."[15] All these forms of "disruption" are of course tactics used by the Civil Rights Movement and other movements engaged in non-violent civil disobedience. This incredibly broad definition of "disruption" means that literally any attempt to interrupt business as usual on campus is, from the standpoint of the administration and the campus police, on the same continuum as an act of violent terrorism.

This might sound like an exaggeration. But think about it from the perspective of the administrator-cop: if the university claims to be the great guardian of tolerance and diversity, then it must protect these values against any who threaten them; and if the business of the university is to spread tolerance and diversity, then any interruption of this business can only be understood as an intolerant stifling of diversity. It might seem that students protesting on campus are attempting to exercise their civil liberties. Wrong, says the administration: by interfering with the business of the university, students themselves are the ones stifling free expression. This broad definition of *disruption* has the result, as Roderick Ferguson puts it, of "justifying police repression in the name of order and relying on the university administration—and not the faculty or students—to determine what is the rightful business of the university and what is not, what is orderly and what is not."[16]

To sum up: what student protesters are said to lack, and what those who propose to run the university claim to possess, is both *tolerance* and *respect for diversity*. Anyone who has spent a minute on a college campus will recognize these as two fundamental keywords of institutional DEI. The student and youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s, like those of today, demanded that the university become more democratic, more racially diverse, more just, and more open. By doing so, they set in motion the energies that necessitated the development of institutional DEI programs. But these energies were ultimately redirected and coopted by the state, corporations, and university administrators as part of the counterinsurgency carried out against these student movements.

When the dust cleared, campuses were more firmly in the hands of university administrators than ever before. After all, if students were the agents of disruption, then it was up to administrators to be the guardians of diversity, equity, and inclusion—at least as these qualities had come to be institutionally defined. As long as the administrators

were allowed to run things without disruption, there would be no need to call in the police, who remained the last line of defense standing between the tolerant, multicultural university and its unruly, disruptive students. Students simply needed to acknowledge "the humanity and good will" of administrators "who urge patience and restraint"—and of the police, "whose duty is to enforce the law." Most important, students needed to give up their intolerant views and "become more understanding of those with whom they differ."[17]

It's obscene that Nixon's Commission on Campus Unrest, set up to address the murder of students on their own campuses by soldiers and police officers, would conclude that the whole problem stems from the failure of students to recognize the inherent "tolerance and diversity" of a system that could so blithely slaughter them in a hail of bullets. But the reader may recognize the rhetoric that's still used by this system of order to attack young people who dare to oppose it. The "intolerance" attributed to student protesters in the 1970s morphed into the threat of so-called "political correctness" beginning in the eighties and nineties. That phrase, and the culture warrior stance that it recalls, was very effectively revived by Trump in 2016. Today, the same logic underwrites the attack on "wokeness," a word that has unaccountably found its way into the mouths of legislators who pass bills that outlaw it. Right-wing commentators, in the wake of the student protests against their universities' complicity in the Israeli genocide, today explicitly link wokeness with terrorism.[18] Administrator-cops use different language, but the outcome is much the same.

In order to prevent the police from being called, which can lead to things becoming very disordered indeed, the Commission on Campus Unrest made an additional suggestion alongside the recommendation for universities to set up armed campus police forces: a management strategy that the report calls "the ombudsman method." This involves appointing an administrative figure whose job is to "act as a mediator and factfinder for students, faculty members, and administrations." To perform this role, the ombudsman "must have both great autonomy and [the] support of the university president." These "special student affairs administrators" are described in a way that's unapologetically tokenistic. As an example of an ideal candidate, the report recommends "a young, independent, black [sic] administrator" who would "serve in the role of a spokesman, mediator, and advisor for black [sic] students. Because these administrators have the confidence of the students, they can suggest practical modifications of student demands without being automatically branded as 'sell-outs.'"[19]

Behold the invention of the diversity worker: autonomous and seemingly powerful, although they work at the pleasure of the president and, as Sara Ahmed has documented, rarely have access to or control over resources or other structural aspects of the institution.[20] In a brilliant piece of *McSweeney's* satire published in 2020, Tatiana McInnis and Amanda Lehr offer an imaginary advertisement for one such position: director of the fictional "Colorblind Rainbow Center for Campus Diversity." One of the job's most important responsibilities is the duty of "developing lists of things to give student-activists that exclude their original demands."[21] That's precisely how the "ombudsman method" was designed to work. It's the strategy that abolitionist scholar Dylan Rodriguez has described as "reformism as counterinsurgency."[22]

The unapologetic tokenism of such positions continues today. The ranks of upper-level university administrators (and, for that matter, tenured and tenure-track university faculty) remain overwhelmingly white and male. In 2017, according to an American Council on Education study, more than 58 percent of college presidents were white men. Not much has changed: the most recent study, released in 2023, reveals that 67 percent of college presidents were male; 72 percent identified as white. As an *Inside Higher Ed* article put it: "meet the new boss, same as the old boss."[23] And the boss is doing just fine: according to the employment marketplace ZipRecruiter, the average salary for a college president is currently $186,961.

