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## “Why You Always So Political?": A Counterstory About Educational-Environmental Racism at a Predominantly White University

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## **“Why You Always So Political?": A Counterstory About Educational-Environmental Racism at a Predominantly White University**

### **Cover Page Footnote**

Thank you to the MMAX students who participated in this project and in doing so, spoke truth to power.  
Thank you to Jordan Beltran Gonzales for his editorial suggestions.

## “Why You Always So Political?” A Counterstory About Educational-Environmental Racism at a Predominantly White University

*Martín Alberto Gonzalez*

### **Abstract**

Using critical race counterstorytelling, I tell a story about the experiences of Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) undergraduate students at a private, historically and predominantly white university in the Northeast of the United States. Drawing on in-depth interviews, participant observations, pláticas, document analyses, and literature on race and space and racism in higher education, I argue that the racially hostile campus environment experienced by MMAX students at their respective university manifests itself as a form of educational-environmental racism. Through narrated dialogue, Aurora (a composite character) and I delve into a critical conversation about how educational-environmental racism is experienced by MMAX students through a racialized landscape in the following ways: (1) Discriminatory Objects and Symbols on Campus; (2) Glorification of Historical Trauma; and (3) Lack of Physical Representation and Cultural Deprivation.

*Keywords:* counterstorytelling, race and space, Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx students, environmental racism, higher education, critical race theory, critical race methodology

### **About the Counterstory**

This counterstory (Alemán, 2017; Gonzalez, 2022a; Martinez, 2020; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) draws on data that was collected during a three-year qualitative research project that used methods such as in-depth interviews, pláticas, and participant observations to examine the racialized experiences of 20 Mexican/

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Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) at a private, historically and predominantly white university in the Northeast of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Adhering to the tradition of counterstorytelling, I used counterstory as narrated dialogue to develop my ideas “through exchanges between characters that represent and voice contending viewpoints about contemporary issues” (Martinez, 2020, pp. 34-35). Specifically, in this story, I am the stock composite character that represents the perspective of the status quo, whereas Aurora is a composite character who represents a counterperspective and critiques the viewpoints put forth by stock stories and stock characters. While this counterstory is loosely based on several experiences, conversations, and observations, I use a composite story and characters, which I created in order to humanize the research data and ultimately recount the experiences of MMAX students navigating a racially hostile campus environment (Cook & Dixson, 2013; Griffin et al., 2014; Martinez, 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Martinez (2014) argues that composite counterstorytelling “differs from fictional storytelling by critically examining theoretical concepts and humanizing empirical data while also deriving material for counterstory’s discourse, setting, and characters from sources” (p. 37). That said, the composite story that follows is comprised of actual responses from participants and a systematic analysis of literature (books, peer-reviewed articles, reports, etc.) related to race and space and racism in higher education. I supplemented this story with my experiences and cultural intuition as a first-generation Xicano (Delgado Bernal, 1998). In the same way the renowned law professor and critical race theory scholar, Derrick Bell, used counterstorytelling to simplify complicated verbiage in the United States constitution (Martinez, 2020), I wrote this counterstory to bring to light the racially hostile campus climate MMAX students, and other Students of Color, must navigate to graduate from a historically and predominantly white university.<sup>2</sup>

### The Setting and Context

Environmental racism is alive and well, embedded in classrooms, dining halls, ivy-covered buildings and throughout the campus of Snow City University (SCU) in Upstate New York.<sup>3</sup> Now, I am not talking about ordinary, traditional environmental racism where low-income Communities of Color disproportionately experience heavy exposure to environmental pollutants such as toxic waste, pollution, and so forth because of their race (United Church of Christ, 1987). In other words, I ain’t talking about how Black and Brown gente are steered to and constrained to live near air-polluting gas plants or other hazardous wastes. No, nothing like that—sticking to this definition limits how we engage and speak to other ways an environment enacts racist discriminatory practices (Pulido, 2000). After all, “old” explicit racism is out and “new” hipster racism is in. People cannot be openly messed up anymore; they got to do it in secret.

Rather, I am talking about a nontraditional type of environmental racism.

Maybe not as visible or apparent. Maybe more difficult to prove. But something unique for sure. Something that can only be seen through a critical lens. You know, the type a fancy academic scholar would coin as their own term and then make thousands of dollars to write a book and speak about it. I am talking about educational-environmental racism—a type of environmental racism that happens on historically and predominantly white university campuses. Those university campus environments entrenched in white supremacy that disproportionately subject Students of Color to negative experiences and feelings of alienation.

One ordinary fall day, my homegirl Aurora pointed this out to me. We had met each other during our college orientation. During our first year, we became best friends since we both were from Southern California and we both ended up at a hella white university in Upstate New York. Technically speaking, we were the same grade, but she was older than me by a way of ‘hood’ age. She grew up fast as the oldest sibling from a low-income family. She reminded me of my family, so I always stuck around her. Aurora attended college in the name of social justice. A true interdisciplinary scholar. She intentionally took an array of college courses from various disciplines, including Business, Ethnic Studies, Women and Gender Studies, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, and History. She knew a little bit of everything from different angles. In our long first year at the university, it became obvious that the knowledge she had received in her Ethnic Studies courses had taken over her life. I guess one could say she was officially a “radicalized” Xicana.

Constantly referring back to readings from her Ethnic Studies classes, to her, everything was wrong with the world. Oppression this. Sexism that. Aurora was that type. Problematic was her favorite word. A fun-ridden trip to a festival would boil down to patriarchy and deconstructing normative thoughts about gender. I knew I couldn’t watch a Disney movie with her because all she would do is complain about how princesses reaffirm the idea that women should not be leaders and that they should be complacent and wait for men to save them.

That being said, I learned a lot from Aurora. We hung out a lot on campus, in between classes and for lunch. We routinely met up on the quad at the heart of the campus and we sat on an old wooden bench. Because we were both first-generation college students, we used a lot of our time together to reflect on our academic journeys. I guess our get togethers were more of a protective layer that helped us motivate each other to do well in our classes, especially at times when we were down—self-preservation at its finest (Villalpando, 2003). Aside from these conversations, we did a lot of people watching and made jokes about our observations. Everyday exposure to practices and norms at our university opened a door for Aurora to analyze the social injustices taking place. I swear she was more wary and observant than a trained sociologist. Without a pen and paper, she would make observations and then bring them to light to start conversations about them. She would constantly tell me, “Dang, you are so oblivious!” whenever I did not catch someone being “racist” or “offensive.”

On an unordinary sunny day at Snow City University, Aurora and I got together on the quad to share some lunch. Savoring the flavor of sandía y pepino with Tajín y limón, we sat on a bench located dead center of the quad. A perfect view of the landscape of our university campus—or so I had thought. Right before I began to meditate about how blessed I was to attend a semi-prestigious university like Snow City University, Aurora abruptly said, “Look! Can you believe it?!”

