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# "Cooperate with Others for Common Ends?": Students as Gatekeepers of Culture and Tradition on College Campuses

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“Cooperate with Others for Common Ends?": Students as Gatekeepers of  
Culture and Tradition on College Campuses

Honors Thesis for the Department of Sociology and Anthropology

By Pamela Zabala

Bowdoin College, 2017

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<i>Abstract</i> .....	v
<i>Acknowledgments</i> .....	vi
<b>Chapter 1: The Ivory Tower Torn Asunder</b> .....	<b>1</b>
The White Space.....	6
Colleges as White Spaces.....	8
Students of Color in White Spaces.....	14
Data and Methods.....	17
Overview.....	21
<b>Chapter 2: “200 Years of Bowdoin, 200 Years of Ignorance”</b> .....	<b>23</b>
John Brown Russwurm: 1826.....	25
Administrative Change at the Dawn of the Century: 1890-1964.....	28
Student Culture at the Dawn of the Century: 1890-1964.....	31
Recruitment to Accommodation: 1964-1970.....	36
Growing Pains – The Administration: 1970 – Present.....	39
Growing Pains – The Students: 1970 – Present .....	42
Discussion.....	47
<b>Chapter 3: Not Not a Fiesta</b> .....	<b>51</b>
Students as Campus Actors .....	53
Bursting the Bubble: Rising Campus Tensions, 2000-2017.....	58
Cracksgiving.....	61
The Gangster Party.....	62
The Tequila Party.....	66

Student Resistance.....	69
<b>Chapter 4: Is Bax Happening? .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Incidents of Racial Bias.....	80
Hypercultural White Spaces.....	83
Discussion.....	90
<b>Chapter 5: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<i>References.....</i>	<i>103</i>
<i>Appendix A: Figures.....</i>	<i>110</i>

## **ABSTRACT**

As colleges and universities have increased efforts to make their campuses more racially and ethnically inclusive, students of color still perceive their campuses as hostile spaces to racial and ethnic minorities. On the other hand, white students often feel as though their institutions do too much, leaving administrators to balance the interests of both groups. This thesis draws on archival, ethnographic, and interview data collected at Bowdoin College to examine the relationship between students and between students and administrators given the role of students as major agents of change on college campuses. I have found that when students feel threatened by institutional change, they go into crisis and create spaces of resistance on campus. Institutions are incapable or unwilling to find solutions that meet the needs of the various constituencies within the student body. Therefore, students and administration become locked in a power struggle that produces only surface-level institutional change rather than meaningful reform in the face of rising racial tensions.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: THE IVORY TOWER TORN ASUNDER**

As the red convertible carrying President Tim Wolfe and his wife reached the intersection of University Avenue and Ninth Street in Columbia, Missouri, a group of students emerged from the crowd and linked arms, blocking the street. Shouting through megaphones, the students took turns listing their grievances against the University of Missouri for its treatment of students of color from 1839 to 2015. The point of their blockade was to draw attention to the “raw, painful, and often silenced history of racism and discrimination on the University of Missouri’s campus.” The students wore shirts with “1839 was Built on my B(l)ack” emblazoned on the back, and called themselves Concerned Student 1950. The name of their groups “represents every black student admitted to the University of Missouri since then and their sentiments regarding race-related affairs affecting their lives at a predominantly white institution.” The mostly white spectators had different reactions to the protest. Some joined the blockade. Others attempted to drown out the protesters by shouting “Move on!,” “Go away!,” and “M-I-Z, Z-O-U!” Several challenged the students and tried to end the protest. Others formed a human chain to prevent the protesters from blocking Wolfe’s convertible. The parade crowd standing around the protesters grew more agitated, and several white men emerged and tried to physically remove the protesters from the road. President Wolfe ignored the student group, refusing to get out of the car to speak to them. The police disbanded the students only eleven minutes after they began their demonstration, and the parade resumed as scheduled, though footage of the demonstration made its way to social media and received national news coverage as well.



Ten days after the protest, on October 21<sup>st</sup>, Concerned Student 1950 released a list of demands, calling for Wolfe's removal, a comprehensive racial awareness and inclusion curriculum, and an increase of faculty of color to 10% of the university's faculty and staff. After years of "constant emailing, letter writing and social media outreach," President Wolfe still did not respond to their demands. Four days later, another act of hate occurred in a residence hall, where a student drew a swastika on a bathroom wall using their own feces (Rios 2015). Concerned Student 1950 characterized this incident as resulting from a continued lack of action on behalf of administrators.

This act of vandalism was the final straw for graduate student Jonathan Butler. Frustrated at Wolfe's actions and the lack of attention that the black student protesters were receiving, he tweeted and sent a letter to Mizzou's Board of Curators on November 2<sup>nd</sup> condemning "the slew of racist, sexist, homophobic, etc., incidents that have dynamically disrupted the learning experience for marginalized [and] underrepresented students at the University of Missouri." In the letter, Butler announced a hunger strike that would not end until President Wolfe resigned (Ford 2015). His strike responded to the lack of communication between university administrators and the students who were being targeted. Butler's hunger strike also drew more national media attention to the campus, and quickly prompted a campus wide movement in which students of color set up tents on the Mel Carnahan Quad in solidarity with Butler's strike (Pearce 2015).

Facing intense scrutiny from students, parents, faculty, and alums for his inaction over the month since the parade demonstration, President Wolfe issued a statement to the school on November 6<sup>th</sup> apologizing for his inaction at the University homecoming parade. "Had I gotten out of the car to acknowledge the students and talk with them

perhaps we wouldn't be where we are now," he admitted. That same day, the Legion of Black Collegians posted a photograph on Twitter of black players on the Mizzou football team, who, with the support of their coaches and teammates, refused to practice or play until the matter of Wolfe's resignation and the student protests had been resolved (Pearson 2015). The accompanying caption read, "The athletes of color on the University of Missouri football team truly believe 'injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.'" This statement indicated solidarity with the movements that were going on throughout the campus and with Butler's hunger strike. With \$1 million at stake if the team did not play in their game the next weekend, Mizzou's Board of Curators, a nine-member governing body for the university, met in a closed-door meeting to discuss future action. If the team forfeited the game, the school would have to pay a sum of \$1 million to their opponent. President Wolfe called for an emergency meeting of the University's Board of Curators on the morning of November 9<sup>th</sup>. He resigned his position, effectively ending both the hunger strike and the football strike.

President Wolfe urged students to use his resignation as an opportunity to "heal and to start talking again," and explained that "change comes from listening, learning, caring, and conversation" (Rios 2015). Additionally, he took full responsibility for the inaction of the University and for the frustration that students were feeling. Wolfe's resignation did not end the controversy however. Two days after President Wolfe's resignation, a nineteen-year old white student named Hunter M. Park was arrested for making terroristic threats via the anonymous social media platform Yik Yak. Park posted, "I'm going to stand my ground tomorrow and shoot every black person I see," sending

students of color into panic and prompting professors to cancel classes out of concern for their students (Eligon 2015).

The events that happened at the University of Missouri are just one of the many racial conflicts that have occurred recently on college campuses, as the protests fueled student movements on colleges and universities across the country. On November 13, 2015, Yale University students staged campus-wide March of Resilience after an administrator, Erika Christakis, sent out an email urging students to simply “look away” if they see a costume that they find offensive or culturally insensitive. It was also revealed that a fraternity on the Yale campus had been banning black women from attending a “White Girls Only” themed party, and that swastikas were being drawn around campus. These incidents incensed the student body, and they mobilized to demand increased support for their cultural groups and centers, the removal of Christakis, and acknowledgement and support for the mental health issues of minority students. Additionally, at Harvard Law School, portraits of the school’s black professors were found covered in black tape a day after students in the Royall Must Fall Movement held marches and rallies both in solidarity with groups on other campuses and to draw attention to their own grievances. Similar demonstrations took place at Ithaca College, Amherst College, Brown University, Princeton University, and Claremont McKenna College, among many others. Students from another sixty colleges and universities submitted lists of demands to their institutions, pushing for administrators to recognize and acknowledge racial violence on their campuses (Wong and Green 2015).

