

## Introduction

### *“Carving Out a Humanity”: Campus Rebellions and the Legacy of Plantation Politics on College Campuses*

BIANCA C. WILLIAMS AND FRANK A. TUITT

“I am reminded that our forebears—though betrayed into bondage—survived the slavery in which they were reduced to things, property, entitled neither to rights nor to respect as human beings. Somehow, as the legacy of our spirituals makes clear, our enslaved ancestors managed to retain their humanity as well as their faith that evil and suffering were not the extent of their destiny—or of the destiny of those who would follow them. Indeed, we owe our existence to their perseverance, their faith. In these perilous times, we must do no less than they did: fashion a philosophy that both matches the unique dangers we face, and enables us to recognize in those dangers opportunities for committed living and humane service. . . . Knowing there was no escape, no way out, the slaves nonetheless continued to engage themselves. To carve out a humanity. To defy the murder of selfhood. Their lives were brutally shackled, certainly—but not without meaning despite being imprisoned.”

—Derrick Bell, *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*

Between 2012 and 2018, more than 100 US college and university campuses erupted in protests. Many used the #BlackLivesMatter declaration as a core message, connecting struggles on their campuses with the battles

against police violence and anti-Black racism taking place in neighborhoods across the country. Black students were at the forefront of these campus rebellions, with actions ranging from minutes-long die-ins and street blockings to weeks of hunger strikes, building takeovers, and sit-ins. Students questioned the tenets and structures that formed the foundation of the universities of which they were community members. Similar to the protests of the 1960s and 1970s, these activists provided a list of demands to their administrations, requesting immediate action be taken to address hostile learning and living environments and institutional inequities. For as long as there have been universities, there has been resistance surrounding them, as their foundations have often been set on ideals of exclusion and the myth of meritocracy. Today the ideals remain but are wrapped in the rhetoric of diversity and inclusion (Ahmed, 2012). During the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL),<sup>1</sup> campus activists encountering the disconnect between this rhetoric and their lived experiences used multiple methods to get their demands and stories out, including photography, social media, street theatre, dance flash mobs, and various forms of digital storytelling.<sup>2</sup> University administrators had a range of responses to these rebellions, some physically violent, including using militarized security forces to pepper-spray, threaten, and arrest students; to refuse to allow food and water in protest spaces; and to remove students from the campus through suspension. These institutional responses supplemented the death threats, hate speech, and other forms of intimidation that campus activists received from their peers, alumni, residents living near campus, and white supremacists both on- and off-line. Campus rebellions such as these are sometimes the most public, spectacular manifestations of everyday protest by students, staff, and faculty; and they often explode when universities count Black *bodies* as present but are not ready to make the necessary changes to ensure Black *people* are welcome, safe, and treated equally.

In the epigraph above, law professor and activist Derrick Bell reminds us that fighting for liberation requires vision and faith. Alongside this, it helps if we have an appreciation for the resistance and resilience Black people have embodied throughout history; gratitude for struggles survived and hard-won victories achieved; and ownership of one's responsibility in the continuing fight for equity and justice. Acknowledging that responsibility, this book on plantation politics explores whether the university is a site where Black people can continue to "carve out a humanity." The authors examine who and what the barriers are to humanizing processes within higher education, and how an understanding of plantation politics

might help us more effectively imagine and organize toward emancipatory futures. Here we zero in on the university as a microcosm of the larger struggles against white supremacy and anti-Blackness, recognizing that the protests and rebellions that erupted in places such as Ferguson and the University of Missouri (Mizzou) are deeply intertwined.<sup>3</sup> Though community organizers and campus activists are frequently discussed as separate entities, during the M4BL they were oftentimes one and the same, moving across spaces to engage in protests against exclusionary practices and police violence. The lines between the university and the community are often troubled when Black people are placed at the center of the analysis.

Bell's epigraph, however, is not only about the inheritance of resistance. It is a reminder that the systems of oppression that disempowered and disparaged enslaved Black peoples are still present—that the tentacles of violence, surveillance, and exploitation they lived through are entangled with the “unique dangers” Black people encounter today.<sup>4</sup> In her celebrated work *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman echoes Bell, writing, “If slavery exists as an issue in the political life of [B]lack America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because [B]lack lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” (2007, p. 6). Hartman pushes us to consider the afterlife of slavery, while Katherine McKittrick (2013) encourages us to think about how plantations continue to influence (Black) futures. As a result of the entanglements between plantations of the past and the establishment of many scholarly organizations and educational institutions, plantation politics are still embedded in the everyday life of the academy. Like McKittrick, we wonder what one might see, understand, and imagine they might do, if we recognize the haunting of plantation life as existing not only in the walls and structures that buttress the university but also in its operations, hiring practices, recruitment and attainment strategies, curriculum, and notions of sociality, safety, and community. Therefore, throughout this text, we use “plantation politics” to refer to the connections between historical policies, practices, and discourses in higher education and their new iterations, which are used to control, exploit, and marginalize Black people.