Not knowing exactly what she was talking about, I quickly agreed, “I know! We are very blessed to attend such a beautiful university.”

But Aurora looked at me as if I had just stepped on her brand-new white shoes. She smirked, “No foo, I am talking about how messed up this university is! Look! These white students walking around freely, all happy, playing their stupid little frisbee game, as if they own this place. Yet, all the Brown and Black students are studying their butts off at the library. Ain’t that messed up?”

I made a quick observation to accompany the frown on my face. “How?” I told her, “They are just enjoying their free time from their classes. I don’t see anything wrong with that.”

She shoved me gently. “Open your eyes for once, Martín! I thought you read the article I sent you about racism in higher education? Racism exists here, and at other universities across the U.S., but very few name it or talk about it” (Harper, 2012).

She continued animatedly, “It’s not normal for white students to be all happy and stress-free, while Brown and Black students are always stressed out! This inequality is a problem created by government institutions like universities. University-created inequalities! University-sanctioned violence! At the end of the day, the Brown Students, La Raza, along with other Students of Color are negatively impacted, while the white students remain on top. Don’t you see it?” She asked impatiently.

Knowing that she was going to continue her racism tangent, I interjected, “C’mon! Here we go again. Every single time! You took one Ethnic Studies class and now you know everything about everything. ‘Why you always so political?’”<sup>4</sup>

“Bruhh. My presence on this campus is political!” she insisted.

I rolled my eyes to change the topic.

“I’m serious!” she exclaimed, to which I questioned, “So how exactly is this messed up again?”

“First of all,” she said, “You and I both know that Students of Color are admitted but not welcomed (Du Bois, 1935) at this university. Sure, they accept us and love to put us on flyers and brochures to show the world that they value diversity, but in reality, they don’t care about us. We’re just meeting their quota!”

“Really, Aurora? You’re trippin’!” I replied, shaking my head. “They admit us because we are qualified and belong here. The people playing in the quad happen to be white, while the students in library happen to be Brown and Black. That’s all. Nothing more, nothing less.”

Still, she replied, committed to shed light on this injustice, “Bruh. That ain’t

it. While white students walk around as if they own this place, us, Students of Color at this white university, are just guests in their house (Turner, 1994).”

I took a bite of my pepino con limón, dissuaded by her argument, “How so?”

Aurora took a deep breath, “Well, we as guests must follow the family’s wishes without question, keep out of certain rooms in the house, and always be on our best behavior. Also, we as guests have no history in the house we occupy! There are no photographs on the wall that reflect our images. Our personal items, paintings, scents, and sounds do not appear in this house. To be sure, there are many barriers for us Students of Color who constantly occupy a guest status that keep us from doing our best work” (Turner, 1994).

Aurora paused, and then took the juiciest pepino from my plastic container, “Look around. This university was never meant for you, it was meant for wealthy white men (Wilder, 2014). We pay rent, too—we pay the tuition! Yet, our priorities are not taken seriously (Gonzalez, 2022b). I don’t see any pictures of my beautiful gente on any of the walls. Why? ‘Cuz this university is trash!”

“Aurora, you are overanalyzing this whole thing. Just enjoy the—”

“The view?” she interrupted, then continued: “Oh you mean the fact that this seemingly beautiful, ivy-filled, promenade-spending WHITE university just held a half-assed public forum on racial discriminatory incidents that recently happened on campus, yet hasn’t done anything structurally to address racism (Harper & Hurtado, 2007)? How many diversity committees do y’all need, Jimbo?” Aurora stated sarcastically, throwing shade at the university’s chancellor.

I laughed at the absurdity, “Yo. You wildin’. No lies. They do have like 20 diversity committees. Yet, nothing has changed.”

## Redefining Environmental Racism

“Yeah. Then people wonder why all the Students of Color stay at the library, together, sitting in the same table. It’s because they’re tired of dealing with this BS. White people love to say that we self-segregate and keep to ourselves. It’s obvious that we do this as a survival strategy. This racial grouping is in response to an environmental stressor, which is racism (Tatum, 2003). This university environment is toxic AF [As Fuck] for Students of Color. It’s called environmental racism. Look it up!”

“Bruh, that’s not how environmental racism works!” I challenged Aurora. “Environmental racism is when Communities of Color are practically forced to live near toxic pollutants such as power plants or dumpster landfills, while white people live in cleaner environments and have access to clean air and water” (United Church of Christ, 1987).

“Yeah, technically speaking, you’re right.” Aurora agreed, reluctantly. “But times are changing, and we should think about environmental racism differently. In my ‘Race and Space’ geography class, I read an article that argued the tradi-

tional definition of environmental racism is very limiting because it's difficult to prove the intentionality behind it. In other words, people can easily say that it's a coincidence that People of Color live in those areas (Pulido, 2000). We've heard it before, 'working-class People of Color live in a highly polluted neighborhood because they want to, not necessarily because they are constrained or are required to do so. Blah Blah Blah.' Get it?"

"Hmmm," I squinted my eyes, unclear of what exactly Aurora was talking about.

Aurora responded calmly to my confusion, "What I'm saying is that it's important for us to rethink environmental racism. Because environmental racism is difficult to prove, we must analyze it in relation to white privilege because it allows us to see how the racial order works to the benefit of whites (Pulido, 2000). If we examine environmental racism through a white privilege lens, then we can better understand the various ways whites accrue environmental benefits because of their whiteness. By the same token, we are able to prove that People of Color are not given those environmental benefits."

"I just don't get it," I admitted. "How can people who look differently have different experiences in the same environment? It's the SAME environment! Can't we all use the environment equally?"

Aurora replicated my energy and responded, "WELL, LET ME BREAK IT DOWN FOR YOU!" She took a sip of her water and then continued, "As a way to clarify what I mean about this 'environmental racism' in higher education, I will use the case of One Riverside Park, a luxury-condominium complex in NYC, which infamously became known for its 'poor door' policy. Have you heard of it?"

"No. I haven't," I responded, honestly.

"All good," Aurora sympathized and then explained. "As a way to qualify for tax subsidies, One Riverside Park reserved rent-stabilized apartments for public housing recipients, but it did not extend the use of their lavish amenities to these residents, including the chandelier-decorated front door entrance or the pool. In other words, they were allowed to live in this fancy condo complex but couldn't even use the fancy front door! They had to go in through the alley!" (Licea, 2016).

"So, basically the 'poor' tenants were excluded from enjoying and reaping the benefits of living in such a luxurious apartment complex?" I questioned.

"There you go!" Aurora patted my back encouragingly. "At a very basic level, the controversial 'poor door' at this luxury limestone-and-glass tower in NYC sheds light on the mere fact that two distinct populations (in this case 'poor' and 'rich' tenants) can have drastically different experiences in the same building/environment. In the same way that there are drastic differences in how 'rich' and 'poor' tenants navigate the SAME building and environment (i.e., One Riverside Park), students from different racial backgrounds navigate and engage with their respective university differently" (Hurtado et al., 2015).