Universities and colleges are now being pushed by frustrated students to acknowledge their racial legacies and the roles they play in fostering current racial

campus climates. Increasingly, the national attention that recent student movements have received offer students a new platform from which to expose these pasts and accuse university administrators of being insensitive to issues that impact racial and ethnic minorities' experiences on college campuses. Thus, these movements and protests highlight a paradox in higher education: as colleges and universities have increased efforts to make their campuses more racially and ethnically inclusive in recent decades, students of color nevertheless perceive the campuses as hostile spaces to racial and ethnic minorities, often reporting more negative experiences during their college years than their white classmates (Rankin and Reason 2005).

In response to racial tension and student demands, institutions of higher education engage in surface-level change and employ a narrow understanding of what diversity is and does, using it as a bandage in order to conceal what are often troubled histories with prejudice and segregation. This allows them to avoid engaging in meaningful structural change. In light of the incongruence between the diversity goals of colleges and universities, and the role of students in shaping and safeguarding tradition and culture through resistance, this thesis centers around four questions: 1) In the context of diversification, how do bias incidents and subsequent institutional responses shape discourses and structures on college campuses? 2) How are white spaces disrupted or maintained after bias incidents? 3) What role do students play in the organization of an institution, and how do students shape the ways in which an institution responds to an incident? 4) How does the relationship between discourses and structures allow for the reproduction of spaces in which incidents of racial bias can continue to happen? In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the literature regarding the role that students play

as agents of resistance within organizations, and of the literature about the ways in which institutions enact change in response to student pressure. I argue that campus cultures make institutions of higher education white spaces, and that administrators face pressure to both diversify and also to maintain these white spaces. When incidents of racial bias arise, the responses from students of color and white students reveal the failure of administrators to sufficiently do both, and student reactions often threaten campus climates. I will then explain why Bowdoin provides an ideal case in which to study these research questions, and give an overview of the methodology used in this study. Lastly, I provide an overview of this thesis as a whole.

### **THE WHITE SPACE**

Elijah Anderson (2015) defines white spaces as social spaces that are overwhelmingly white, and which normalize the exclusion and absence of people of color.<sup>1</sup> These include many of the spaces people move through to accomplish their daily and nightly rounds: restaurants, schools, churches, neighborhoods, and work spaces. Prior to the Civil Rights Movement, these spaces were physically all-white. As many institutions have racially diversified, Anderson emphasizes contemporary white spaces as a perceptual framework for understanding spaces that favor white subjectivities and where people of color face symbolic exclusion. White people see white spaces as unremarkable and take them for granted as normal reflections of civil society (Anderson 2015). What these spaces reflect however, is a society that is rooted in white middle class

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<sup>1</sup> Although Anderson understands white spaces in relation to the racial segregation of blacks, this conceptual framework can be expanded to include anyone who is not phenotypically white, for they face exclusion regardless of their specific ethnic or racial background.

values, authority and ownership over these spaces, and security in knowing that white people are demographically and symbolically the majority. Though the legal measures that created and maintained white spaces are no longer in place, these spaces are continuously reproduced by the propagation of an implicit racial hierarchy, whereby anyone who is not phenotypically white is an “other” and does not belong. White people do not have to mitigate any part of their identity to exist in these spaces, and do not need to think about how their race positions them in these spaces in order to navigate them.

In recent decades, white spaces have become increasingly demographically diverse, though they continue to be reproduced and maintained, which means that people of color are not experiencing white spaces in the same way as their white counterparts. For people of color, being able to exist in a white space is contingent on their ability to 1) not challenge the implicit racial order by staying in their place, and 2) dissociate from the iconic ghetto, another perceptual category that Anderson uses to explain how non-white skin becomes closely associated with poverty, crime, violence, and dependency (Anderson 2012). According to Anderson (2015), the iconic ghetto serves as a “touchstone for prejudice, a profound source of stereotypes, and a rationalization for discrimination” against people of color. Thus, when people of color enter white spaces, they are immediately scrutinized by white people who aim to place them and determine whether or not they pose a threat. The constant white gaze relegates upwardly mobile people of color to “the margins between the ghetto and the wider white society,” for they are never fully incorporated into white spaces but do not really belong to the iconic ghetto either (Anderson 2015).

Although white spaces are perceived as being more diverse than they have been in the past, they are still perceived as being homogenously white and relatively privileged by people of color, who stand out despite the progress that has supposedly been made (Anderson 2015). White people see the advancement of people of color as a “profound and threatening racial symbol” (Anderson 2015). They may feel that this advancement is being made at their expense and that they are being prejudiced against. Only after people of color pass inspection are they granted provisional acceptance. Because they are constantly being portrayed as others and as outsiders to these spaces, face such intense scrutiny, and repeatedly have their presence challenged, people of color perceive white spaces as being off-limits and as spaces where they must assimilate and perform whiteness. However, they are forced to navigate white spaces in everyday life, facing constant reminders, both subtle and overt, that they do not belong in these spaces, which, over time, leads to weariness and fatigue in people of color. Elijah Anderson (2015) points to schools, and institutions of higher education in particular, as one type of social institution that may be interpreted as being white spaces due to their history of exclusivity and place as markers of elite social status. Additionally, these are places that still face incredible racial tension despite their diversification over the past several decades.

### **COLLEGES AS WHITE SPACES**

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2015), there were approximately 17.3 million undergraduate students in the United States enrolled at degree granting four-year institutions in the fall of 2014. Of these students, 9.6 million were white, 2.4 million were African American, 3 million were Hispanic, and 1 million were Asian. These numbers represent incredible growth since the turn of the century. Hispanic

enrollment, for example, experienced a 119% increase from 2000 to 2014, growing from 1.4 million to 3 million students. Black enrollment had a 57% increase, from 1.5 million to 2.4 million students. Meanwhile, white enrollment only increased by 7%, from 9 million to 9.6 million students. Because of this rapid diversification, which has rapidly changed the composition of American colleges and universities, racial tensions have continued to increase, and bias incidents are ever more prevalent. This suggests that bringing more people of color into white spaces that are historically exclusive of others, without addressing how the structure and culture of such organizations continuously reproduce this framework, only exacerbates racial and ethnic divisions on college and university campuses. Additionally, these statistics help to highlight the tension that arises as colleges become more diverse while simultaneously remaining white spaces.

Despite efforts to diversify their student populations, colleges remain white spaces because the traditions, language, activities, and cultural practices of institutions of higher education, in conjunction with the demographic dominance of whites in higher education, perpetuate white cultural ideologies (Soja 1989). On college campuses throughout the United States, there remain vestiges of a time when education was traditionally reserved for elite white men, and campuses excluded women and students of color (Fullwood 2015). Recent student protests have pushed back against the ways in which white spaces are historically constructed and preserved through crests and buildings and statues bearing the names of instrumental figures with controversial histories (Wilder 2014). These emblems of whiteness constantly remind students of color that their institutions were not made for them, and that in another era they would have never been admitted. Many student protests and demonstrations focused on these



emblems because when students of color exist in white spaces like these, they face the unique pressure of having to exist in a space that has been historically constructed to exclude them. Often adding insult to injury, these spaces are often named to honor people like John C. Calhoun and other pro-slavery figures.

At Georgetown for example, students organized a protest and sit-in to get the names of Rev. Thomas F. Mulledy and Rev. William McSherry removed from campus buildings. These men were responsible for orchestrating the sale of two-hundred seventy-two Georgetown slaves, who belonged to prominent Jesuit priests, to pay the debts of the University in 1838 (Swarns 2016). Their sale was worth \$3.3 million in today's currency and helped relieve Georgetown's significant debt, which means these slaves played a substantial role in the growth of Georgetown as a prominent institution of higher education (Swarns 2016). In the fall of 2015, student activists staged a sit-in outside the office of President John J. DeGioia from 9am to midnight to demand that the institution change the name of two buildings on campus honoring Mulledy and McSherry (Puri 2015). Two-hundred fifty students, faculty, and staff also participated in a march in solidarity with students of color at Georgetown and other colleges. As a result of these protests and other student initiatives, Georgetown has begun to take steps toward making important reparations for its past. Currently, Georgetown is working to provide reparations to the descendants of the slaves that were sold to save the school (Swarns 2016).