The one exception to the general trend of white male supremacy in university leadership involves lower-salaried administrators working in student affairs or in DEI offices, where day-to-day "diversity work" takes place. According to a report by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, "among offices on campus, student affairs was the most likely to have a person of color as its highest-level administrator." Overall, the report concludes, "Students were more likely to encounter people of color in service roles than in faculty or leadership positions. While people of color represented less than one-fifth of senior executives, 42.2 percent of service and maintenance staff and one-third of campus safety personnel were people of color."[24] There, in a nutshell, you'll find the balance of power in the contemporary multicultural university, which must be protected, at all costs, from the disruption of students.

Multicultural Genocidaires: The Weaponization of Civil Rights Law

My purpose here has been to outline some of the history that has brought us to where we are today, and to highlight continuities in the dual use of DEI cooptation alongside the direct policing of student activists over the past five decades. This past year has brought an insidious twist to the story: the active weaponization of civil rights laws so that they can be deployed against anti-racist student movements. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964—a law passed thanks to years of anti-racist organizing and activism—prohibits discrimination based on race, color, or national origin in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance.[25] It's hard to imagine how such a law could be turned against students protesting against their institutions' complicity in apartheid and genocide, but that's precisely what is now unfolding on multiple campuses.

As Alex Kane of *Jewish Currents* has documented, this is the result of a decades-long campaign by right-wing

supporters of Israel.[26] In 2004, Kenneth Marcus, the interim director of the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) under George W. Bush, issued official guidance instructing schools to consider Title VI to prohibit discrimination against "groups that exhibit both ethnic and religious characteristics, such as Arab Muslims, Jewish Americans and Sikhs." Title VI itself does not mention religion as a protected class, so at first glance, this seemed an important extension of protection from discrimination intended by the law. But Marcus' previous career as a conservative lawyer should have provided a clue to what might come next: one of his first major cases was as a lead counsel for three white residents of Berkeley who sued the Department of Housing and Urban Development to protest low-income housing for unhoused neighbors.[27] Starting in 2004, right-wing organizations began using Marcus's guidance (with his explicit blessing) to launch civil rights complaints and federal lawsuits that cited Palestine solidarity speech and activism as contributing to Title VI violations.

This lawfare strategy gathered force over the next decade, after the Obama administration's OCR refused to overturn Marcus's guidance and affirmed that Jews and other religious minorities who have "actual or perceived shared ancestry or ethnic characteristics" are covered under Title VI. While most of these lawsuits were ultimately dismissed, Marcus argued in a 2013 op-ed that they still accomplished the important goal of putting universities "on notice" by, specifically, "exposing administrators to bad publicity."[28] Given that the two biggest fears of university administrators are lawsuits and bad publicity, the template by which administrators came to see repressing Palestine solidarity organizing on campus as a way to pre-empt Title VI complaints was established.

When Marcus was appointed assistant secretary for civil rights and head of OCR after the election of Donald Trump, he had the opportunity to double down on this strategy. He opened multiple investigations into schools on the basis of complaints that cited pro-Palestinian activism, including re-opening a seven-year-old case brought by the Zionist Organization of America against Rutgers University; the case claimed that an academic event featuring Omar Barghouti, a founding member of the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel, violated Title VI provisions.[29] Marcus also successfully pushed for Trump to issue an executive order that not only codified Marcus's own 2004 guidance but also directed federal agencies that enforce Title VI, including the Department of Education, to consider how they could incorporate the controversial International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism—a definition that infamously classifies some criticism of Israel as antisemitism—into their work.[30]

Marcus was ultimately forced to resign due to complaints from civil rights groups that he had abused his authority by forcing through cases that furthered his personal and political agenda—including the case against Rutgers.[31] But the damage was done: a pattern through which campus administrators would come to use the principles established by civil rights laws to punish anti-apartheid students and faculty for standing against genocide was set firmly in place. The Biden administration's OCR, far from pushing back against any of this, maintained Marcus' interpretation of Title VI, kept Trump's executive order in place, and even went beyond Trump's order by stating in January 2021 that it "will consider the IHRA definition in handling complaints of anti-Semitism"—something even Marcus had not been able to achieve.[32] The stage was set for the full weaponization of civil rights law over the past year.