I stared at the quad, quietly, watching all the white students playing confidently without any doubt or distress.



Aurora continued, “In the same way this fancy condo complex accepts to reject, this white university admits us, but doesn’t welcome us (Du Bois, 1935). Consequently, this predominantly white university campus becomes a hostile and culturally depriving environment for Students of Color (Yosso et al., 2009).”

“Yeah,” I halfway agreed. “I just don’t understand how the university itself can be racist. Like the actual landscape of the university is racist, too?” I asked, innocently.

“Yup! That too,” Aurora replied without any hesitation.

“But how can the actual university landscape be racist?” I repeated my question.

“Have you ever came across the well-known phrase, ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder?’” Aurora looked at me, knowing I have heard that phrase before.

“Yeah. That phrase is used to explain the idea that individuals decide what’s beautiful and what’s not,” I replied, confidently.

“Yes. It explains the subjective nature of beauty; that is, beauty does not exist on its own but is created by its observers,” Aurora added.

“Ok. What’s your point?” I pressed Aurora.

“This phrase is not only limited to the realm of art. Aside from just artwork, symbols, images, statues, buildings, and even environments elicit emotions and meanings, too. Yet, even these emotions and meanings vary depending on the eye of the beholder. For example, just down the street from this university, there is a statue of Christopher Columbus being lifted and seemingly praised by Native Americans,” Aurora explained.

“I’ve seen it! Word on the streets is that statue is very controversial. Have you seen it?” I asked Aurora.

“Yeah,” Aurora answered, “The fact that this statue is controversial proves my point.<sup>5</sup> This particular statue and setting has been interpreted and evaluated differently by spectators and city-goers. For some, this statue signifies discovery and victory—what makes the United States ‘great.’ For others, this exact statue gives rise to disgusted feelings and warrants serious discussions about colonization and genocide—much of which these observers claim has been taken out of United States textbooks and classrooms. So, an object or entire setting can elicit drastically different emotions depending on experiences relating to and knowledge of that respective object and/or setting. While some will develop a sense of pride and feelings of peacefulness, others will remain frustrated and invalidated.”

“I guess that kind of makes sense,” I confessed.

“You guess?!” Aurora raised her voice. “Homie, you better know! All you have to do is take a human geography class and you’ll understand. Why don’t you expand your little knowledge and take one?”

I intentionally didn’t reply because I knew that was a rhetorical question.

## Landscapes—Cultural and Racialized

“Since I know you ain’t going to take one. Let me just school you really quick,” Aurora stated sarcastically. “In geography, there is a concept called a cultural landscape, which is a tangible, visible entity that is both reflective and constitutive of society, culture, and identity (Schein, 1997).”

“Pshhh. The only landscape I know is landscaping. Like cutting grass,” I laughed at my own joke.

Aurora accompanied my laugh, “Foo, you’re wack!”

She continued, “A cultural landscape is basically an environment, space, or literally a place that has been modified by human activities giving it the ‘cultural’ aspect. Get it?”

“Yeah, it’s when humans alter a natural environment,” I replied eloquently.

“Exactly! So these cultural landscapes work similarly in that they are perceived as and mean something entirely differently depending on the individual and their unique experiences. In our geography class, we were assigned a foundational piece on landscape (Meinig, 1979) called, ‘The beholding eye: Ten versions of the same scene,’ which reminds us that ‘the eye of the beholder’ is central to how we view and thereafter interact with a respective landscape,” Aurora recalled.

“Aye. No lies. I heard a podcast on this!” I said excitedly.

“Ok, Mr. Smarty Pants. What’s it about then?” Aurora tried to call my bluff.

“Well, the title says it all. This geographer gives ten different interpretations of the same scene,” I lied so Aurora can stop her racism tangent. But it didn’t work. In fact, it worked against me. It fueled her commitment to educate me.

“You’re a damn liar!” Aurora laughed. “Yes and no. This article basically agrees with what I’ve been saying this whole time. Depending on one’s experiences and worldviews, they assign different meaning to a place. For example, according to this article, people who are interested in environmental injustices such as dying trees, dilapidated farms, or industrial pollution will perceive ‘landscape as problem,’ while people who are looking to make a generous profit will view ‘landscape as wealth’ and assign monetary value to everything in view” (Meinig, 1979).

“That makes sense. Isn’t that what politics is all about?” I asked rhetorically.

Aurora smiled. “Yeah. And with landscape, as with other things, whenever race is thrown into the mix, things become even more complex. Without a doubt, landscapes, too, are racialized.”

“Here you go again with the race card!” I complained. “Racialized landscapes (Schein, 1999)? You gotta be kidding me. Is that even a thing?”

“Best believe it is! What? You think I’m just making these things up?” Aurora questioned me.

Before I could answer, she explained, “Racialized landscapes are landscapes that reproduce or sustain racial projects (Omi & Winant, 1994).”

“Racial projects? Like the hood, where we grew up?” I suggested half-way jokingly.

Aurora smiled, “Nah, homie. That’s a different kind of project. To put it simply, racial projects connect what race means and the ways in which both social structures and everyday experiences are racially organized based upon that meaning (Omi & Winant, 1994).”

“So, environments create the meaning of race and then treat it accordingly?” I wondered aloud.

“Yes,” Aurora answered receptively. “In this case, racialized landscapes are landscapes that manifest themselves as racial projects (Schein, 1999, 2006). To be specific, a cultural landscape can be racialized, and a racialized landscape serves to either naturalize, or make normal, or provide the means to challenge racial formations and racist practices (Schein, 1999).” That being said, landscapes, like the one at this university, are not innocent (Schein, 2003). As a matter of fact, a landscape plays a central role in mediating social and cultural reproduction, and it does so in its ability to stand for something: norms, values, fears, and so on” (Schein, 2003).

“If I’m hearing you correctly, what you’re saying is that racialized landscapes can influence one’s behavior and/or sense of belonging? And that land and landscape are important to practices of belonging” (Schein, 2009). I suggested, unsure if I was understanding her point.

“Yup!” Aurora replied, quickly. “This is alarming because encoded in landscapes is a culturally produced expression of social order (Kenny, 1995), in this case, whites are on top and everyone else at the bottom. Cultural, racialized landscapes may appear as ‘beautiful’ and seemingly ‘nondiscriminatory’ to those in dominant positions, yet to those in marginalized positions they are deemed the exact opposite.”

“You served it to me, but I ain’t drinking your Kool-Aid. I call BS on that one,” I told Aurora, not convinced by her argument. “Look around. This is a beautiful campus with beautiful buildings. Magnificent infrastructure with historical buildings. Oh. Sorry. A beautiful ‘racialized landscape’ with historical buildings,” I stated while making air quotes after saying ‘racialized landscape’ to mock Aurora.