At Yale, students protested the name of Calhoun College, one of their twelve undergraduate colleges, because it was named after John C. Calhoun. He was the seventh Vice President of the United States and a prominent white nationalist, slave holder, and

advocate for slavery. After a slew of protests in the fall of 2015, students demanded that Yale change the name of the College, which President Peter Salovey refused to do (Wang and Svriuga 2017). “We cannot erase American history but we can confront it, teach it, and learn from it,” he said in his statement to the Yale Community (*YaleNews* 2016). At the urging of an independent committee, an uptick in student protests, and an incident in which a black employee shattered a stained-glass window depicting a slave picking cotton, Salovey reversed his sentiments (Simko-Bednarski 2017). One year later, Calhoun College was renamed in 2017 to honor Grace Murray Hopper ’34, a computer scientist and naval officer who earned a Ph.D. in mathematics in 1934 (Wang and Svriuga 2017).

These cases are examples of how white spaces become normalized, and then challenged, over time. Cabrera (2012) argues that whiteness is normalized when institutions have disproportionately high representation of whites, take on reactive rather than proactive stances on racism, a concentration of power in white, male administrators, and the exclusion of diversity in their mission statements. Students also play a role in normalizing whiteness by creating what Cabrera calls “racially homogenous sub-environments” and taking on a sense of victimization that insulates whites from the racial antagonisms that they often identify as reverse racism. This ability to self-segregate and remove themselves at will from the racial narrative of their campuses reinforces the white space as a space in which white people can opt into or out of participating in the most racialized aspects of the space without consequence. Students of color do not have this option, as they have to constantly navigate white spaces in order to succeed, and when they are pushed too far, as Mizzou and other cases demonstrate, they will resist. Student

demonstrations push back against the normalization of white spaces in two ways: 1) by addressing the immediate racial prejudice that they face from student, staff, and faculty, and 2) by challenging their colleges as historically constructed white spaces that celebrate and honor the exclusion of marginalized people. Thus, these demonstrations have garnered a variety of responses, ranging from support and marches in solidarity to incredible backlash and threats of violence (Wong and Green 2016).

As people of color have entered white spaces, they have entered institutions that preserve structural whiteness and reinforce it through physical representations of whiteness, as well as discourses and actions that adhere to notions of whiteness as the norm. Diane Lynn Gusa (2010) refers to the combination of discourse, ideology, and collective and individualized actions that reproduce and maintain this hierarchy as White Institutional Presence (WPI). A college's White Institutional Presence consists of the ideologies and practices rooted in the institution's design and the organization of its environment. It is informed by white ascendancy and white victimization. White ascendancy refers to an attribute of WPI whereby whites feel superior and create hostile environments for blacks when they feel that their privileges are challenged (Gusa 2010). White victimization contributes to the production of white ascendancy because it is a process through which white students view minority students as being illegitimate participants in higher education and perceive themselves as losing ground as a result of multiculturalism (Gusa 2010). Ultimately, what keeps these spaces white is that they continue to operate within this framework, and that they actively work to other people of color by never granting them full acceptance and by relegating them to a lesser status when they actively challenge the space.

Beyond just normalizing white spaces, colleges and universities engage in social reproduction as a means by which to stay elite and exclusive. However, they may also omnivorously adopt progressive stances that seem to contradict their own goals for the purposes of reproducing their elite status and having the best of both worlds. This is best exemplified by the small, incremental changes that colleges and universities make to address student demands and give the illusion that structural change is being made. According to Ariss et al. (2014), whiteness at the organizational level is evident in the conscious and unconscious practices and strategies that serve to maintain ethnic privilege, discrimination, and the power of whiteness.

In order to stay elite, colleges and universities must work to maintain the academic and economic structures that make them so exclusive, because these factors are what keeps bringing in revenue, donors, and supporters to these schools. However, this goal of maintaining social reproduction clashes with the image of colleges as socially transformative spaces. Institutions engage in social reproduction to sustain their existing structures and cultural standards, not to fundamentally change everything about themselves. They may adopt some aspects of progressivism, such as diversity action plans and educational programming around race and diversity, but these efforts do little to address the underlying structural and organizational frameworks that continuously reproduce the white space. These cultural standards of colleges and universities are understood within the context of whiteness, so these institutions are constantly reproduced as white spaces. Such “subtle, nebulous, and unnamed” messages and practices of whiteness harm those who do not adhere to the norms of white culture and reinforce the dominance of whiteness (Gusa 2010).

## **STUDENTS OF COLOR IN WHITE SPACES**

Students of color are always the “other,” and do not have the same liberty of blending in or opting out of the white space. Rather, they face pressure to conform to the white space and prove that they have no relation to the “iconic ghetto” (Anderson 2012). They are also looked upon to teach their classmates about diversity, often taking this additional burden in lieu of their institutions (McLelland and Linnander 2006). Thus, students of color are seen as filling a role for their universities, rather than being treated as normal students. According to Patricia Hill Collins (2012), organizations market certain individuals or groups, such as racial and ethnic minorities, as outsiders to a space in order to opt for cosmetic changes rather than substantive structural change. This suggests that students of color are portrayed as outsiders in order to achieve an appearance of diversity without needing to challenge the structure of these organizations and engage in diversity practices that will challenge the white hegemony of these organizations (Bonilla-Silva 2006). This leaves students of color at an immense disadvantage considering that institutions of higher education are sites of group-level struggles, where competition for representation and resources in these elite spaces depends largely on who can wield the most numerical and symbolic power (Lewis, Chesler, and Forman 2000).

As students of color become more visible on college campuses, they are increasingly posing a challenge to the numerical dominance of whites in these spaces. While students of color have historically lacked the power to affect large-scale structural change, colleges and university are increasingly dependent on diversity and progressivism as a source of social reproduction. Therefore, students of color do have a

degree of organizational leverage that they can utilize by making their issues large enough problems that their school cannot ignore them. It was difficult for Mizzou, Yale, Georgetown, and Princeton, among many others, to handle the scrutiny that student protests bring upon them. Thus, by resisting and speaking up about their experiences, students of color are seen as disrupting the white space. According to Anderson (2015), “the most easily tolerated black person in the white space is often the one who is ‘in his place.’” The reason this person is more tolerated is because they are “less likely to disturb the implicit racial order – whites as dominant and blacks as subordinate.” This leverage has led to conflict between students, as white students tend to perceive students of color as demanding too much of their schools and working to undermine the presence of white students on their campuses. This also leads to conflict between students and administrators, as both white students and students of color make unique demands upon their colleges and universities, leaving staff and administrators to mitigate between the needs of different students and the values and goals of their schools.

White spaces are interpreted and maneuvered differently by students according to their own positionality in relation to whiteness and according to their own individual or group experiences. Additionally, the normalization of white spaces has led to radical resistance from both students of color and white students, who face conflicting notions of what the white space means for their personal experiences on their campuses. These experiences shape how students respond to each other and to administrators at primarily white institutions, especially when incidents of racial bias occur. On the one hand, white students are not othered in the white space, and perceive any efforts on behalf of their schools to become more inclusive and diversify as an attempt to shift the campus culture

to one that is against them and for the “other.” Their sense of ownership over the space is directly challenged, and they, according to Anderson (2015), find ways to remind students of color that they do not belong. On the other hand, students of color are othered by these incidents and by frequent microaggressions from faculty, staff, and other students. They respond through activism and by challenging their peers and administrators.

Students’ responses vary across a spectrum however. Not all white students engage in incidents of racial bias. Many recognize institutional injustices and consider themselves allies to people of color and their causes, often championing diversity and inclusion. Still others choose to not to engage, but whether they recognize inequality and don't want to be involved or just don't see or understand the problem, they still preserve a status quo where whiteness is the organizational norm. Although some white students may see themselves as "woke," they ultimately continue to benefit from their college or university being a white space because being white in a white space grants them privileges that students of color do not benefit from. Students of color also have varying responses to white spaces and bias incidents. When it comes to incidents of racial bias, some are resistant and actively work to point out the inequalities they face on a daily basis at their predominantly white institutions. Others choose to not get involved because they either don't get as offended as some of their peers, don't understand the issues at hand, or they simply don't want to become involved for fear of the backlash that comes with being an activist voice on a college campus.