Moreover, we argue that plantation politics are often pushed to the forefront when institutional actors are confronted with Black people's resistance, such as during the Movement for Black Lives. Purposely, this

book focuses on plantation politics *and* campus rebellions because we are aware of the relationship between the two. Through personal experience, hundreds of hours in committee meetings and classrooms, as “troublemakers” and researchers of racism and campus environments, we recognize the ways higher education institutions draw on strategies and ideologies of the plantation past to repress and fragment movements. So often these spaces and opportunities not only help us understand oppression better but also how the legacy of Black people’s resistance has shaped the academy, and continues to shine a light on the racial violence that is present.

We call these instances of campus activism “rebellions” because we recognize that these multisited uprisings (sometimes spontaneous, but often organized) are socially, spatially, and temporally connected. “Rebellion” allows us to get a wide-lens view of campus activism, understanding how the work of residents and Dream Defenders in Sanford after Trayvon Martin was killed is not only linked to that of community members in Ferguson and students at Mizzou but also to the legacy of Black resistance during the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, we use rebellion to note how these acts of disruption and open defiance against administrative and police authority trigger the fears of those in power at universities as they scramble to reestablish what they view as order, contain the movement and emotions of Black folx, and mitigate white anxiety. Though academic administrators can sometimes imagine they have dominion over their campus—viewing it as contained, privileged, and distant from the surrounding community—it is these rebellious acts of Black students that often disrupt this illusion. As Black students draw attention to the structural violence perpetuated by academic institutions, and call for things like reparations and equity, administrations mobilize to squash these rebellions and extinguish flames of resistance. An analysis of institutional responses to campus rebellions is useful for understanding how universities uphold white supremacy even as they pledge resources toward diversity and inclusion initiatives as remedies for these disruptions.

Teasing out a plantation politics framework has the potential to help us identify the machine of white supremacy in higher education<sup>5</sup>—how it operates, how it views us, how we act as assets and liabilities to it, who our accomplices or allies are, which entities act as barriers to equity and justice, what we need to tear down, and how we can build something new in its place. Putting a spotlight on university responses to campus rebellions during the Movement for Black Lives allows us to shift the attention from the protests that are viewed as symptoms of a problem to the conditions and individuals that assist in creating oppressive educa-

tional environments. Or a more favorable read may be that a plantation politics framework helps us see how institutions actually seeking to tackle inequities often end up perpetuating them by not directly addressing the root(s) of the problem.

### Why a Plantation Politics Framework?

Although we started this project in 2015, there was a clear moment when we recognized the type of work a plantation politics framework could facilitate. Sitting in the room at the 2016 Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) conference in Columbus, Ohio, the editors of this book waited for the appointed time for our panel session to begin. We were in a collective state of shock. Folx of color filled the seats around us, some speaking in whispers, as if speaking at a higher level would disrupt the grief and mourning permeating the space.<sup>6</sup> Others sat silently in their seats, staring off into the distance, with sadness coming off of them in waves. In the wee hours of the morning, it had been confirmed that Donald J. Trump had won the election for president of the United States. And we were here, in this room, committed to presenting on plantation politics in higher education. Some of us felt the words we planned to speak were necessary but also meant nothing. Urgent and weighty matters felt even more so, yet giving a presentation on them seemed inadequate. The stakes of valuing Black life, of maintaining safety and wellness in our environments, had increased exponentially overnight.

Staff, students, and faculty around the globe participating in the Movement for Black Lives had spent years engaging in activism and consciousness raising, declaring and demanding that “Black Lives Matter!” In multiple ways, voters, politicians, police, and university officials had replied that these lives, in fact, did not. With this in mind, several questions threaded the session’s papers and comments together: How does one move the academy closer to its espoused aspirational goals of diversity, inclusion, and equality when a (white) majority has elected a white supremacist to lead the country?<sup>7</sup> Is a commitment to an equity-minded agenda within higher education even possible? In this political climate, how do we talk honestly about the ways oppression and dehumanization of Black people continue to be essential to higher education? How do we begin to value Black people and their labor when our experiences tell us that universities thrive using strategies from plantation pasts instead of working toward equitable futures? Finally, how do we imagine liberating

spaces and emancipatory practices when our engagement with these institutions often results in us being implicated in our own oppression?

Though startling, the day after the election felt like a new phase on old terrain. As each presenter spoke about the various ways plantation politics show up on our campuses, the energy in the room shifted. People began to take notes, and their body language was attentive. Questions and comments were passionately expressed, and there was a general sense of recognition, confirmation, and validation. An exhale. A moment to breathe collectively at a time when it felt as though our breathing and our existence did not matter. There was also hopelessness. Anger. Rage. Sadness. Even helplessness. Audience members spoke about feeling stuck not only in their academic careers or training but also in spaces where fighting to make a difference, being dedicated to battling white supremacy and anti-Blackness, felt like a decision to suffocate one's self (Rushin, 1981; Evans, 2010).