Aurora shook her head and reached into her bag and pulled out an article from her geography class titled, “Whitewash: White Privilege and Racialized Landscapes at the University of Georgia (Inwood & Martin, 2008).” “Look at this.” She handed it to me while she summarized it.

“This article clearly illustrates that racialized landscapes of universities are ‘whitewashed.’ In other words, racialized landscapes at universities advertently privilege whiteness and so it’s perceived to be seemingly nondiscriminatory to all its students. Yet and still, this white mainstream ideology and campus culture in higher education is discriminatory toward Students of Color (Yosso et al., 2009) and is perpetuated through its denial, or what is known to be called white institutional presence (Gusa, 2010)! Whiteness is everywhere. It’s institutionalized! You can’t deny it, even though a lot of people do!” Aurora exclaimed matter-of-factly.

I took a quick glance at the article. After quickly reading through the article summary, I turned to Aurora and told her, “Aha! Look! It says here this is a case study, meaning this only applies to this particular setting, which is the University of Georgia! This doesn’t apply to Snow City University!”

Aurora raised her eyebrows as she made a duck lips. “Wow. I knew you were oblivious, but I didn’t think you were that out of touch with reality!”

“What? I’m just telling you what it says here. You showed me the article. You should’ve known better,” I told Aurora. “Nowhere in this article does it say anything about Snow City! Why? Because Snow City loves ALL its students equally!” I answered my own question.

“You’re such a coconut! Your skin is Brown, but your worldview is white.” Aurora mocked me. “Remember how this conversation started? I told you that Students of Color experience a unique type of environmental racism, one that happens at *this* university campus, which affects only them.”

“You did, but you haven’t proved it! All you have talked about is this stupid radical landscape,” I answered, quick as a flash.

“It’s called RACIALIZED landscapes. NOT radical landscapes,” Aurora corrected me.

“Yeah, whatever! I forgot . . . you’re the radical one!” I responded, intentionally trying to get on Aurora’s nerves.

“Anyways, it’s important that you understand racialized landscapes in order for me to prove my point. Do you understand it?” Aurora asked, impatiently.

“Yeah. It makes sense,” I assured Aurora.

### **Educational-Environmental Racism via a Racialized Landscape**

She took a bite of her granola bar and continued, “Good. I said it happens in educational spaces, so let’s just call it educational-environmental racism, as a point of reference. Are you following me or did I lose you already?”

I rolled my eyes and then conceded, “Continue.”

“Educational-environmental racism is experienced by Students of Color through a racialized landscape (Inwood & Martin, 2008; Schein, 1999, 2006), which is a landscape, or lack thereof, that elicits negative feelings, feelings of isolation, and cultural deprivation,” Aurora stated.

I covered my mouth and fake yawned. “Get to the point on how THIS university elicits negative feelings, feelings of isolation, and cultural deprivation.”

“Stick around and you’ll find out!” Aurora joked. “Everything on this campus, from the physical structure in construction, down to the curriculum and everything that we handle day to day, is all touched by a European influence. All of it. The way the structures are built, the way the stairs are built, the way university’s Chapel is built, all of it is touched by that influence.”<sup>6</sup>

I squinted my eyes, pretending to carefully analyze the campus Chapel from afar to taunt Aurora.

### **Discriminatory Objects and Symbols on Campus**

She continued, “The statues that are around campus, for example like the ‘Arching Man,’ that for me has a very Western notion of art. I don’t know, the form, the shape of it. I don’t know, I can see it like in other classical like Western European art.”<sup>7</sup>

“Look over there!” Aurora pointed unapologetically to the statue across the quad. There, in the middle of the quad, stood a statue of a Native American/Indigenous Person shooting a bow and arrow to the sky conveniently located for everyone to pass, see, and perhaps cherish.

“Such a historical statue. In case you didn’t know, our mascot was once the Indian Warriors. It was the official mascot of this university for 47 years! The Class of 1951 donated the statue as it embodies those qualities that students, alumni, and fans have come to expect from their athletic teams, which are strength, endurance, and agility.<sup>8</sup> Such a prideful statue. What an honor,” I stated, without knowing I had said anything wrong.

“Psssh. An honor? Yeah right! An honor for white people! Do you know why this isn’t our mascot anymore?” Aurora looked at me for an answer.

“To be honest with you, I don’t,” I admitted.

“Because members of the Native American student organization headed a successful protest against using the Indian Warriors as a sports team mascot! And still, the statue itself remains. The DISRESPECT!” Aurora remarked angrily.

I wasn’t aware of this history. Nevertheless, I proceeded, “Well, at least they have a statue.”

“HA!” Aurora shook her head, “It’s perpetuating the image of the Native as a warrior. Yet, it’s putting that perspective through a white lens, not presenting the Native American as a subject with power.<sup>9</sup> It’s basically stereotyping Indigenous People as dangerous, violent people. Just like Hollywood. Except here. Right on our campus.”

“Yeah. Just like Hollywood. I’m sure,” I laughed sarcastically.

“This statue is just a caricature for white people. That’s what white people want to see. Do you think a native person made that sculpture? Probably not . . .”<sup>10</sup> Aurora assured me.

“Why does Abraham Lincoln have a full body of clothes and the Native American is naked out here?”<sup>11</sup> Aurora asked, referring to the Abraham Lincoln statue that sits on the other side of the quad. “It’s because they want us to think that Indigenous People are ‘noble savages’ (Fisher, 2001) and in need of being civilized! You’re being educated to think that we, People of Color, are savages and you don’t even see it!”

“Ok. Well, how do you make sense of the College Football Heisman winner statue? He’s a black man. That must be reverse discrimination, then?” I asked, cleverly.

“Unless you’re an athlete, there’s nothing else. Sure, there are a few black names out there in the quad, but they’re all athletes, and these athletes did give a lot of acknowledgement and a lot of money to the school, so the university gives them their deserved recognition. So, yeah, I mean, there’s definitely, again, that alienating thing where either you’re a sports hero, or you don’t get anything. And then, when it’s a Native American, it’s what? It’s, you’re a mascot. Not a human being. A mascot,”<sup>12</sup> Aurora explained.

“Regardless, there is statue of a Person of Color on our campus. An outstanding athlete at that. You should be satisfied,” I suggested.

“See, there’s another problem,” She protested immediately. “What are they trying to say? Is it that all People of Color do is play sports? What’s next? That they’re admitted to this university not because of their intelligence, but solely because they can catch a football with one hand? (Harper, 2009). It’s no wonder why Black males ‘don’t fit the description’ of what a student looks like, and why they experience all these racial microaggressions on their own university campuses (Smith et al., 2007). To top that off, a recent report indicated that Black male athletes are overrepresented in sports at Snow City University, but at the same time they are underrepresented in the general student population and in graduation rates (Harper, 2016). Riddle me that one. SMH!”