It is evident that within white spaces, students of color, white students, and administrators are locked in a struggle over the preservation of colleges as white spaces

and the future direction of colleges and universities in light of the increasing diversification of campus communities. The movements and protests that have occurred around the country since Mizzou suggest that as these historically white colleges and universities continue to grow and diversify, they will continue to be spaces of contention and racial and ethnic conflict as long as institutions of higher education engage in only cultural, surface-level changes. I argue surface-level change has allowed institutions of higher education to avoid engaging in meaningful structural change that would challenge rather than preserve whiteness. It would take long-term structural change to dismantle the historical construction of colleges and universities as white spaces. In response to the demands placed on them by so many different groups, administrators choose a middle ground that allows them to maintain their equilibrium and the cultural status quo of their campuses while simultaneously engaging in cultural changes that appease students on both sides, who, as short-term actors, lack a long-term stake in the welfare of the organization. By studying the ways in which students resist administrative action and the ways in which administrators mitigate student interests, I hope to show that meaningful structural change is incredibly difficult to achieve at elite institutions because of the various interests at play.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

Bowdoin College provides a unique opportunity for examining the emergence and evolution of diversity discourses on college campuses. The College prides itself in having a long commitment toward black Americans and in being a racially progressive school. Additionally, efforts by the College and by students to diversify in the last fifty years have created a diverse student body. Today's Bowdoin, which is more diverse than it has



ever been, “would have astonished the collegians of Sill’s day,” who embraced a rural Bowdoin based on gentlemanly ideals and “anti-urban [i.e., anti-poor, anti-black] sentiment” (Calhoun 1993: 260). Despite its penchant for progressiveness, Bowdoin experienced two incidents of racial bias during the 2015-16 academic year that fractured the campus along racial, cultural, and ideological lines. These events came less than a year after “Cracksgiving,” an annual party in which the men’s lacrosse team had traditionally dressed as Native Americans and Pilgrims. Cracksgiving sent the campus into a long period of debate and dialogue, after which it seemed as though the issue of cultural appropriation had been laid to rest. However, on October 22, 2015, members of the Bowdoin College sailing team threw a Gangster Party and dressed in “costumes of stereotypical African-American accessories and styles, including hair braided in cornrows, baggy clothes and 1980s hip-hop style bucket hats” (Branch 2015). Several months later, on February 20, 2016, several Bowdoin students hosted a Tequila Party, in which partygoers dressed in sombreros and mustaches for an event that was described in the invitation as “not not a fiesta.” This incident was far more divisive than the Gangster Party because of the administration’s swift punitive action and the vociferous reaction from minority students, who pushed for this immediate action to be taken. In addition to these recent acts, Bowdoin’s reputation as a small, elite liberal arts college that is 69% white in a state that is 95% white also provides ample opportunity to examine how white spaces are reproduced at Bowdoin in the context of racial bias incidents, and how students situate themselves within them.

This project draws on archival, ethnographic, and interview data collected from Bowdoin College. Archival research focused on editions of *The Bowdoin Orient* from

1964 to the present, with a focus on articles and opinion pieces that refer to incidents of racial bias, administrative responses to incidents of racial bias, and student protests and movements. Though students of color were present on Bowdoin's campus before 1964, they were not present in significant enough numbers to be able to gather a significant amount of data on them. Additionally, 1964 is a significant year because it is when the institution began its earnest push for diversity. This data also highlighted administrative groups and committees, committee reports, and pockets of the Bowdoin population that have been responsible for creating and shaping campus discourses, which was further examined through archival work. It has also provided insight into the ways the administration has responded to incidents of racial bias over time and the way that these incidents have shaped the campus racial climate. From these archival sources, I have been able to produce a timeline of major incidents of racial bias that have occurred at Bowdoin in the past five decades, and have been able to map and contextualize them within Bowdoin's efforts to diversify.

I also conducted and transcribed thirty in-depth interviews following a semi-structured interview schedule. The interview sample consists of members of the classes of 2017, 2018, and 2019. Fifteen were from the class of 2017, nine were from the class of 2018, and four were from the class of 2019. Seventeen students of color and thirteen white students were interviewed, with twenty-one identifying as female and nine identifying as male. These semi-structured interviews provided insight into the ways the student body experienced and responded to these incidents and the way they responded to the administration's reactions. Though the interview sample is absolutely not representative of the school's population, the very nature of this research subject and the

interviews, as well as my own positionality as a woman of color, greatly impacted the demographics of the interview sample. Additionally, the interviews were conducted during the summer of 2016, only months after the school year ended, when these incidents were very fresh in students' memories and it was still a raw subject to engage in. A large portion of the questions addressed the incidents of racial bias that have occurred in the past few years and the informants' responses to the incidents, to other students, to Yik Yak posts, and to administrative decisions after the incidents. They also gave a sense of how students of color navigated the campus during the past year given the image of Bowdoin that was sold to them before enrolling and the perceptions that they have in contrast to the racially conflicted Bowdoin that they have been experiencing. In seeking to understand the role of students in organizational change, these interviews provide an important perspective that provides insight as to the kinds of short-comings students see in the institution, as well as the reasoning behind the demands that they make of the institution.

In this thesis, the word "institution" is used solely to refer to colleges and universities as institutions of higher education. When referring to colleges and universities as coordinated, hierarchical structures, I use the term "organization." When focusing on Bowdoin or specific colleges in particular, I use "the administration" to refer to the current employees who occupy upper level positions at institutions of higher education. This includes deans, presidents, and trustees unless otherwise specified. Specific people or offices will be identified individually when applicable. I use "Bowdoin" and "The College" interchangeably because that is what Bowdoin refers to

itself as in official college documents, and also because it distinguishes things that are particular to Bowdoin from any other schools that may be referred to.

## **OVERVIEW**

Chapter Two will focus on Bowdoin's history with regard to issues of race and diversity. White spaces are historically constructed, and this chapter will examine the elements of Bowdoin's history that have constructed the College as a white space. Beginning with the graduation of John Brown Russwurm '26 and ending in the present day, I break down the long-standing commitment toward black Americans that Bowdoin claims, and I will show how administrative efforts to diversify over time have done little to quell racial tensions, as evidenced by the incidents of racial bias and the pushback from both white students and students of color on efforts to engage in change. In Chapter Three, I will outline the presidencies of Barry Mills and Clayton Rose and examine what racial tensions have looked like at Bowdoin in the twenty-first century. In particular, this chapter focuses on "Cracksgiving, the "Gangster Party," and the "Tequila Party" to show the role that administrative policies in response to incidents of racial bias effectively other students of color, leading them to resist these efforts and create diverse spaces of their own. This chapter also explores responses by students of color to address the inadequate institutional response to the incidents on campus. Chapter 4 explores the responses of white students to incidents of racial bias, who may also react against the administration when they feel that the status quo is being challenged and against the students who are becoming increasingly vigilant about their behavior by creating what I call hypercultural white spaces. I expand upon Anderson's (2015) understanding of the white space and Cabrera's (2012) concept of the racially homogenous sub-environment

by showing that hypercultural white spaces go above and beyond to reproduce the culture and tradition of exclusivity that college campuses attempt to maintain. I will use these chapters to argue that ultimately students play the largest role in shaping institutional culture around race and inclusivity. Lastly, in Chapter Five, I provide recommendations for future research, detail the limitations of this research, and offer a conclusion.

## **CHAPTER 2: “200 YEARS OF BOWDOIN, 200 YEARS OF IGNORANCE”**

In February 1988, the Bowdoin College Office of Admissions placed an advertisement in the annual publication of *Black Enterprise Magazine*'s “Carvers of Opportunity” issue as part of a marketing effort to recruit more students of color “in an aggressive way” (see *Appendix A*). Featuring a photo of John Brown Russwurm, the College's first black graduate, the advertisement asks prospective students, “How many colleges can point to such a long-standing [sic] commitment to black Americans?” The advertisement then describes how Bowdoin's commitment to racial inclusion spans back to 1826, the year Russwurm graduated, and it invites the potential black Bowdoin student to be a part of the “next 150 at Bowdoin.”

Russwurm's legacy remains an important part of Bowdoin's history and lies at the core of its campaign to recruit and retain students of color. In addition to view books and recruitment materials, Bowdoin uses Russwurm's name for scholarship funds, and for its prestigious annual lecture series sponsored by the Africana Studies Department.