In that room, "plantation politics" came to name something that had been weighing on many of us as Black folx in higher education: (1) the psychological warfare we experience in educational institutions whose histories make it clear that they were not made for us; (2) the creation of an active (but sometimes elusive) machine of racist rhetoric, policies, and procedures that fuel the academy; (3) the exploitation of Black people and Black labor that helps universities appear diverse enough for the sake of profit while devaluing Black voices when it comes to institutional change; and (4) a recognition of the emotional and pedagogical labor that marginalized people offer every day, but especially during periods of campus rebellions, which universities view as branding or reputation "crises." Naming these forces at ASHE, and the other conferences and universities we have presented at, has offered audience members and presenters alike some solace as white supremacy becomes more blatant everywhere. As many therapists teach, putting a name to a feeling or experience can allow a person to recognize what is happening to them and offers some space so they can work through it. We want this book to play a role in that affirming and healing process. Here, we name and mark plantation politics to contribute to the canon of research detailing how white supremacy and anti-Blackness were (and continue to be) central to the inner workings of higher education. We take seriously Black people's vernacular description of universities as "plantations" in order to tease out old and new dehumanizing practices and ideologies that universities implement to be profitable in the business of teaching, learning, and research.

It is our hope that readers will see how the technologies used to create plantation life are connected to those that sustain higher education, and the ways these produce racial inequities and hostile environments that give rise to campus resistance. In the next chapter, coeditor Dian Squire builds on Craig Steven Wilder and Thomas J. Durant's work to offer an analysis of the vestiges of plantation culture and life and their influence on modern university culture, climate, and structures of power. Each additional chapter offers a window into how employing control mechanisms to repress campus rebellions reinforces white supremacy, limits freedom, and continues to oppress Black people. The authors also open up possibilities for how actors within university structures and cultures may envision and work toward racial equity, justice, and liberation. The book acknowledges the physical and emotional costs Black people experience in the academy's mostly white spaces, while also speaking, dreaming, and strategizing steps toward more equitable futures.

To be clear—in this book we are not arguing that universities are actual plantations like those of the Antebellum South, nor are we arguing that Black people in academic institutions experience the type of physical, sexual, and psychological horrors our ancestors endured.<sup>8</sup> We will never know the violence of being treated solely as chattel, as a subhuman commodity, or the terror of such enslavement. As Black people's resistance chipped away at racist and otherwise unequal systems over generations, there has been greater mobility and access to housing, education, employment, and healthcare for many. However, in light of recent surges in raids within immigrant communities, a growing understanding of the intricate ways capitalist systems continue to disempower Black peoples, and a heightened awareness of the traumatizing effects of carcerality, surveillance, and police violence, many are asking whether the conditions of our current moment should be viewed as adaptations that present new terrors and challenges to freedom and liberation. As Black activists hold universities accountable and campaigns for reparations grow, some institutions excavate their racist histories from the archives and publicly share their stories. Here, we are made ever more aware of the interconnections between the plantations of the past and the establishment of many educational institutions. However, some unwisely believe that this history is distinct from current day operations and has no impact on the present.

As we spoke with Black folx in higher education throughout this project, it became clear that some had great concerns about the ways race, capital, and labor coalesce to perpetuate inequities in higher education.

Universities were critiqued for not valuing the pedagogical and emotional labor that staff and faculty of color invest to create welcoming environments that retain (tuition-paying and/or reputation-promoting) students of color; failure to honor the labor that Black student athletes contribute to both the university's coffers and the reach of the institution's brand (Hawkins, 2010); and the taken-for-granted ways Black faculty continuously drag institutions into the future through their theoretical and research innovations.<sup>9</sup> For universities to attempt to make campuses equitable or inclusive without explicitly working through the connections between race, capital, and labor, is to throw financial and work-energy resources at problems one does not honestly intend to solve. Some of the book's contributors ask if it is possible for educational institutions to be effective without exploiting Black labor or marginalizing those who are committed to being unapologetically Black. It may be that in order to respect and value Black people, the academy may be required to die to itself. In the wake of giving up the violence, exploitation, and exclusion that currently function as the motors of the academy, a rebirth will be necessary.