Knowing that she had made a good point, Aurora added to her analysis, “Did you know that there is an endless list of People of Color who have made history without playing sports? Read a book written by an author of color! Visit the civil rights library on campus for once! Oh. I forgot it’s hidden, marginalized, and constantly defunded. Environmental racism, I swear!”

Silence filled the air as I thought critically about her statements, looking for a good rebuttal.

“You really got me worked up by this statue conversation,” Aurora confessed. “It’s a serious matter. Multiple of my Xicanx friends at this university told me that they become unsettled whenever they pass by or think about this Indigenous statue. One literally told me the Indigenous statue makes her feel more alienated and weird as shit.<sup>13</sup> She is well-aware of the histories and constant struggles of Indigenous Peoples, and for her, this is yet another example of how marginalized communities are exoticized and exploited.”<sup>14</sup>

“Now that you say that, this statue could be seen as a slap in the face,” I agreed, reluctantly.

“Yes! This university constantly makes claims of homage that it is on Native Land. Before most presentations and programs, administrators and faculty are basically required to acknowledge that we’re on Indigenous land. You like going to sporting events. Do they do it there?” Aurora asked.

“Well, kind of,” I responded, semi-confidently. “In the sporting arenas like the university’s football and basketball stadium they have the local Native American Nation flag on display to support and acknowledge its importance, yet, like you said, this university contradicts its stance by allowing this statue to remain in the middle of the quad on main campus.”

“Andale,” Aurora complimented my observation. “And that statue is not too far from the sporting arena where spectators from all over the state come to support the university’s sports teams. Such actions speak to the university’s interest in ‘celebrating’ diversity, but not having a genuine interest in critical, social justice-oriented policies that challenge the status quo, the current racial order, or the institution’s privilege and power (Castagno & Lee, 2007). It’s terrible!”

“That’s true!” I replied, as I reached into my backpack to get my Hot Cheetos.

Right before I was going to open the bag, Aurora snatched it from me and then proceeded to open it, “You know, part of me says this statue needs to be removed, but then part of me says their bullshit and racism need to be memorialized and people need to remember how fucked up these people are. ¿Me entiendes?”<sup>15</sup>

“Aye. You better give me those chips back,” I complained.

“This romanticized statue . . . .” She took a big handful of my Hot Cheetos and then handed me the bag, “This statue is rooted in the idea of the ‘vanishing Indian’ (Fisher, 2001). It’s a romanticized version of the extinct Indigenous Person when, para empezar, the Haudenosaunee, whose lands are the lands of Upstate New York, are not extinct. They’re very much alive and well and still practicing their cultures and their traditions and have their government.”<sup>16</sup>

She had a point. I stared at her and thought about what she said. And I was silent, munching on Hot Cheetos.

After a long three seconds, I opened up, “I agree with you, but then I don’t. It could go either way. Most of these students and professors aren’t as ‘woke’ as you, so if the statue remains, they won’t see anything wrong with it. For example, I didn’t see anything wrong with the statue until you yelled at me and stole my Hot Cheetos.”

Aurora coughed, and then drank her water as she nearly choked on a Hot Cheeto because of my joke.

### Lack of Physical Representation

“Ok. So, this educational-environmental racism and racialized landscape thing. You prove your argument with statues only?” I asked in sincere curiosity.

Aurora’s eyes widened, excitedly, “No! There are other aspects of this university that provoke negative feelings, feelings of isolation, and cultural deprivation. Look around. Do you feel like you’re represented in the university’s landscape?”

“What do you mean?” I asked Aurora to clarify her question.

“Let me elaborate. Looking at the university physically, did you feel like you

have a sense of belongingness? Just looking at the university? Looking at the buildings? Looking at the dorms? Looking at the circumstances?" Aurora elaborated.

"I want to say yes. It's a nice campus. It's a very attractive campus. It makes you like it because it looks really nice. I didn't really think about the belonging part. It just looks nice,"<sup>17</sup> I replied, honestly.

"So, it looks nice but you aren't sure whether or not you belong."<sup>18</sup> If it looks nice, don't you want to belong there, too?" Aurora inquired.

"Not necessarily. I don't really feel like I need to belong here. I just need to get my work done,"<sup>19</sup> I answered.

Aurora smacked her lips, "WACK. That's a typical response from someone who has never taken an Ethnic Studies class. You don't want to just do your work here. You worked hard to get here, no one handed this to you. No one handed you a scholarship. You worked for that scholarship. You worked for the money that brought you here, but you don't feel like you belong in the social spaces."<sup>20</sup> It's also important for you to feel like you belong at this university! After all, you don't want this university's environment to give rise to survivor's guilt" (Solórzano, 1998).

"What's that?" I wondered aloud.

"Survivor's guilt is the idea that Students of Color experience a sense of guilt that they're at a university, while some of their homies and homegirls are not. They ask themselves, 'How is it that I arrived' when so many others like me haven't? Will someone discover that a mistake was made and I don't really belong here? How long will it take for them to realize that I am an impostor, an other? Microaggressions experienced at a university because of its racialized landscape can give you a harsh case of survivor's guilt (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Imposter syndrome places the blame on Students of Color rather than addressing the hostile and toxic campus environment that makes these students feel as if they are 'imposters' when they are not" (Hollingsworth, 2022).

"Oh," I said quietly, underneath my breath. I had experienced feelings like that, but I didn't want to admit it to Aurora. It would have confirmed her far-fetched hypothesis. I wouldn't hear the end of it. So, instead, I continued the conversation and changed the subject, "You said something about representation, right?"

"Yeah, we've already established that the statues at the university weren't meant for you, but looking at the names of buildings, do you feel like you are represented in the university's infrastructure?"<sup>21</sup> Aurora asked, again, already knowing the answer.

"The names of buildings, I don't feel represented in those either. No. Unfortunately, I don't see any names that I would associate with. I don't really feel represented in that. I mean, there's not any building on this campus that has a Spanish name,"<sup>22</sup> I confessed.

"Exactly!" Aurora exclaimed loudly. "Deadass. I can't even pronounce some of these building's names. Like the Panaschi Lounge, I don't know how to say that. That's not words that are in my vocabulary . . . I don't know how people say things



like that. The Skultzher Center . . . like I don't know to say that either . . . just so many things here are just like . . . ugh! This place here was not built for us. I don't know, it's just like . . . You just get this feeling. You just know, you know?”<sup>23</sup>

I scrunched my face, “Yeah . . . kind of.”

### Glorification of Historical Trauma

“You honestly think these names on buildings were established to honor good people? Hell nah. These are WHITE people who had a lot of money at a time when People of Color weren't allowed to have money.”

“Are you implying that these names on the buildings are names of slaveowners?” I questioned Aurora.

Aurora replied immediately, “DAMNNEAR! A lot of these fancy universities have buildings named after slaveowners. After all, profits from slavery helped fund some of the most prestigious schools in the Northeast including, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, and Harvard (Wilder, 2014). Even if the buildings are not named after actual slaveowners, those who they are named after probably had a slaveowner mentality. I'll tell you that for sure!”