Ironically, in order to attract students of color, Bowdoin's selling point has been 150 years during which only sixty-seven African Americans graduated from the College. Not only are these sixty-seven students largely absent in their recruitment materials, these materials also neglect to mention the eighty-four years between Russwurm's graduation from Bowdoin and the graduation of Bowdoin's second black student, Samuel Dreer, in 1910.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, none of these materials explore Russwurm's experiences as a Bowdoin

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<sup>2</sup> There were black students who graduated from the Medical School of Maine, which operated on Bowdoin's campus but as a different entity. At the time that Russwurm attended Bowdoin, there were a total of six black students at the College, Russwurm and five at the Medical School.

student, particularly the social and spatial isolation he experienced from students and faculty. Despite these gaps in Bowdoin's "long-standing commitment" to racial inclusion, the College continues to draw on this history proudly, and as evidence that it is a racially progressive institution.

Despite the values and the traditions that the College claims, Bowdoin's history does not show a lengthy commitment to the well-being of people of color. Rather, it shows that the College has gone through periods of growth and periods of regression, where it has been repeatedly pushed to change and it has made efforts to address these challenges. In these instances, the College's narrative of progressiveness has been undermined by its unsuccessful efforts to create an inclusive and diverse community. These efforts have been unsuccessful because of the College's inability to be proactive in structural change, opting instead for reactive, surface-level efforts that allow white spaces to be reproduced and allow it to adhere to its history as a primarily white institution. Even then, new policies are not put in place until the administration is provoked by student action or resistance.

Just as Bowdoin has drawn upon its "wealth of black history" to recruit and enroll students of color, this chapter traces the diversification of Bowdoin from the time of Russwurm's matriculation to the 2015-16 academic year, giving particular attention to the racial tensions that emerged in response to these efforts. Unlike, typical histories of the College however, this chapter will highlight how students have been primary agents of change at Bowdoin, and will draw attention to the stories that have been excluded from the dominant Bowdoin narrative. These stories highlight the conflictive way in which

change has been brought about, and the inability of the College to engage in meaningful structural change.

### **JOHN BROWN RUSSWURM: 1826**

When John Brown Russwurm (1799-1851) arrived at Bowdoin, he challenged, to a degree, the very purpose of the institution and the principles upon which it was founded. Born John Brown, the illegitimate son of John Russwurm, a wealthy, white Virginian, and a slave woman, Russwurm grew up in a racially-mixed Jamaican society until he was eight. His father sent him to Montreal to attend a private boarding school, and five years later brought him to Portland, Maine, where he had settled after marrying his second wife Susan Blanchard. At the urging of his second wife, who fully accepted him into the family, the elder Russwurm gave John Brown his last name. Russwurm was incredibly proud of his son, who was described as “a mulatto of fine personal appearance and manners,” and despite having slave-owning family in the south, openly introduced him to elite Portland and Boston circles (Winston 2010).

Deeply affected by his father’s death in 1815, Russwurm returned to Jamaica, due largely to his inability to continue his education properly, and the racism he faced without the protection of the elder Russwurm. What little money his father left him was used to settle his estate, and his wealthy relatives in the south refused to provide financial support. He soon returned to America however, because he did not find any of his father’s friends alive, and therefore did not receive the kind of support he expected. Upon his return to America, his stepmother appointed Calvin Stockbridge, a merchant and member of a prominent New England family, as his guardian. Stockbridge provided him



with the financial assistance he needed to attend Hebron Academy, only thirty miles away from his home.

Russwurm left Hebron after less than a year and, lacking the money to attend college, taught in black schools in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia until 1824, when he enrolled at Bowdoin at the age of twenty-four with the help of his stepmother and her new husband. Using the \$300 that he had earned from teaching, he financed his own education at Bowdoin. Academically, he was well suited for Bowdoin and was even invited to join the Athaenean Society, a prestigious literary club whose members included American author Nathaniel Hawthorne. However, he was not allowed to live on campus and lived twelve miles away from Brunswick in the house of a carpenter named Mr. Pettengill. As a student, Russwurm was aware and conscious of his race and his surroundings; although he was visited by several of his classmates, including Nathaniel Hawthorne, he never visited them in return, due largely to “his sensitiveness on account of his color.” Though it is very likely that he faced racism while at Bowdoin, Russwurm took measures like these to avoid conflict with his white peers, and made no mention of any racial violence against him in his letters and papers. According to his close companion James Hall, Russwurm was “always dignified and gentlemanly, never giving indication of other than strict good breeding” (Winston 2010). Following his graduation in 1826, Russwurm founded the abolitionist newspaper *Freedom’s Journal*, which was the first newspaper owned and printed by African Americans. Later, Russwurm emigrated to Liberia, where he served as colonial secretary, eventually becoming editor of *The Liberia Herald* from 1830-1834. He was appointed governor of the Maryland Colony in Africa in 1836, serving in that position until his death in 1851.

Though he was the first black student at Bowdoin, Russwurm was not the only black person at Bowdoin or in Brunswick at the time. The most famous black citizen of Brunswick at the time was probably Phebe Ann Jacobs (Calhoun 1993). Starting her life as a slave in new Jersey, Jacobs was given to the wife of Dartmouth's President Wheelock as a maid for their daughter, who later married Bowdoin's third president William Allen. She moved to Brunswick with the Allen family in 1820, and, after the death of her mistress in 1828, moved into Brunswick and lived on her own. As a free domestic servant, Jacobs was permitted to make her own living. She made money by doing laundry for Bowdoin students until her death in 1850. She became a local legend among Bowdoin students, who described her as being piteous and trustworthy. Jacobs is widely believed to be one of the inspirations for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which Stowe wrote while living on campus with her husband Calvin Ellis Stowe, a professor at the time. Despite overlapping with Russwurm's time at Bowdoin, no record exists of the two interacting.

Around the same time, five black students were enrolled in the Medical School of Maine, controlled at the time by the Trustees and Overseers of Bowdoin College. Among them included John Van Surley de Grasse (Medical School Class of 1849), who served as the assistant surgeon of the 35<sup>th</sup> U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War and became the first black doctor to join the Massachusetts Medical Society, and Benjamin A. Boseman, who served as the U.S. Army's assistant surgeon for the last year of the War and later became a legislator in South Carolina before his appointment as U.S. Postmaster General under President Rutherford B. Hayes.

After the Civil War, both the United States and Bowdoin experienced a period of reconstruction and rediscovery, which often remains hidden in Bowdoin's institutional history. Throughout and after the war, the College took pride in acknowledging its role in supporting the Union, so much so that it got into a small feud with Dartmouth over which New England college had contributed more to the war effort (Calhoun 1993). This desire to acknowledge that they were on the winning side and did a lot to help the Union, which is the side that fought for the end of slavery, is another way that the College uses the narrative of the nineteenth century to advance its own image as a progressive institution. Despite celebrating its role in the preservation of the Union and the graduation of John B. Russwurm, both symbols of the College's racial progress, the College did not admit any blacks during this time, and the culture of the campus was one that still denigrated them (*see Appendix A*).

#### **ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGE AT THE DAWN OF A CENTURY: 1890-1964**

The Bowdoin of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was a complete departure from the "Old Bowdoin," of the Civil War era. The College, often referred to as "Bowdoin *beata*" or the blessed place, aimed to provide the quintessential liberal arts education. Under the leadership of President Hyde, the College turned out elite, Christian men who were "prepared, body and spirit, for the world's fight" (Calhoun 1993). Subsequent presidents Kenneth C.M. Sills and James Stacey Coles continued to reproduce these ideals as they led Bowdoin through the Great Depression, two world wars, and a rapidly changing racial climate in the country. During this shift from the Reconstruction Era to the mid-twentieth century, the College made few significant attempts to actively recruit students of color. Although it took some time for Bowdoin to

adopt more progressive policies, evidence suggests that some efforts were made to open Bowdoin's doors to those who did not identify as Christian white males. Two major developments in the first half of the century, the segregation of national fraternities and the development of an exchange program for international students, brought some change and diversity to the Bowdoin campus.