### Campus Rebellions: From “I, Too, Am” to “#BlackLivesMatter”

One of the most prominent examples of the convergence of student and community organizing in recent years took place in February 2012 in Florida. A group now known as the Dream Defenders began organizing after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was killed by neighborhood security person George Zimmerman on February 26, 2012. Students from Florida State University, Tallahassee Community College, and Florida A&M University marched from Daytona to Sanford (about 39 miles) and sat in governor Rick Scott's office for 31 days. They demanded that their representatives push back against the “Stand Your Ground” laws that Zimmerman used as part of his defense for killing Martin. Their demands and actions resulted in the legislature holding hearings on the law. Their organizing showed that students recognized how their experiences within higher education and on campuses were connected to a larger fight against police violence and the killing and surveillance of Black people. Their activism had the power to make a difference not only on their campuses but also in their state legislature.

Nationally, people took notice of the Dream Defenders' organizing and bold energy. As increased attention was paid to police shootings and

killings of unarmed Black folx across the country, the organizing in Florida and many other states contributed to a politically intense climate. On July 13, 2013, George Zimmerman was found not guilty of killing Trayvon Martin. Outrage, disappointment, fear, and calls for justice fueled more rebellions nationwide. On that day, both Black Youth Project 100 (BYP100) and the global network of Black Lives Matter were birthed. Black Youth Project 100 is an affiliate organization of the national research endeavor called Black Youth Project, started by feminist political scientist Cathy Cohen and formerly led by founding national director Charlene Carruthers. Both BYP organizations were created in Chicago (Carruthers, 2018). That July, Cohen brought together 100 youth (including students ages 18 to 35) for a convening, and on the night of the 13th, they created BYP100 as an organizing body.

As the herstory goes, Black queer women community organizers Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors joined forces with Black woman immigration organizer Opal Tometi to cofound an online campaign using the rallying cry and hashtag “#BlackLivesMatter” (Khan-Cullors and Bande, 2018). Eventually, Black Lives Matter (BLM) became a global network of over 45 chapters, filled with organizers who worked collectively at times, and autonomously during others.<sup>10</sup> Black Lives Matter became a central node in the even larger network called the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which was composed of over 50 organizing entities from places such as Ohio, New York, Missouri, Maryland, North Carolina, and California. Members of M4BL worked together to create what is commonly known as the policy platform for the movement. Prominent Black transwomen leaders in M4BL and the BLM global network, Elle Hearn went on to found the Marsha P. Johnson Institute, which focuses on policy and programming for Black transwomen, while Aaryn Lang helped lead Black Trans Liberation Tuesday, a national day of action. Protests and acts of resistance during the Movement for Black Lives generated national conversations about community safety, racialized and gendered violence, emotional wellness, prison abolition, voting rights, and economic empowerment. Students at universities across the United States were not only members of BLM chapters and M4BL organizations but also central actors in the alliances and partnerships created with student groups on college campuses.

In the shadow of the national mourning and organizing around Trayvon Martin and the ever-growing list of Black people who were victims of police violence, a photo campaign giving voice to Black students' experiences at Harvard College was created in March 2014. “I, Too, Am

Harvard” went viral, with students on multiple campuses describing their experiences with marginalization and belonging. Black Harvard students introduced the project by stating on their Tumblr page, “Our voices often go unheard on this campus, our experiences are devalued, our presence is questioned—this project is our way of speaking back, of claiming this campus, of standing up to say: We are here. This place is ours. We, TOO, are Harvard” (2014). Claiming that they, too, were essential members of their respective university communities, dozens of schools created photo campaigns and hashtags dedicated to the experiences of students of color on their campuses. At Harvard, the photo campaign was turned into a play based on interviews with Black students. In these interviews, and in other online conversations about inclusion, diversity, access, equitable resources, and surveillance, students began to identify some of the early demands for future campus rebellions.

In August 2014, Ferguson, Missouri, went up in a blaze. On the 9th, 18-year-old local resident Michael Brown was murdered by officer Darren Wilson. His body was left on the ground in the scorching sun for over four and a half hours, with family members, friends, and neighbors standing watch and comforting each other, unable to reach him as police investigating the scene barred their access. That night, and consistently for the next year, Ferguson residents led their neighbors and visitors in numerous rebellions, demanding justice for Brown’s family, expressing rage at the death and disregard for Black life, and protesting for long-term change.<sup>11</sup> Some of the protestors were in high school, and others were campus activists from nearby colleges such as Saint Louis University and Washington University.<sup>12</sup> Streets and highways were shut down, city meetings disrupted, and buildings set ablaze while militarized police attacked protestors with Tasers, tear gas, sound cannons, and rubber bullets. Rebellions increased three months later when it was announced that the grand jury had decided not to indict Wilson. Many would argue that the killing of Brown, the nonindictment of Wilson, and the rage and bravery of Ferguson protestors and organizers was the central spark and motivating fuel of the international movement that would become popularly known as the Black Lives Matter movement. People all around the world watched the #FergusonUprising grow on the news and online live streams. Students at Howard University, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Maryland, and the University of North Carolina participated in die-ins, drawing attention to police disrespect of Brown’s life as he laid dead in the street, and the

trauma his community experienced as they were forced to watch him there. Since August 2014, protests, rebellions, and debates about police violence, surveillance, and the value and (in)significance of Black life have remained important parts of public discourse, political action, and classroom conversations.