All continuities aside, there really is no precedent for the repression we've seen on campuses this past year. This repression is now being carried out precisely *in the name of diversity, equity, and inclusion*, via the direct weaponization of civil rights law. The two primary aspects of counterinsurgency against student movements—DEI programs for co-optation and the police for direct repression—have been united. Universities are increasingly tasking their DEI offices to act as the literal multicultural police. For many DEI workers, repressing and disciplining students, faculty, and staff for standing against genocide has become a primary job responsibility.

The paradox is apparent to many of those working in DEI offices: as a number of respondents recently told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, "demands for harsher punishments run counter to the inclinations of people in student-affairs offices, who say they got into the field to help young people."[33] But the continuing weaponization of Title VI, and the re-election of Donald Trump, assure that this use of DEI for direct repression will no doubt continue. Kane reports a meeting at Brooklyn College where a college administrator informed faculty that, following an OCR-led Title VI investigation, any student allegation of discrimination—even if it concerned a post on a private social media account that was five years old—could result in professors being called in by the administration.[34] The administrator responsible for delivering this news, and for enforcing these policies, is the college's current Interim Chief Diversity Officer.

But the real responsibility lies with the upper administrators who, in the words of Bassam Haddad, "have become an extension of state power."[35] It is the college presidents who are calling the police on their students, banning them from campus, throwing them out of housing. In April, Columbia's President Nemat Shafik testified to Congress about how she would punish student protesters, then flew back to New York and called in the police: since no laws had been broken, she suspended them, declared them "non-students" on the spot, and had them arrested for trespassing. In October, Pomona College's President G. Gabrielle Starr suspended twelve student protesters for the rest of the academic year—which means losing housing and financial aid—without a hearing or any chance to see the evidence against them. President Starr invoked her "extraordinary authority," like any dictator, to throw students out of school for standing against genocide, while the Pomona website continues to laud her for "ensuring students from the full range of family incomes enroll in college and thrive."[36] And in November, the FBI and police raided the private family houses of two Palestinian American George Mason

University students in response to the decision of President Gregory Washington to escalate a minor spray painting incident into a criminal investigation.[37]

It has become achingly clear to students everywhere what their administrators are willing to do in order to maintain "order" on campus. At George Mason, more than 80 student groups came together to write a statement protesting the actions of their administration and the police. "Do universities such as GMU routinely send phalanxes of police officers in military fatigues and armored vehicles, and carrying assault rifles, to break down the front door and raid the homes of students during the pre-dawn hours over an allegation of spray painting? Do administrators routinely rush to judgment and issue criminal trespass orders—the kind used to exclude serial sexual predators and stalkers from campus—against students who have been accused of graffiti?" the groups wrote. "It appears that the answers to these questions may increasingly be 'yes.'"[38] Students also see the extent to which this fits in with the long history of student resistance and administrative repression. Reana Akthar, a sophomore at Wesleyan University who was placed on deferred suspension for protesting outside a Board of Trustees meeting in September, put it best: "It's fundamentally wrong for our actions to not be situated in a long history of activism at Wesleyan. The very basis of the disciplinary hearing is unfair because what political demonstration isn't a disturbance of the peace or a disruption?"[39]

The accusation of complicity with genocide is not something to be taken lightly. Accordingly, student activists have clearly and courageously documented their universities' complicity with the genocide being carried out by Israel, with complete support from the U.S. government, just as an earlier generation of activists did regarding complicity with apartheid South Africa and the U.S. war in Viet Nam. The administrators of these universities have not only opted to continue this complicity but have taken every measure, including direct and brutal violence, to ensure that it continues without interruption. One of their most important tools has been the weaponized distortion of Title VI handed to them by right-wing politicians.