“Oh snap! Dang. Those are supposedly the best schools in this nation, yet they come with hella baggage. That's terrible!” I asserted. “But what about here in Snow City University? This is the Northeast. Upstate New York. We can't possibly have the same baggage,” I told Aurora.

“You better think again,” Aurora reached for my bag of Hot Cheetos and proceeded to eat some. “This university is home to one of the most prestigious schools of citizenship and public affairs in the nation, right?”

“The best of the best. So I've been told,” I agreed.

“Ok. Well, within this prestigious school, there is the Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, which supports multi-disciplinary research focused on challenges to governance globally.<sup>24</sup> This institute is named after Daniel Patrick Moynihan. There are even awards given out annually named after him,” Aurora recounted.

“Aye. When I went to the sociology graduation last year, I saw this award being given out. The person who got the award was given a nice plaque AND \$1,000,”<sup>25</sup> I shared with Aurora.

“SMH. They can keep that dirty money!” Aurora replied angrily.

“Why do you say that? That's a G! Money is money . . . Ballin'. I'm trynna get that,” I grabbed my Hot Cheetos bag.

Aurora side-eyed me as if it was her Hot Cheetos bag, “Let me get to my point.”

She continued, “Anyways, located on the third floor, there is a whole series of offices and lounging areas designated for this institute. As soon as you enter, they have a whole painting of Daniel Patrick Moynihan located behind the welcome desk.<sup>26</sup> Have you heard of this Daniel? Do you know who he is? Do know that what he has done?” Aurora's voice got louder and louder after each question.

“Dang. Chill. You must really like him,” I said sarcastically. “Nah. I’ve never heard of him. Please, educate me.”

“Daniel Patrick Moynihan was an American sociologist who was really mainstream and worked with the American government. He published a paper on African American families back in the ’60s. It basically placed the blame on Black Americans in the American society for not being successful. This paper said that the family structure of African American families is the problem, which was something that was caused by the system. That’s what propaganda does. Instead of getting you to criticize a system, it gets you to criticize yourself. The point is this guy’s name is on the government school at Snow City University,”<sup>27</sup> Aurora detailed.

“For reals?! What’s the name of his paper? I want to look it up,” I asked.

Aurora pulled out her phone and looked it up, “His infamous report is titled, ‘Negro Family: The Case For National Action,’ commonly known as the Moynihan Report.”

Aurora continued scrolling and reading, “Aha. Here’s the line I was looking for.” She read the following paragraph aloud so I could listen to the report’s absurdity, “This report further engrained the notion of ‘culture of poverty,’ which claimed that poor people’s culturally-engrained behavior causes them to remain in a cycle of poverty. In particular, Moynihan’s (1965) report postulated that Black people’s family structure and morals are significant impediments to upward social mobility, thus ultimately insinuating that their behavior and beliefs must be altered in order to improve their current living conditions.”

“I ain’t even gonna lie. That’s a persuasive argument. I’m sure he persuaded a lot of people,” I suggested.

“Heck yes!” Aurora agreed. “This study absolutely pioneered the cultural deficit-thinking school of thought. Till this day, there are remnants of this way of thinking about peoples’ failures and successes. When in doubt, just blame the culture, that’s the easiest” (Yosso, 2005).

I shook my head and added, “For a university to endorse someone who has made such a detrimental impact on Communities of Color is daunting.”

“Exactly. Whenever I go anywhere near this Moynihan Institute, I get the chills because I know of how damaging this person’s research has been to communities who I am deeply invested in. Even though some undergraduate students may not know who Moynihan is initially, they are taken aback as soon as they find out the history and his endorsement at this university. Oftentimes, they are in disbelief that Snow City University allows for this to happen. To think, these are the people they look up to?”<sup>28</sup> Aurora shook her head in disgust.

We took a long pause.

I thought our conversation was over, until Aurora continued her rant out of nowhere, “Here’s another one for you. Have you ever been into Sims Hall?”

“Wait. Not Sims Hall! Don’t tell me Imma have to protest that building, too!” I teased Aurora.

Aurora shook her head up and down, “In case you didn’t know, Sims Hall here at Snow City University is named after James Marion Sims, who is known by most white Americans as the ‘father of modern gynecology.’ He developed pioneering tools and surgical techniques related to women’s reproductive health.”

“That’s pretty cool,” I interrupted.

“There’s an important catch,” Aurora warned me. “Sims’ research was conducted on enslaved Black women without anesthesia. He cared more about his stupid experiments than providing therapeutic treatment. He caused innumerable suffering by operating under the racist notion that Black people did not feel pain (Holland, 2018). He was a RACIST with a slaveowner mentality!”

“Yo!!!!” I exclaimed. Suddenly I had an epiphany. “I’m not a campus expert, but I have been in Sims Hall multiple times. My boy’s mentor has an office in that building, so we visit here and there. Correct if I’m wrong, but isn’t the Civil Rights library in that building?”

“Hmmm mmm,” Aurora hummed in agreement.

“Damn. That’s hella disrespectful!” I stated in a frustrated tone.

“And do you know what other departments are in this same building?” Aurora asked, impatiently.

I stayed quiet without a response.

“The AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES Department!” Aurora responded in a high-pitched tone.

She continued, “And do know what other department is in that same building?”

“Don’t tell me it’s the Women and Gender Studies Department,” I guessed, unsure if I was correct.

“BINGO!” Aurora clapped mockingly. “And do you know what else is housed in this building?”

“Damn. It gets worse?” I laughed in a serious manner.

Aurora raised her carefully plucked eyebrows, “Yes it does!”

She elaborated, “MULTIPLE Academic Achievement and Student Development Programs for underrepresented students are housed in this building. These programs serve mainly Students of Color. There’s even a research program for underrepresented students! Imagine that, learning about research in a building named after a racist with no research ethics. The IRONY! The DISRESPECT! The EDUCATIONAL-ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM!”

Suddenly, I became interested in what Aurora was telling me. I was in agreement. Still, I was unsure how it was considered environmental racism, “I agree. You can’t really disagree with what you’re saying. This whole building set up is super shady. Suspect to say the least. But how exactly is this environmental racism?”

### **Cultural Deprivation and Deinvestment**

“I guess you only pay attention to detail when it concerns your shoes, huh?”

Aurora threw shade at me. “I told you that educational-environmental racism is experienced by Students of Color through a racialized landscape, which is a landscape, or lack thereof, that elicits negative feelings, feelings of isolation, and cultural deprivation. The key words here are ‘lack thereof.’ Get it?” Aurora carefully enunciated the words ‘lack thereof’ slowly, so I could get her point entirely.

“Ok, so lack thereof, meaning what?” I wanted clarification.