While residents and community organizations such as BYP100, BLM, and Dream Defenders lit up the country with protests while publicly calling out presidential candidates, students on university campuses also engaged in an extended period of activism. One of the most prominent examples was the organizing of Black students at the University of Missouri in 2015, which eventually became the Concerned Student 1950 group. The “1950” refers to the year the first Black student was admitted to the university, and the group’s name memorializes that moment. After several racist incidents took place on campus, and the administration failed to adequately address the concerns of the students these incidents targeted, a group of Black students began to organize. Taking lessons learned from the rebellion in Ferguson, which was two hours away from campus, students effectively mobilized using social media. In October, Black students blocked the car of university system president Tim Wolfe during a homecoming parade, demanding that he deal with the hostile campus environment. Videos of this confrontation went viral. Arguing that Wolfe should resign for his failure to effectively address the situation, Concerned Student 1950 increased the intensity of their organizing and offered eight demands. Graduate student Jonathan Butler went on a hunger strike, players on the football team threatened a labor strike (with the coaches’ support), and students camped out on the quad. Administrators released statements and eventually met with students but offered little recourse as the organizing efforts gained national attention. This powerful demonstration of strategic organizing resulted in the resignation of Wolfe and the establishment of a system-wide diversity officer. Mizzou is a great case study not only of the effectiveness of student organizing but also of what can happen when the larger political context influences campus activism and vice versa.

The year 2015 was a particularly pivotal one as protests and acts of resistance took place around the globe. Though mostly ignored by US mainstream media, students in San Juan protested for over two months against proposed tuition increases and massive cuts in resources to the flagship campus of the University of Puerto Rico. They demanded that the administration address the university’s accreditation crisis after it filed bankruptcy. The university shut its doors in response, with the president

and many trustee members resigning in the midst of the crisis (Robles, 2017). In October 2015, students throughout South Africa protested the increase of school fees with #FeesMustFall. Police fired rubber bullets and stun grenades at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in response to protests, while students were arrested at the University of Cape Town (Hauser, 2016). Calling for the abolition of tuition fees and “free education as a human right,” students in London protested in November 2015, drawing attention to the great amount of debt students accumulate to attend university. Police and students confronted one another in the streets, resulting in the arrest of at least twelve students (Coughlan, 2015).

As rebellions exploded, the editors of this book focused their attention on the campus rebellions connected to Black Lives Matter in the United States in order to understand what was generating this energy for sustained, long-term protests, and how universities were responding to it. Each of us could feel the impact of these political encounters in our classrooms, in our conversations with colleagues and students, and on our own wellness. We asked how we could assist students in expressing themselves, in demanding what they needed from universities, and applying the critical thinking and action tools we offered in the classroom. We wanted to analyze this current moment to decipher what was happening at our universities, and to use this resistance to help move these institutions closer toward equity.

Coeditor Frank Tuitt pulled together a team of graduate students and postdoctoral researchers to analyze the demands of over 100 campus rebellions.<sup>13</sup> Many of the demands were almost exactly the same as the demands from Black student movements of the 1960s and 1970s: more Black faculty; a more inclusive curriculum; more resources for programming and residential issues. One of the few demands that stood out from the rest was the call for increased resources for mental health services, and professionals trained to be culturally responsive and culturally competent in order to assist Black students dealing with racism and anti-Blackness. Additionally, some students demanded reparations in the form of free tuition or other remedies to address present and historical campus inequity. During these rebellions, students were not simply asking for short-term fixes to the campus climate so they could feel more welcome. They were pushing all members of the community to question who was included or excluded from the stated purpose and values of their institutions.

The activism taking place on campuses and in nearby neighborhoods created an environment for one of the longest continuous anti-white

supremacist, pro-Black movements in the United States. While campus administrators often think of these rebellions as activities that are contained by campus borders, this period of organizing shows us that (Black) students are affected by, participate in, and move across school boundaries in ways that some administrators are often unaware of. The alignment of rebellions on campus and in the streets was not surprising to many Black people, as universities have always been microcosms of the larger world. While academic institutions are sites of privilege and designed with borders to keep some without access, what happens in “the public” still affects what happens on campus. The academy may be distinct from “the public,” but it is not free from the public’s influence. In fact, in some political struggles, higher education is the frontline of ideological warfare. It is no surprise that debates about racism, freedom of speech, academic freedom, a living wage, sexual violence, immigration, and citizenship have significantly fueled student organizing in the past few years. And the tactics universities use to respond to these protests—the arming and militarization of campus police, the pepper-spraying and tear-gassing of students, strict disciplinary action against student activists, the banning of food and drink during sit-ins—demonstrate that universities are not sacred places held apart from the violence of police and security forces that surveil and punish society. They never have been. Being a student or staff member with university affiliation can bring with it a certain amount of privilege. However, for Black staff, faculty, or students, an ID with the emblem or crest of the university does not keep them safe in a world that does not see them as human. Black student organizers, faculty, and staff disruptors frequently understand this and take action accordingly.