Returning to the Roots: Student Resistance, Then and Now

If the history I've provided here seems unrelievedly grim and negative, let me assure you that so far, I've only told half of the story. We've seen the extent to which today's university, despite its rhetorical commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, derives its approach from the deft trick perfected in the wake of the Kent State and Jackson State massacres: turning state violence visited upon students into an opportunity to increase managerial and police control. But it's important to emphasize that I follow the lead of other activist-scholars in seeing our contemporary "multicultural" university as emerging from the clash of two opposed forces. The effective neutralization of the most radical impulses of student movements by the state, corporations, and university administrations came via the violent smashing of demands for decolonization, wrapped up in the pretty words offered by institutional DEI. But the counterinsurgency of institutional multiculturalism would never have been necessary in the first place without the insurgent demands of student movements, particularly Black and Third-Worldist anti-colonial movements.[40] Remembering that history is a way to begin the work of pushing back against the ongoing counterinsurgency today.

Faced with the grim reality of the university today, and in particular the latest wave of administrative-police repression from today's multicultural genocidaires, we need to remind ourselves of the significant and hard-won victories of student movements for decolonization in effecting major transformations at their universities. At San Francisco State, the country's first School of Ethnic Studies was established in 1969 following the longest student strike in US history. The struggle was led by a Third World Liberation Front that united the Black Student Union, Latin American Students Organization, Asian American Political Alliance, Filipino American Collegiate Endeavor, and Native American Students Union at SFSU—a radically multicultural alliance if there ever was one. Down the road a bit, at Berkeley, the Department of Ethnic Studies was created as a result of another student strike led by students united as the Third World Liberation Front. Less well known is the remarkable history of Merritt College, a two-year college in Oakland, where collaborations between students, faculty, and community activists resulted in the first Black history course in the country, initially offered in 1964, and the founding of the country's first Black Studies Department three years later. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, the founders of the Black Panther Party, met while they were students there, and it's fair to say that Merritt College was the birthplace of the Panthers.[41]

At my own school, the City University of New York, the struggles of a united student movement led by Black and Puerto Rican student groups in the late 1960s and early 1970s succeeded not only in winning a program in Black and Puerto Rican Studies, but also a radical but sadly short-lived open enrollment policy. This student-led struggle to desegregate CUNY has been justly described as "the most significant civil rights victory in higher education in the history of the United States."[42] The student movement at CUNY was deeply influenced and inspired by ongoing struggles for decolonization, which they linked to their anti-racist work within the university. As one student activist writes in his account of the history of struggle at CUNY: "The rapid decolonization of Africa, the Cuban Revolution and the appearance of armed national liberation movements across Latin America, the upheavals taking place in China, and the heroic resistance of the Vietnamese to the aggression of the mightiest military power in human history all contributed to a situation in which oppressed people everywhere imagined that they could make great gains through struggle."[43] Today's CUNY wouldn't exist without these struggles to decolonize the "people's university."

And that struggle continues. The resounding "Five Demands" issued by students at City College in 1969 were echoed in the "Five Demands to Heal CUNY in Crisis," aimed at the austerity policies starving public education in New York, issued by the Free CUNY Coalition at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In April 2024, when students, academic workers, and community members established the CUNY Gaza Solidarity Encampment at City College, they issued their own Five Demands, calling on their university to divest from companies complicit in Israeli apartheid and genocide; support the call for an academic and cultural boycott of Israel; release a statement in solidarity with the Palestinian people; demilitarize CUNY by getting police off campus; and demanding a fully-funded, free People's CUNY, including free tuition and a fair contract for staff and faculty. The student-led Palestine solidarity movement at CUNY, which has brilliantly connected the dots between opposing settler colonialism, fighting austerity, and decolonizing their university, openly acknowledges their debt to the student movements of the past: one of the many cultural events held at the encampment before it was smashed by the administrator-cops was a screening of the film *The Five Demands*, which documents the student strike led by Black and Puerto Rican students that shut down City College in April 1969.[44]

This is where I'm supposed to say something vaguely apologetic, like "I don't mean to romanticize the student movements of the past." Actually, I don't have a big problem with doing a little bit of romanticizing, especially if it helps to reclaim the decolonizing power that these movements began to unleash before being set upon by the full force of state violence. That's particularly important when we try to come to terms with another face of this counterinsurgency: the way in which neoliberal politicians, pundits, and administrators have persistently *demeaned* student movements over the past five decades—for example, recasting collective struggles for redistribution and restructuring as the individual "grievances" of spoiled students—as part of what Roderick Ferguson calls "an ideological project meant to tear down the web of insurgencies that activists have been demanding."[45]