“Meaning that the lack of representation in this university’s landscape can also elicit negative feelings, feelings of isolation, and cultural deprivation. If you think about it, almost all the artwork, portraits, buildings, designs, and statues located on the main campus at this university are Eurocentric. I don’t see anything that represents my own culture. I don’t see Latinx art anywhere. The architecture is just boring ass ancient Roman shit. I study history, so architecturally, I’m aware of the type of architecture they’re using, that it’s Roman-type architecture that they’re using. That’s a hegemonic type architecture.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, for the most part, buildings and streets at and near this university are named after white people, too. It’s alienating AF.”

I couldn’t disagree. I didn’t have any proof. Aurora was speaking facts. Lately, I’ve noticed the same thing. I nodded my head up and down, urging her to continue.

Sure enough, Aurora continued animatedly, “Just think about it. A prime example of how there is a lack of representation in the university landscape is seen in what this university values and preserves. For instance, have you been in the NewVoice building where one of the most competitive broadcasting programs in the nation is located?”

“Bruh. Who hasn’t? They have the best computer labs,” I stated.

“Immediately as soon as you enter this modern, visually striking renovated building, there are portraits of notable alumni and difference makers. What do you see?” Aurora asked.

“There is a wall with pictures. I think all the pictures there admire a lot of the faculty and staff who died, or like the athletes and stuff like that . . . . But I never once saw anybody who was a Xicana, or a Latino who was represented in that space,”<sup>30</sup> I replied, honestly.

“Exactly,” Aurora agreed. “All but a few people on that wall are white. Not only that, but there’s an aura or there’s something about it that just says these institutions were not built for me.”<sup>31</sup>

“I don’t know about all that,” I laughed at Aurora’s ridiculous statement.

In a serious manner, Aurora explained in detail, “In this case, the lack of People of Color on this wall is troubling. Because they see very few people who look like them on this wall, Students of Color majoring in this degree might question as to whether they belong in this program and university or perhaps worse, whether contributions to the field of broadcasting made by individuals who look like them are worthy of recognition.”

"Very true. There's definitely a lot of successful People of Color in the broadcasting field. They have to be recognized, too," I asserted.

Aurora looked at her watch. "I gotta bounce soon. My geography class starts in about 15 minutes."

My mind spaced out as I thought critically about Aurora's points.

"Aside from those problematic statues, are People of Color represented at all in this university landscape?" I accidentally asked myself verbally.

Aurora heard my remark, "Yes, but in very marginalized ways."

"How so?" I wondered.

"I mean, yeah. We have the Office of Multicultural Affairs . . ." Aurora stated.

"True," I reflected.

"It's in the basement!" She complained. "Where do you go to speak to the other people or other staff members who are of color, who can relate? At the basement of some building, which really sucks. Why don't they just have a big office? It's a really small office, too."<sup>32</sup>

"Damn. It's in the basement of our student center," I repeated underneath my breath. "No one really goes to the basement, so it's like . . . You kind of feel like the university doesn't really care about it. It's just down there. So, yeah, in terms of race, yeah, it's there. They're showing that they acknowledge it, but they don't really invest in it . . . It's just there. They're not going to do anything about it."<sup>33</sup>

"And that's why I said our presence in the actual university landscape is marginalized, too!" Aurora insisted. "Cultural centers, like the Office of Multicultural Affairs play an important role in countering negative experiences of Students of Color like us, especially in a hostile university environment like this (Yosso & Lopez, 2010). It just shows you how the university loves to front on like 'oh, diversity, inclusion, send your Students of Color here,' because of money . . . They want all these students to come into this university so they can get the federal dollars that comes with that, the tuition, the scholarship money that comes with all of that, but they don't want to do the actual work to make this campus actually inclusive. To make this campus actually welcoming to Students of Color. Even things like the Office of Multicultural Affairs. Even people in that office have to fight for money . . ."<sup>34</sup>

Aurora appeared to be heated. Her voice got louder and louder as she preached. She took a deep breath, and continued preaching, "At the end of the day, this university still wants all their money. They want the rich racist white kids to come into the school and they want us to be here kind of like props, like yeah, we're welcoming. Like 'yeah, there's no racism here,' BUT THERE IS RACISM HERE. There's so much and there's . . ."<sup>35</sup>

"Bruhhh. Relax," I cut her off. "I get your point. There's racism here. I haven't had the chance to go visit the multicultural office, but I was recommended that anyone who goes to college, has to find the multicultural office and just start speaking to people there.<sup>36</sup> But yeah, it's terrible how it gets treated and how the university fronts."

“But since we’re on the topic of basements, let me give you one last example before we get going,” Aurora offered.

“Did you know there was a basement to the basement?” Aurora asked.

“There’s a basement below the Office of Multicultural Affairs? It gets lower than that?” I got up and threw my trash in the nearest trash can.

Aurora nodded in agreement, “Yes! Have you seen the murals there?”<sup>37</sup>

“To be honest, I haven’t. Do they also glamorize and glorify white people?” I speculated.

“Actually, no. It’s quite the opposite,” Aurora replied.

I frowned, surprised by her response, “Then what is it?!”

“Along the stairwell of the underground basement, you will see hella dope murals of mostly Black legends like Missy Elliot, André 3000, Beyoncé, Bob Marley, Jay Z, and others. They have a lot of POC, like Carmelo Anthony and shit.<sup>38</sup> Those murals that are in that underground basement are gorgeous,”<sup>39</sup> Aurora described excitedly.

“Yo. That sounds dope AF. I have to check them out,” I responded. “How’d you even know about them? How’d you find them?”

“When I first came in, that’s the very first thing I saw on this campus because I was with my mom and I didn’t know where anything was. I went through and I was like oh what? But it’s so like . . . Literally, you only end up there by getting lost. Because I was lost, I ended up there,”<sup>40</sup> Aurora complained.

“Dang. That ain’t coo. I bet a lot of people don’t know about it,” I added.

Aurora made duck lips, “Yeah. You can add yourself to that list. I just met a Xicana who barely saw these murals as a junior. It’s her third year at this university, and she has never seen them! She never spent time in the underground and the only reason she went was because the copy center is underground basement as well, that’s when she had to start going there because of her graphic design major and that’s when she started seeing them.”<sup>41</sup>

“Regardless, that’s pretty dope!” I stated naively.

But Aurora had other thoughts. She stared at me with a no-you-didn’t face. “Damn, but they in the basement! I’m sad about it. ‘Cuz first of all, all our people don’t come down there, so they’re already not seen that well and then it made me angry because I’m just like, ‘These are murals that represent People of Color, this was created for Communities of Color but the space that the university gives it is underground,’ like, ‘Let’s hide this art.’”<sup>42</sup>

I was in disbelief. “It’s crazy how they put it in such a place where nobody’s going to see it.”<sup>43</sup>

“Out of sight, out of mind,” Aurora exclaimed cleverly. “Who’s going to go down there? People who are going to the Multicultural Affairs Office or . . . That’s it.<sup>44</sup> It’s like keep all the People of Color in the basement so we don’t have to see them. And then they have the nerve to use these murals as an example like ‘oh, we’re so multicultural. We got all these icons of hip hop or whatever here,’ but it’s like . . . It’s a little two-faced because it’s so hidden.”<sup>45</sup>

I stayed silent. All this was starting to make sense.