### Centering Black Lives in Higher Education

The recent surge of campus rebellions during the Movement for Black Lives serves as a reminder that Black people have always been central to the project and mission of education in the United States. Despite hundreds of years of systemic racism that barred access to educational institutions, generations of Black people have been actively present in college and university communities. Oftentimes they have pushed these institutions to become more equitable, just, and innovative. Texts such as Carter G. Woodson’s *Miseducation of the Negro* (1933/2011) detail how efforts such as the Freedmen’s Bureau attempted to provide education to Black people

after emancipation, creating practices that would later be the foundation for public education. Black people were some of the earliest educators, architects, and laborers helping—willingly and unwillingly—to build academic institutions. Even today, Black feminist and Africana thought lead to programmatic and disciplinary innovations such as “intersectionality” and “interdisciplinarity,” creating new ways of thinking and producing knowledge. Black students, faculty, and staff contribute greatly to academic institutions, often acting as their consciences whether they desire to or not. They contribute diversity, equality, and equity-based work, many times lifting the entire system up and improving it for everyone, while fighting for their own survival.

In their essay “A Case for Reparations at the University of Chicago,” authors Caine Jordan, Guy Emerson Mount, and Kai Parker (2017) describe how essential Black people and their labor were to the university’s establishment. They write,

The University of Chicago does not exist apart from Julia Leakes and the suffering of her family—it exists because of them. Between 1848 and 1857, the labor and capital that [plantation owner Stephen A.] Douglas extracted from his slaves catapulted his political career and his personal fortune. Slavery soon provided him with the financial security and economic power to donate ten acres of land (valued at over \$1.2 million in today’s dollars) to start the University of Chicago in 1857. This founding endowment, drenched in the blood of enslaved African Americans, was leveraged by the University of Chicago to borrow more than \$6 million dollars in today’s terms to build its Gothic campus, its institutional structures, its vast donor network, and an additional \$4 million endowment before 1881. In short, the University of Chicago owes it[s] entire presence to its past with slavery. (para 3)

The University of Chicago is not the only institution where this type of exploitation took place, nor was this exploitation simply used to establish the physical structures of the university. At some of the earliest established higher education institutions, foundational contributions to research disciplines were enabled by the labor and monetary “capital” of enslaved Black peoples. In “The Missing Link: Conservative Abolitionists, Slavery, and Yale,” Eric Herschthal (2017) writes that letters from Benjamin Silliman,

Yale's first chemistry professor in 1802, "reveal how slave money helped build up Yale's science programs in particular. If scholars are to continue researching slavery's ties to universities, which they must, they need to pay closer attention not only to which universities profited from slavery, but what particular branches of knowledge within those universities gained from it" (para 3). As we seek to make Black Lives Matter in higher education, it might be helpful to center the contributions of Black peoples while documenting, valuing, and teaching about how their work helped shape the physical and material conditions of the academy.

Many founders of academic institutions, fearful of how powerful Black learners would be if they had access to formal education, created policies and practices designed to keep Black folk out. Some of these white university founders, board members, and presidents made their fortunes from the slave economy and held Black people in captivity. We know that Black people's delayed access to these institutions and the research produced in them was not accidental but intentional. This is where the plantation politics in higher education truly began to crystallize. To be Black on a university's campus is to live with a contemporary version of W. E. B. Du Bois's "double-consciousness." It is to understand that the way you see yourself is different from how the institution views and values you, even as it recruits you, and highlights your experiences and achievements. Reading your institution's aspirational diversity mission statement, looking at the pictures of folk of color in the campus brochure dedicated to inclusion, or laboring on the university's diversity committee as a Black person is to endure a particularly insidious, long-term form of gaslighting. Here, the school promises to do better when it comes to issues of racism while arguing that the (unequal) access Black people have to the institution is an indicator that the necessary work has already been done. However, many Black students, staff, and faculty recognize that for the real work of equity to be completed, the institution will have to drastically change who and what it is. They know that the reality they are presented with in the university's materials isn't the reality of what they live each day on campus.

Having to fight tooth and nail to access higher education and then have our humanity degraded or threatened throughout the education process when we gain access is why so many Black students, staff, and faculty decided to protest and resist on campuses across the country. To be essential to the project of equality-based education yet be systemically marginalized from its fruits is enough to make anyone engage in rebellion.

However, having faith that things can be different, and desiring to demand and fight for that change, is some of the powerful work Black people continue to participate in. As we sit in classrooms, in libraries, and at the feet of our community members learning about our history and the ways we helped build the academic spaces that continue to try to diminish us, we grow ever more committed to creating new analyses, practices, policies, and visions of what education can look like.