In 1947, the Chi Psi fraternity sent a letter to President Sills, offering to host an international student if the College paid for their tuition. The College adopted this idea and adapted it into the Bowdoin Plan, which, at the time, made Bowdoin the only school where foreign students' full expenses were covered for an entire academic year. Students presented this plan at the NSA Conference of the United States Student Association, and it became a national model for exchange programs around the United States. By the 1950-51 school year, this program was in full swing. Bowdoin was not only hosting international students, it had also received an invitation from the Spanish Institute of Culture, who offered to reciprocate the program for American students who wanted to study abroad. Each of the fraternities hosted one international student, so twelve to thirteen students got to study at Bowdoin every year. While the fraternities covered room and board, the College paid for their tuition. There is no evidence to suggest that these students were counted in any official capacity as full-time Bowdoin students, or that the College counted them as international students the way they do today, but they were present in fraternities, which at the time were the most exclusive spaces on campus. In 1950, the countries represented were: Germany, Zambia, Guatemala, Sierra Leone, Brazil, Italy, and Sweden. Other years saw students from China, Japan, Vietnam, Iraq, and Austria, among others. The administration hoped that this program would show that

“Bowdoin is not backward in opening her doors to students from foreign lands” (*The Orient*, September 27, 1950; 4). However, it is important to consider that while such a large effort was made to bring international students to the College, little was being done at this time to admit and enroll American students of color. These efforts did not begin in earnest until the mid-1960s.

On October 21, 1959, Professor A. Leroy Greason published a letter in *The Orient* criticizing fraternities and their “gentleman’s agreements.” Though Bowdoin did not allow for discrimination in fraternity recruitment, it was unclear whether fraternities should abide by the rules of the College or the rules of their national chapters. These campus organizations did not deny the discriminatory practices that their chapters adopted as written rule, which included the exclusion of Jews and blacks from membership. However, several campus fraternities, in compliance with the College rules, abided by implicit, unspoken agreements to not admit Jews, Negroes, Orientals, or any other “scapegoat minority.” According to Greason, these implicit policies had an “effect upon the morality of students, upon the purpose of the college, and upon the authority of the administration” (Greason 1959). In particular, he argued that these exclusive policies that the fraternities had in place contradicted the promise of the College and of the President for a welcoming environment for everyone. By excluding minorities from fraternities, they were not allowing Bowdoin to be a welcoming and inclusive campus. At the time, the administration’s fraternity policies were highly opposed by some students, who described fraternities as “focal points of student resistance which the administration cannot tolerate” (Page 1959). However, these policies were ultimately successful at creating spaces that were more open to diversity, as fraternities began to separate

themselves more explicitly from the discriminatory practices of their chapters. Several fraternities at Bowdoin, including Delta Upsilon (1950), Kappa Sigma (1965), and Sigma Nu (1968), severed ties with their national chapters over discrimination clauses that conflicted with Bowdoin's policies.

These policies indicate that during this period of growth, the College was slowly but surely making progress toward being an open and welcoming campus. However, an examination of student life during this time suggests that these efforts were not enough to challenge the prejudiced and exclusionary campus culture being cultivated by students.

### **STUDENT CULTURE AT THE DAWN OF A CENTURY: 1890-1964**

In the telling of these stories about the war and the rebirth of Bowdoin, many narratives are excluded from the College's official history, especially those relating to the treatment of African Americans on campus. Beginning in the 1890s, student minstrel shows were a constant presence at Bowdoin. Often it was the local Brunswick minstrel troupe, the high school students, or visiting troupes who performed for the Bowdoin community at the Town Hall or at Memorial Hall, the campus theater. After some time, students adopted these theatrics and put on an annual student-run show.

From these kinds of shows, popular stereotypes of blacks were constantly reproduced and sold as entertainment to white audiences. A typical minstrel show included a plantation scene, sentimental or happy songs, and comedic acts that relied on stock characters deeply rooted in African American stereotypes (Schroeder 2010). According to J. Stanley Lemons (1977), the minstrel show as a form of entertainment "had comic Negroes as the focus; and it became widely popular in the 1840s ...[and] again in the 1880s and 1890s when race relations were at their worst, most violent level."

Minstrelsy introduced several new characters to the American imagination, including Jim Crow and Zip Coon, and created, through the performances of white actors in blackface, a new socially accepted racial narrative in the country that cast blacks as docile, stupid, thieving, and lazy (Schroeder 2010).

An editorial published in the February 18, 1891 edition of *The Bowdoin Orient* introduced the idea of hosting student minstrel show. It promised that there was money to be made in the endeavor and that “there has never been a time more fitting than the present for the stirring up of such a scheme at Bowdoin” (*The Orient*, February 18, 1891: 235). Just weeks after this first editorial, a student committee was assembled to entertain the idea. The five-student committee determined that Bowdoin “possessed an abundance of material for a first-class show,” and that “Bowdoin burnt cork artists could draw an immense crowd,” which refers to a technique used by minstrel performers to blacken their faces. By the next year, preparations were underway, and a student minstrel show was scheduled for June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1892, the College’s annual Field Day. The show proved to be a rousing hit, and *The Orient* spared no praise in its review:

John Pierce proved to be an interlocutor right from Interlocutorville, and the rattling of the bones by Clifford, Hunt, and Gatley, and the beating of the tambos by Hastings, Bean, and Whitney, were worthy of the darkest of darkies from the southern-most of southern plantations.

The review urged students to make the minstrel show an annual tradition at the College, and to use this tradition to bring all of the campus, athletes and non-athletes alike, together for a common cause.

The Athletic Association, which regulated the athletic interests of the College, continued to put on shows on and off for a few years as a fundraiser for the benefit of the baseball team and the track and field team. This group consisted of two faculty members,

five students, and five alumni. In 1894, a show was planned but then cancelled for lack of student interest in the production. As the United States entered the twentieth century, minstrel shows saw a decline in popularity as vaudeville shows became increasingly popular. However, there was still minstrelsy in Brunswick during this time. Bowdoin students frequented and participated in town shows often, as evidenced by the weekly activity bulletin in *The Orient*, though they didn't put the shows on themselves for some time. In 1899 however, the Baseball Association began making plans to bring back the minstrel show as an annual fundraiser for the team and as a recruitment tool for the College, as prospective students visiting from various prep schools in the area would be invited to attend the shows.

Directed by Mr. Robert "Bob" Toothacker, an outside hire who directed multiple shows at Bowdoin, as many as fifty students came together every year for a decade to put on the minstrel show. They played instruments, acted in skits, and gave monologues, all coming together to create what was called an Olio, a miscellaneous collection of musical and literary selections (Schroeder 2010). These shows were explicitly racist, and made up of various stereotypes and traditional minstrel repertoire to denigrate people of color for the entertainment of white students and community members, who saw them as good, wholesome fun. The minstrel show of 1904 for example, promised all attendees a piece of authentic sugar cane from a Louisiana sugar plantation as a souvenir for attending (*The Orient*, January 28, 1904:135). The receipt from the 1904 show indicates the amount of work that went into these productions. The minstrel show earned the Baseball Association a net profit of \$206.39 after total earnings of \$431.55 and expenses of



\$225.16, which included \$2.00 to “Haskell, for services in blacking” (*The Orient*, February 4, 1904: 200). The *Orient* reported after the 1904 show:

Every one feels proud of the performance given last Friday by the Bowdoin minstrels. A better minstrel show has not appeared in Brunswick for many years. ... The *Orient* hopes to see a minstrel show put on every year.

Samuel Dreer, a promising student from Washington D.C., enrolled at Bowdoin in 1906 after the admissions office neglected to realize that he was black. He was allowed to stay on as a student and had an illustrious career at Bowdoin, once earning six “A” grades in one semester, and graduating magna cum laude and as a member of Phi Beta Kappa in 1910. Dreer arrived at Bowdoin at the height of campus minstrelsy. A January 28, 1908 article in *The Orient* describes the minstrel show of 1907-08, just one year after Dreer arrived on campus:

Shortly after eight the curtain rose. Fifty men in dress suits were seated on bleachers on the stage ... On the ends were the six special fun-makers, with black faces and grotesque costumes.

Students sang “coon-songs,” such as “Who, me?”; “Colon Town,” and “Much Obligated to You,” and following several encores and raucous approval from the audience, the night ended with a dance that lasted until midnight. Minstrelsy was a prominent part of Bowdoin’s campus culture throughout Dreer’s entire tenure as a student. In 1909-10, Dreer’s senior year and the sophomore year of Arthur A. Madison ’12, a black student who enrolled two years after Dreer, there were talks of doing away with the minstrel shows in favor of a performance by the Dramatic Club. It is unclear whether this was a student motion or a request from the administration at the time, but the Student Council took a vote on the matter and voted 4-2 to keep the minstrel show as a part of the spring performances (*The Orient*, December 17, 1909: 169). Months later, after the minstrel

show took place, an editorial appeared in *The Orient* condemning the show as a “bum comedy,” which was put on despite general sentiments against it (*The Orient*, February 11, 1910: 205).