The institutional multiculturalist way of telling the story nods toward the "historic" achievements of the Civil Rights Movement and student and youth activists of The Sixties—and even offers a sad shake of the head at the Kent State massacre—but then scorns today's supposedly coddled, whining students who are said to be nothing at all like those fine and righteous student activists of the past. Joe Biden gave voice to this position clearly, if not eloquently, while he was running for President: "The younger generation now tells me how tough things are. Give me a break. No, no, I have no empathy for it. Give me a break. Because here's the deal guys, we decided we were gonna change the world. And we did. We did. We finished the civil rights movement in the first stage. The women's movement came to be. So my message is, get involved."[46]

We must refuse this version of the story, so carefully constructed by neoliberals, which claims that student movements combusted from within or ran out of steam, that students got tired of chanting and finally learned to be tolerant and trust the administrators, and that everything was fine until those nasty encampments turned up. Let's hold on instead to the alternate story I have tried to tell: student activists striving for social change (in fact, students more generally) have been violently and ruthlessly repressed, criminalized, surveilled, and demeaned, while also being systematically impoverished by student debt, for more than five decades, but have never stopped resisting.

To sum up: "DEI" in its current institutional form is what we're left with when institutions reconfigure radical student demands seeking to transform the system into slogans that strengthen the university's "brand." Ferguson expresses it well: "Rather than a result of student demands, we might more accurately think of diversity offices as the administrative and bureaucratic response to those demands."[47] But this means that DEI also contains traces of the original radical demands of the youth movements of the sixties and seventies: to open up the university, to wrench it from its settler colonial, white supremacist, and patriarchal capitalist origins, and to transform it into a place of radical democratic possibility. Those tasks remain utterly incomplete, and today's student movements have taken up this work. Radical teachers owe them our undying solidarity. That includes being willing to stand with them shoulder to shoulder every time the administration calls the cops.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

[1] For an excellent overview of this story, see Roderick A. Ferguson, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2017). Some of what follows draws on my book *Decolonize Multiculturalism* (New York: OR Books, 2022).

[2] Rob Nixon*, Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), p. 2.

[3] Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier, *Austerity Blues: Fighting for the Soul of Public Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016).

[4] "Mark Blyth: How Austerity Brought Us Donald Trump," *The Dig Podcast* (February 14, 2017). For an extended analysis, see Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[5] Hannah Appel and Astra Taylor, "'You Are Not A Loan!': Introducing the Nation's First Debtors' Union," *In These Times* (July 23, 2024).

[6] Ben Chapman, "Thousands of CUNY Students Experience Homelessness and Food Insecurity, Report Says," *New York Daily News* (27 March 2019).

[7] See Sara Weissman, "Over 100 Campus Police Departments Got Military Equipment Through This Federal Program," *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* (July 20, 2020); Victoria Chamberlin, "As Federal Programs Continue to Militarize Campus Cops, Some Universities Reconsider," *Guns & America* (July 9, 2020).

[8] Samuel P. Catlin, "The Campus Does Not Exist," *Parapraxis* (April 21, 2024).

[9] "Where College Protesters Have Been Arrested or Detained," *New York Times* (July 22, 2024).

[10] "Antisemitism on College Campuses Exposed, Education and the Workforce Committee Releases Report," Press Release (October 31, 2024).

[11] For more on the Orangeburg Massacre, including its historical silencing, see Jack Bass and Jack Nelson, *The Orangeburg Massacre* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), along with the 2009 documentary *Scarred Justice: The Orangeburg Massacre 1968*, directed by Bestor Cram and Judy Richardson.

[12] *The Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1970); see also Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 18.

[13] Libby Nelson, "Why Nearly All Colleges Have an Armed Police Force," *Vox* (July 29, 2015); Angela Wright, "How Armed Police Officers on Campus Have Become a Ubiquitous Part of American College Life," *MacLean's* (June 25, 2020); Alex Vitale, "Campus Police Are Among the Armed Heavies Cracking Down on Students," *The Nation* (May 9, 2024).

[14] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 132, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 29.

[15] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 117, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 28.

[16] Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 29.

[17] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 4-6, 14, 131, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 22-23, 28-29.

[18] See Abe Greenwald, "The Woke Jihad," *Commentary* (June 2024); Michael Harriot, "The War on Wokeness," *Guardian* (December 21, 2022). For critical analyses of the "war on wokeness," see Patricia J. Williams, "How Not to Talk About Race," *The Nation* (October 18, 2021) and Anthony Alessandrini, "The Lived Experience of Social Construction," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 30.2 (2022).