## Overview of the Book

Campus resistance during the Movement for Black Lives called universities to atone for their racist histories, create strategies that would generate institutional change, and clarify their commitment to the Black members of their communities. The disconnect between the university's values and commitments and the everyday experience of Black folx was made clear in the ways administrators decided to engage activists during these tense moments of disagreement and difference. As we examined universities' responses to students mobilizing around these incidents, one question we were interested in gaining insight into was, "What are the conditions that contribute to campus resistance?" Repeatedly, this question led us to the dual forces of white supremacy and anti-Blackness, and their manifestations in campus communities. Each part of the book addresses a particular instrument of plantation politics in the contemporary university, recognizing that these instruments and the forms of resistance that occur in response to them are all interconnected. Subsequently, there are inevitably—and, we hope, productively—connective threads running through the three sections. Part 1 of the book discusses how higher education can be used as a mechanism to control Black people while upholding whiteness, white supremacy, and anti-Blackness. Part 2 makes the case that instead of serving as a gateway to racial equality or justice, universities (especially traditionally white institutions) often design diversity and inclusion initiatives that neglect race and racism and reinforce whiteness. Finally, part 3 describes some of the forms of resistance students and instructors engage in as they call into question higher education's commitment to equity, and the narratives and policies administrators and government entities create in order to repress campus rebellions. By studying this system of plantation politics and the rebellions against it, we seek to illuminate the relationship between these experiences of oppression and resistance,

showing how Black people pushing for change have always, and continue to, transform higher education for many.

**PART 1: CAPITALISM AND COLONIAL VESTIGES OF  
WHITE SUPREMACY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

As we turned our collective focus to plantation politics, we saw the increasing tendency of white people calling campus police on Black folk as a clear example of the rising tide of white supremacist sentiment at traditionally white institutions (TWIs).<sup>14</sup> According to these complaints, working while Black, walking on campus while Black, sleeping while Black, teaching while Black, eating while Black, and standing in front of your residence hall while Black were code violations even though these were the very things Black people were invited to campus to do.<sup>15</sup> These complaints, and subsequent encounters with police and security authorities, were ways that (white) people and institutions made evident their notions about who they imagined Black people could be, how they thought Black people should act, and where they felt Black people should have limited access. Unfortunately, these racist incidents had real material consequences and served as reminders that many faculty, staff, and students still view Black people with contempt and are willing to do them harm. Thus, our book's discussion of plantation politics reinforces Michael Dumas's (2016) description of anti-Blackness, in which Black folk exist in a structurally antagonistic relationship with higher education institutions that repeatedly deny their humanity. Dumas suggests that institutions often employ technologies that affirm whiteness as humane while systematically excluding this as a reality for Black people. Accordingly, in the first part of this book, the chapters help us understand how Black people's most recent encounters with white supremacy and anti-Blackness on campuses are connected to those that grounded previous colonial and capitalist structures.

To this point, Dian Squire's chapter on allochronism opens part 1, making the case that the current white supremacist and anti-Black sentiments permeating college campuses should not be viewed as only recent acts of violence "but rather situated in material and nonmaterial realities of time and place [from] centuries ago." Specifically, Squire explores the characteristics of plantations as systems, connecting historic plantations and modern universities in order to offer greater detail about the plantation politics framework and its utility in understanding contemporary institutions. Correspondingly, Saran Stewart in chapter 2 describes three

forms of plantation pedagogy in the Caribbean and the United States, demonstrating how instructors have inherited educational practices from the plantation and can push back against these in the classroom. Next, Steve D. Mobley Jr. et al. draw attention to the important point that white supremacy is not just a concern for TWIs. In chapter 3, the authors describe how the vestiges of white supremacy can be seen in institutions centered on Black education, making it possible for even our most revered HBCUs to uphold an anti-Black settler project. Finally, in chapter 4, Wilson Kwamogi Okello posits that education has been a training ground for submission and the passive acceptance of rules in society that prop up systems of dehumanization, oppression, and exploitation. He contends that the emergence of Black studies as an intellectual canon can be read as an act of insurrection—one that accounts for the legacy of violence inflicted on Black bodies while making room for the imagining of Black futures.

Taken together, the chapters in part 1 provide a historical overview and insight into theoretical groundings of the plantation politics framework. The chapters suggest that higher education operates as a system to maintain and perpetuate white supremacy and anti-Black racism as well as other forms of racial formation projects that subjugate Black people for capitalist gains. Moreover, they build a compelling argument for situating recent campus rebellions as an intentional response to the instruments of social control and exploitation employed by ruling elites in the academy.