The college is capable of something better and in future will demand something better. The Minstrel Show- is a relic of barbarism which in the logical evolution of events must give place to a more worthy cause, and the time for the transformation is the present.

It is evident that the shows faced some opposition by this time, though evidence does not suggest that Dreer or Arthur were directly involved in opposing these performances. The final student show for over a decade occurred in 1912. Though outside troupes visited Brunswick and local groups continued to perform, Bowdoin students would not put on another minstrel show until 1920, when the fraternity Delta Kappa Epsilon put on a performance, and 1922, when a performance was put on for a prospective student weekend. President Sills was in attendance at this performance, and at its conclusion, got up on stage to talk about the advantages of Bowdoin and pursuing a liberal arts education.

Dreer paved the way for other black students to attend Bowdoin. He was highlighted for his accomplishments in the March 1939 edition of *The Bowdoin Alumnus*. The piece, titled “Bowdoin and her Negro Graduates,” also featured profiles of the seven black students who had enrolled since Dreer. J. Arnett Mitchell ’13, Bowdoin’s fourth black student, wrote this piece to highlight all eight of the black students that had attended Bowdoin from 1826 until 1939, including Russwurm, Dreer, Arthur A Madison ’12, himself, David Lare, Jr. ’17, William Dean, Jr. ’26, Henry Lincoln Johnson ’26, and Richard K. Barksdale ’37. Each of these men experienced a Bowdoin that lacked diversity, and though they all went on to be successful, their race played a major role in how they were treated on campus. For example, *Masque and Gown*, the school theater

troupe, took advantage of Richard Barksdale's being at Bowdoin to put on a production of *The Emperor Jones* in 1937 (Calhoun 1993). He was one of the only black cast members in the show, so most of his white cast mates used blackface in the production. Black enrollment remained steady until the 1960s, with one or two black graduates per year, on average, for about fifty years (*see Appendix A*). accommodation

### **RECRUITMENT TO ACCOMMODATION: 1964 - 1970**

By the 1960s, Bowdoin was “a conservative, all-male, sports-minded college” with very little diversity (Calhoun 1993). However, this decade was a time of rapid social change in the United States. National discourse surrounding the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 shaped many of the College's efforts that were made to diversify and create inclusive spaces for students of color. Despite Bowdoin's slow commitment to the civil rights effort, the College sponsored several initiatives in the 1960s to diversify the predominantly white student body. These efforts, which sought to bring more students of color to the College and increase knowledge of Bowdoin in underprivileged urban communities, placed the College ahead of many other institutions, who often worked to keep students of color off of their campuses.

In 1963, Bowdoin students began the Morehouse Exchange Program, in which two students from Bowdoin and Morehouse College exchanged schools for the duration of a semester. The program was deemed a success, and continued for several years. That same year, the College also launched Project '65, a campus-wide recruitment drive for black students that aimed to “close the gap of ‘inequality of information’ by contacting principals, guidance counselors and students in poor areas to make them aware of the educational opportunities at Bowdoin” (*The Orient*, April 17, 1964: 1). As part of this

initiative, sixty students, representing most of the twelve campus fraternities, sought to address “the crisis of negro higher education” by enrolling eighty-five black students by the fall of 1970 (Calhoun 1993). In 1964, three cars of students went to sixty-one schools and interviewed one-hundred seventy-two students in Chicago, St. Louis, Pittsburgh, Louisville, Cincinnati, and Columbus, in addition to cities across Virginia and the Carolinas (*The Orient*, April 17, 1964: 1). This innovative project received financial support from the Rockefeller Foundation in 1967 to supplement its limited budget and provide financial support for black students, which is a limitation that the College faced (Esposito 1967). Even though black students expressed their interest in attending Bowdoin, there was not enough financial aid to help them attend.

Despite the College’s earnest push for diversity in the student body, Bowdoin’s black enrollment remained below expectations before peaking in the early 1970s and then dropping again by the end of the decade. The College faced several challenges recruiting black students, the biggest of which was the decision of many accepted black students to matriculate elsewhere. Student groups and administrators often attributed these issues to a variety of factors, including the College’s rural setting, its distance from any major cities, the largely white student body, and the cost of attending. To address these challenges, the College established the Committee on Responsibilities to Disadvantaged People in 1968, which explored its continuing efforts to meet the educational needs of the disadvantaged black population (*The Orient*, November 22, 1968: 4). Additionally, the College redoubled its efforts to highlight Bowdoin as an accessible institution to populations who might not otherwise come into contact with the College or its student body. These efforts proved mildly successful; in the fall of 1969, 46 black students enrolled at Bowdoin,

nearly twice the combined number of black students matriculating at Bowdoin from 1826 to 1963 (*see Appendix A*).

As diversity became a more prominent goal for the College, it took many steps in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s to create an inclusive and educational space for both black students and white students. This time period signals a shift in the College's work toward diversity. Between 1966 and 1972, thirty-seven black students graduated from Bowdoin, and the enrollment of black students slowly continued to rise. Therefore, rather than trying to simply recruit black students, they began to make institutional changes that would accommodate them as well. In 1968, the African American Society, a student organization for African American students, was chartered. Additionally, the art exhibit *The Portrayal of the Negro in American Life*, which was the largest exhibit of African American art that had ever been shown in the United States, debuted at Bowdoin's Walker Museum of Art. Martin Luther King, Jr. was present for the opening of this exhibit in 1964 and remained on campus an additional day to give a lecture on his work and the importance of Civil Rights. The Bowdoin Undergraduate Civil Rights Organization (BUCRO) ran a very active high school recruitment program and made trips to poor schools throughout the south and southeast (Harrison 1968). BUCRO's mission arose out of perceptions that the Admissions Office failed to accept responsibility of recruiting from "predominantly Negro communities." This organization also pushed for the creation of the African American Studies program at Bowdoin, and for the hiring of staff and faculty of color.

Despite Bowdoin's modest successes in recruiting and retaining talented students of color, this era of rapid change and diversification gave way to a period of violence

against students of color on campus and repeated incidents of racial bias. Though the College became more tolerant in the 1960s and 1970s, what little racial or ethnic diversity that existed on campus did little to challenge a student culture that rejected and rebuffed many of these efforts. As the decade continued, both white students and students of color became more vocal about their needs and about challenging the College to do more, often clashing with each other over the designation of inclusive spaces.

### **GROWING PAINS – THE ADMINISTRATION: 1970 - PRESENT**

In keeping with their efforts to make Bowdoin a more inclusive space, the administration engaged in several efforts to bring about change on campus. Many of their actions during this time were in response to student demands and a variety of movements and protests. One of the most important decisions made by the college was to establish an African American Center at the behest of the African American Society (est. 1970). The Center, which opened January 15, 1970, aimed to “make the black student aware and proud of his heritage and ... convey to the white community an understanding of that heritage and an appreciation of the contributions of black men to world culture” (Drummond 1970). The College renamed the center on January 27, 1979, calling it the John Brown Russwurm African American Center. This was the first instance of the College naming something that is “for” students of color after Russwurm. The Russwurm Center remains the only space on campus named for a person of color. At the dedication ceremony, President William F. Enteman said: “We honor ourselves by linking the name of John Brown Russwurm even more closely to the life of Bowdoin. Russwurm was a most distinguished graduate of Bowdoin, and we are justifiably proud to count him as one of our own” (Worrell 1979). Though the College aimed for this space to be

educational and all-inclusive, it quickly faced backlash from white students who thought that the members of the African American Society would begin to practice reverse racism. Though this claim was repeatedly refuted by the College, it continued to resurface for many years after the initial creation of the space.