“I get what you mean about how the university only flaunts when it wants to,” I admitted to Aurora. “I remember the university had a ‘Trans Lives Matter’ flag hanging casually in front the student center for quite some time. Then, the week prospective students visited, they took it down immediately. It looked all wack, like it was obvious the flag was clearly missing.”

“Exactly! Only when it benefits them. This university ain’t really in it because they truly believe in diversity. They do it for show!” Aurora insisted.

“I mean . . . that’s what it seemed like.” I agreed.

Aurora looked at her watch again. “Yo I gotta bounce for reals before I’m late for this class,” she gathered her belongings and proceeded to apply her lipstick. “You can’t deny it tho, if you really think about it critically, the racialized landscape of this predominantly white university is oppressive. Undeniably, it gives rise to unsettling emotions and experiences exclusively experienced by Students of Color. However you want to look at it, through its mere presence, ‘or lack thereof,’ this university landscape negatively impacts the sense of belongingness for already marginalized Students of Color (González, 2002). The conversation we just had provides a glimpse of the subtle, yet various ways Students of Color are survivors of educational-environmental racism.”

After much debate, I was convinced. “You know,” I told Aurora, “This whole race and space conversation really got me thinking.”

“Go on,” Aurora said with no emotion, waiting for me to say something problematic.

“The more I think about it, the more I am persuaded that we attribute meaning and value to distinct racialized landscapes. Not only that, but I’m also convinced that white people’s spatial interests are always put at the forefront and privileged, while historically marginalized people’s interests are oftentimes neglected and not taken seriously (Lipsitz, 2007). There’s definitely some tension in what a space should look like. At this university, white students’ interests and comfort are prioritized,” I suggested.

“BEEN!” Aurora put her hand on my shoulder. “A white space is based on exclusivity and exchange value, ultimately skewing opportunities and life chances for white people (Lipsitz, 2007). Exclusivity is everywhere, and it’s in spite of the fact that this university was built on the backs of People of Color.<sup>46</sup> This is an exclusive white club.<sup>47</sup> Everything on this campus is made to make white students feel comfortable and included, so they can succeed. A celebration of culture of an oppressed and marginalized group, especially an oppressed marginalized group that is the Indigenous People, in this context, is sometimes seen as exclusive by some white students.<sup>48</sup> It’s like somebody telling me reverse racism exists, it doesn’t.<sup>49</sup> How can it exist? It can’t! Because of the literal land, the stolen land that this violent ass infrastructure fucking resides on.<sup>50</sup> It’s native land, but this university acts like it’s theirs, and the white students act like they’re entitled to it. You can tell this place is so overtly white, like everything.”<sup>51</sup>

“That’s facts,” I hugged Aurora to say my goodbyes.

“You better share this knowledge I just dropped on you with all your little Student of Color homies who naively praise this university on their social media accounts,” she responded as she playfully pushed me away.

“Yeah, I will . . . Only if you buy me some Hot Cheetos.”

\*This story was inspired and modeled after my favorite writing by Michele Serros, “Attention Shoppers.”

### Author Note

Thank you to the MMAX students who participated in this project and in doing so, spoke truth to power.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> While Latinx encompasses a wide variety of people from Latin America and the Caribbean, including Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, Guatemalans, Colombians, Chileans, and so on, I decided to specifically use Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) because the participants specifically identified as MMAX and wanted to use that identification, and Latinx is too broad and doesn’t consider the unique ethnic-based experiences of being MMAX. Nevertheless, MMAX falls under the broader “Latinx” category, so at times, I use MMAX and Latinx interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this manuscript, I use Students of Color interchangeably with Mexican/Mexican American/Xicanx (MMAX) students because MMAX students fall under the broader category of Students of Color, and the participants in this study also referred to themselves as Students of Color. While this study focuses exclusively on the experiences of MMAX students, other Students of Color—specifically Black and non-MMAX Latinx students—expressed to me similar concerns throughout the data collection process, but I did not collect those responses for this project.

<sup>3</sup> All names included in this manuscript are pseudonyms.

<sup>4</sup> This phrase was taken directly from a participant interview conducted February 1, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> In 2018, the Snow City University student-run newspaper published an article on the fact that this Native American statue is indeed controversial. In fact, a senior called on Snow City University to remove Christopher Columbus statue out of respect to Indigenous People.

<sup>6</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted October 23, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 6, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> This information was taken from the university’s online webpage.

<sup>9</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted January 28, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> This response was paraphrased from an in-depth interview conducted April 16, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> This response was paraphrased from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Several participants expressed to me similar sentiments via informal conversations.

<sup>15</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted October 29, 2018.



- <sup>16</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted October 29, 2018.
- <sup>17</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 27, 2018.
- <sup>18</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 27, 2018.
- <sup>19</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 27, 2018.
- <sup>20</sup> The previous four sentences were taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted May 9, 2018.
- <sup>21</sup> This question was asked to all 20 participants. All 20 participants said no.
- <sup>22</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 27, 2018.
- <sup>23</sup> Everything but the first two sentences was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2018. The names of the buildings were altered.
- <sup>24</sup> This is true. I had a conversation with the Dean of this college at Snow City University and the Dean glorified Moynihan.
- <sup>25</sup> This is true. They literally give out an award to faculty named after him.
- <sup>26</sup> This was described by a participant in an in-depth interview conducted January 24, 2019.
- <sup>27</sup> This entire response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted January 28, 2019.
- <sup>28</sup> Response is paraphrased from an in-depth interview conducted January 24, 2019.
- <sup>29</sup> The previous five sentences were taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted May 9, 2018.
- <sup>30</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted June 2, 2018.
- <sup>31</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted May 10, 2018.
- <sup>32</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 16, 2019.
- <sup>33</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>34</sup> Everything but the first two sentences was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>35</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019. Emphasis added.
- <sup>36</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 16, 2019.
- <sup>37</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>38</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 6, 2019.
- <sup>39</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted May 12, 2018.
- <sup>40</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>41</sup> This response was paraphrased from an in-depth interview conducted May 12, 2018.
- <sup>42</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted May 12, 2018.
- <sup>43</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>44</sup> This response was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>45</sup> This response was paraphrased from a response in an in-depth interview conducted April 29, 2019.
- <sup>46</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.
- <sup>47</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.
- <sup>48</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.
- <sup>49</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.
- <sup>50</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.
- <sup>51</sup> This sentence was taken directly from an in-depth interview conducted February 1, 2019.

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