## **PART 2: INSTITUTIONAL RHETORIC AND THE FALSE PROMISES OF “DIVERSITY” AND “INCLUSION”**

Another aspect of plantation politics that contributed to contemporary campus rebellions is a growing suspicion of diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives that are divorced from, or in conflict with, racial equity and racial justice goals. In part 2, the authors argue that diversity initiatives have been operationalized in a manner that positions the inclusion of Black people into higher education as a means to further the aims of whiteness and white supremacy. Oftentimes at the center of the false promises of inclusion are diversity workers—for example, staff at cultural centers and chief diversity officers, or faculty representatives on diversity committees. These individuals are required to provide disproportionate amounts of labor as they are exploited, and then punished and discarded for doing the work they were hired to do. Unfortunately, one consequence of the widespread adoption of diversity initiatives, such as inclusive excellence (IE), is that

it allows universities (particularly TWIs) to move away from a focus on race and racism as a central component of diversity and inclusion efforts (Tuitt, 2016). Frequently, universities will focus on, and invest resources in, programming around gender, class, sexuality, or even diverse political ideologies at the expense of institutional change around race, racism, and white supremacy. The authors warn that if we are not vigilant, many will continue to be seduced by IE and diversity-driven initiatives that mask the plantation politics of representation, and become complicit in the management of difference and the suppressing of resistance. Additionally, in this context, D&I initiatives become a sort of Trojan horse that results in the exploitation and minimization of staff and resources that are theoretically supposed to help Black people successfully move in, through, and out of academic institutions.

Collectively, the chapters in part 2 highlight how diversity and inclusion efforts have become co-opted as sophisticated instruments of plantation politics that protect white interests and privilege. Universities advance D&I rhetoric while simultaneously limiting opportunities for real transformation. Armond Towns sets the conversation off in chapter 5, as he makes the case that D&I efforts function as a plantation politic in which Black folk are not included as promised in inclusivity policies. He describes how the interconnection between racism, capitalism, and higher education functions in ways that not only render D&I policies ineffective but call for an investigation of whether violence against people of color is necessary for the establishment and maintenance of US institutions, including educational ones. In chapter 6, Jesse Carr et al. further demonstrate the limits of D&I initiatives by suggesting that diversity efforts at TWIs are a means of branding and crisis management that seek to assimilate nonwhite folk into primarily and historically white spaces without disrupting institutional investments in whiteness. In these efforts, “diversity workers” are often exploited for the reputation and profit of the institution, even while their labor is framed paternalistically as a charitable benefit to those who exist at the margins.

The remaining two chapters in this part provide concrete examples of the ways diversity workers are potentially set up to be agents of plantation politics. In chapter 7, Frank A. Tuitt explores the eerie similarities between the contemporary chief diversity officer (CDO) and the plantation driver during slavery, highlighting the roles these two positions play in the management of Black people in traditionally white institutions. He argues that the CDO position is a descendent of the plantation driver,

and as such has the potential to be complicit in the systematic and often violent dehumanization of Black and Brown people in TWIs. Toby S. Jenkins et al. expand this discussion of the exploitation of diversity workers by analyzing how cultural center directors create strategies to resist the subjugation of racially marginalized communities. The authors bring an intersectional analysis to plantation politics by highlighting the precarious position that women of color who serve as cultural center directors inhabit as they are expected to advocate for racially marginalized students in a manner that often results in their own marginalization. Overall, the four chapters in part 2 illuminate the limits of institutional diversity and inclusion efforts. They warn that if universities are not critical of their implementation of D&I initiatives, their programs intended to facilitate equality can actually act as barriers to antiracist campus environments and can reinforce whiteness.

### **PART 3: RESISTANCE AND REPRESSION: CAMPUS POLITICS AND LEGISLATIVE ACTS OF ANTI-BLACKNESS**

As the national conversation about violence against Black people took center stage during the Movement for Black Lives, Black staff, students, and faculty increasingly aired their grievances and concerns on university campuses. Some expressed their frustrations not only with feeling unsafe but also with being viewed as responsible for diversifying campuses, then experiencing a lack of institutional support once those efforts challenged the status quo. Campus rebellions grew, and university administrators and local government officials became fearful in the face of being held accountable for institutional racism. Demands from young leaders organizing a national movement scared board members and various stakeholders concerned not only with campus safety but also with university reputations and ranks. A series of campus policies and legislative acts were revisited or newly instated in an attempt to extinguish the tensions.<sup>16</sup>

A recent report by the American Council on Education (2016) noted that a climate of fatigue develops as racially marginalized peoples expend significant emotional and physical labor to respond to campus needs during a racial crisis. The report acknowledges that often this labor exists outside of explicit job responsibilities, and the feelings of fatigue are greater when this labor does not result in any significant change nor is valued by campus leadership. Correspondingly, Black people who experience racial battle fatigue are frustrated, shocked, angry, filled with anxiety, and at times feel a