[19] *Report of the President's Commission on Campus Unrest*, p. 205, quoted in Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 24-25.

[20] See Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham: Duke UP, 2012); *What's the Use? On the Uses of Use* (Durham: Duke UP, 2019); and *Complaint!* (Durham: Duke UP, 2021).

[21] Tatiana McInnis and Amanda Lehr, "The Colorblind Rainbow Center for Campus Diversity Seeks a New Director to Tell Us That Nothing Is Wrong," *McSweeney's Internet Tendency* (July 8, 2020).

[22] Dylan Rodriguez, "Reformism Isn't Liberation, It's Counterinsurgency," *Medium* (October 20, 2020).

[23] Josh Moody, "Moving the Needle on the College Presidency," *Inside Higher Ed* (April 14, 2023). See also *The American College President: 2023 Edition* (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 2023).

[24] "College Students Are More Diverse Than Ever. Faculty and Administrators Are Not," *AAC&U News* (March 2019).

[25] For an extended analysis of the role of political movements, especially student movements, in the development of civil rights legislation, and the uses to which such legislation has been put within the limits of institutional multiculturalism, see chapter five of my *Decolonize Multiculturalism* (p. 151-96).

[26] Alex Kane, "The Civil Rights Law Shutting Down Pro-Palestine Speech," *Jewish Currents* (November 15, 2024). See also Amira Jarmakani and Emmaia Gelman, "Zionist Organizations' Latest Strategy to Criminalize Palestine Advocacy: Weaponizing Civil Rights," *Mondoweiss* (September 24, 2024) and Emmaia Gelman, "Astroturf Antisemitism Watchdogs," *Jadaliyya* (April 13, 2024). I'm deeply indebted to the research done by Kane, Gelman, and Jarmakani, along with the legal scholar Darryl Li, for the account that I set out here.

[27] Henry K. Lee, "Berkeley Neighbors' Suit Against Hud Staff Upheld," *SFGate* (September 28, 2000).

[28] Kenneth L. Marcus, "Standing Up for Jewish Students," *The Jerusalem Post* (September 9, 2013).

[29] Erica L. Green, "Education Department Reopens Rutgers Case Charging Discrimination Against Jewish Students," *New York Times* (September 11, 2018).

[30] See Jewish Voice for Peace Press Release, "Jewish Voice for Peace Unequivocally Opposes the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism" (February 8, 2021).

[31] Erica L. Green, "Education Department's Civil Rights Chief Steps Down Amid Controversy," *New York Times* (July 28, 2020).

[32] See Kane, "Civil Rights Law."

[33] Kate Hidalgo Bellows, "A Punishing Year," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (December 4, 2024).

[34] See Kane, "Civil Rights Law."

[35] Akela Lacy, "Police Raid Pro-Palestine Students' Home in FBI-Led Graffiti Investigation," *The Intercept* (December 3, 2024).

[36] See Palestine Legal Press Release, "Civil Rights Orgs Warn Pomona College Unprecedented Suspensions of Students Are Unlawful, 'Punishes the Act of Protest Itself'" (November 13, 2024).

[37] Lacy, "Police Raid."

[38] Lacy, "Police Raid."

[39] Bellows, "A Punishing Year."

[40] I'm borrowing the notion of institutional multiculturalism as "counterinsurgency" from Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2011).

[41] See Donna Jean Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2010); Robyn C. Spencer, *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland* (Durham: Duke UP, 2019); and the film *Merritt College: Home of the Black Panthers*, directed by Jeffrey Heyman and available online.

[42] Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2012), p. 125.

[43] Bhargav Rani, "Revolution and CUNY: Remembering the 1969 Fight for Open Admissions," *GC Advocate* (30 July 2018). See also Martha Biondi, "'Brooklyn College Belongs to Us': Black Students and the Transformation of Public Higher Education in New York City," in Clarence Thomas, ed., *Civil Rights in New York City* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011) and Tahir H. Butt, "'You Are Running a de Facto Segregated University': Racial Segregation and the City University of New York, 1961-1968," in *The Strange Careers of the Jim Crow North: Segregation and Struggle outside of the South*, ed. Brian Purnell and Jeanne Theoharis (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

[44] *The Five Demands*, dir. Greta Schiller and Andrea Weiss (2023).

[45] Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 68-69.

[46] Eve Peyser, "Biden Trashes Millennials in His Quest to Become Even Less Likable," *Vice* (January 12, 2018).

[47] Ferguson, *We Demand*, p. 26.

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