In response to several incidents that occurred over the course of this decade, Bowdoin made several efforts to address and understand racial tensions that existed on campus. President Greason commissioned the Ad Hoc Committee on Racial Relations in 1984, and the Bias Incident Group in 1988, to study racial tension at Bowdoin. Composed of five staff and faculty members, the committee produced a report for the president on April 23, 1984, that featured some of the major racial problems at Bowdoin and proposed several solutions. President Greason's Bias Incident Group was composed of administrators, faculty, and students. This group also sought to address bias incidents and provide administrative recommendations to the institution about what actions to take. Incidents like these forced the College to define these incidents and create a protocol for responding to them in the future. The commission of the Bias Incident Group defined bias as "discrimination, harassment, or intolerance of others because of race, religious affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, or other characteristics" (Lierle 1988). This group played an important role in defining bias for the College and providing a system of reporting and accountability for affected students. Though not a judicial body, the Committee ensured that all incidents of racial bias were treated with the attention and the severity that they deserved. These committees also provided important recommendations to the College regarding academic and social initiatives that would redefine the way Bowdoin incorporated students of color into the fold of the campus.

Bowdoin also created academic departments and programs that aimed to broaden and modernize the traditional liberal arts education at the behest of the Race Relations Committee, which was formed to explore and report on racial issues at Bowdoin. One of the most significant recommendations that this group made was proposing two new distribution requirements that would address the “narrowmindedness, insensitivity, and ethnocentrism of what now appears to be widespread at the College” (Putnam 1984). The two proposed mandatory courses for students would focus on the culture of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Africans, or race relations in general (Prouty 1984). This transition was made easier by the creation of academic departments that would challenge the ethnocentric focus of the liberal arts at Bowdoin. In 1986, Bowdoin received a \$490,000 Pew grant for the creation of an Asian Studies Program. This grant allowed for the creation of three new faculty positions, two of which ended when funding ran out in the 1990s, and the development of courses concerning Japanese culture and religion, South Asian anthropology, and Chinese language (Lindhal 1987). Latin American Studies did not exist as an official major at Bowdoin until 2001. Though classes in the subject did exist, they were cross-listed with other subjects, and students hoping to do a major had to create a proposal for study and design the major themselves (Jordan 2001). When the major and program were created, the program averaged about two-hundred thirty students a year enrolled in courses listed in the program, with only eight faculty teaching them. These changes suggest that Bowdoin was open to student pressure for change. However, the bias incidents that continued to occur escalated racial tensions as the College prepared to enter the next century, leaving a variety of problems for future President Barry Mills.



## **GROWING PAINS – THE STUDENTS: 1970 -**

On Friday, February 18, 1970, thirty-three members of the African American Society marched into the administrative offices located in Hawthorne-Longfellow Library. They carried copies of a statement they had drafted to address the College's lackluster efforts to meet diversity goals. It was evident that the College was not on track to meet the promised goal of enrolling eighty-five students by the fall of 1970. In their statement, they demanded that the College "make an honest and sincere effort to increase the enrollment of qualified black students at the College" (Sweet 1970). This demonstration is emblematic of the role that students played in pushing Bowdoin to adopt better policies for diversity and inclusion throughout the end of the twentieth century. Although President Howell, the Deans, and the Director of Admissions Richard Moll were away on a trip to Connecticut, the students asked for permission to leave copies of their statement on the desks of the missing administrators. The students were allowed to leave their statement for the President, and left soon after, ending their peaceful protest. Days later, on February 25, 1970, it was announced that President Howell and Paul Wiley, the president of the African American Society, reached an accord that the College would make a renewed effort at black enrollment, and would admit sixty, rather than fifty, black students for the following fall (Kolod 1970).

The student-led African American Society was an important force behind many of the most important structural changes made by the College in the 1970s. In May of 1969, the AAS submitted a proposal to the Governing Boards for the establishment of an Afro-American Center. "Because the College is ill-equipped to sufficiently serve the cultural and social needs of Blacks," read the proposal, "it is therefore proposed that an Afro-

American Center be established toward the end of meeting these needs” (Drummond 1970). Though it was an African American Center, the College advertised the house as a space that would be open to all students, regardless of race. However, many white students alleged through editorials and complaints to the College that the building would just become a black space and that the house promoted racial segregation. This accusation was made when the Center was first opened in 1970, and when it was renamed in 1979. In *The Orient*, a student wrote, “There is speculation that the Afro-American Center will be nothing more than a black fraternity practicing reverse discrimination” (Worrell 1979).

On Friday, October 5, 1979, the African American Society organized a demonstration on campus to protest the non-reappointment of Dr. John D. Walter, director of the Afro-American Studies department and to draw attention to the problems that they as black students faced at Bowdoin. That night, someone left Ku Klux Klan pamphlets at the Russwurm Center and in the doors of the Hawthorne-Longfellow Library. According to Geoff Worrell '82, who spoke to *The Orient* on behalf of the African American Society, this was not an unexpected response to their demonstration: “When we have had demonstrations in the past or racial issues have been brought up, we have had someone do something like this” (Himmelrich 1979).

Efforts to diversify and accommodate students throughout the 1970s and 80s gave way to increasing racial tensions at Bowdoin and multiple incidents of racial bias as white students also became emboldened by the critical mass of students of color now present on campus. These incidents exacerbated racial tensions between student groups, and are indicative of a changing student culture on campus as Bowdoin began to diversify

and make the campus more welcoming and inclusive. In 1984, a conservative student publication called *The Patriot* published an article in which the author claimed that “affirmative action is by definition discrimination against nonracial/ethnic minorities” (Hanson 1983). This was not the first time in its short-lived tenure that *The Patriot* generated controversy around race and racial diversity, as students of color and LGBT students often accused them of using racial and homophobic epithets. In one article, they referred to a black male student as “boy.” These incidents resulted in a petition from the African American Society and the Bowdoin Queer-Straight Alliance demanding that publication of the magazine be paused. Four years later, three white male students performed a rendition of Aretha Franklin’s “Respect.” For this performance, the lead singer was in black face. Initially deflecting the controversy by expressing to *The Orient* their hope that the black face would lend the performance more credibility, the students eventually issued a public apology in the school paper.

In spite of the tumult that Bowdoin was facing, the 1980s and 1990s were also a time of great student resistance to the policies of the College and to the idea that Bowdoin has always been racially progressive. In May 1990, the Coalition of Concerned Students presented a list of demands to the administration regarding the College’s need for diversity and their lack of action in response to rising racial tensions. They gave the newly-hired President Edwards until November 2 of the following fall semester to respond to their proposal, which included ideas for increasing faculty diversity and attracting minority students to Bowdoin. Despite President Edwards’ pledge to devote time and energy to ensuring that minorities have a place at Bowdoin, the Coalition for Concerned Students did not receive a satisfactory response from the president. At 7am on

Friday, November 2, 1990, members of the Coalition of Concerned Students arrived at Hawthorne-Longfellow Library and blockaded the entrances. “Put diversity in the University,” they chanted, preventing the President and his staff from entering the building until their demands were addressed (Jeong 1990).

During James Bowdoin’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations on September 22, 1993, students dropped a banner that read “200 years of Bowdoin, 200 years of ignorance” from the second-floor windows of the Russwurm Center (Schoolwerth 1993). These students sought to shed light on the fact that Bowdoin’s two-hundred-year history was one that did not include them, and in fact, was a history of ignorance toward their needs. This demonstration challenged the narrative that Bowdoin had been inclusive and welcoming for two hundred years. Students had mixed reactions. While some saw the banner as a good way to get the attention of the College, others felt that students of color were being ungrateful for all the College had done for them. Thomas Spande ’94 told *The Orient* that “Considering the generosity with which Bowdoin has adjusted its curriculum to addressing timely topics of gender, class and race relations, the complaint is unjustified” (Schoolwerth 1993).

Black students were not the only ones vocalizing the injustices they faced at Bowdoin. On October 13, 1989, Marco Oshiro, the Co-President of the Asian Interest Group, a student group created to help the College enroll students of different backgrounds, published a letter in *The Orient*. In the letter, he admonishes the administration for not considering Asians to be minorities and focusing solely on the recruitment of black and Hispanic students. In particular, he cites the exclusion of Asian students from minority weekend, which was used to bring low-income black and

Hispanic applicants to the College. Another letter, written by Eric G. Lee '90 on behalf of the Asian Interest Group, uses harsher language, and accuses the administration of discrimination against Asian American students. Lee also cites their exclusion from College recruitment efforts. It is not clear what kind of response the College had to these accusations, but soon after these letters were published the College made very public efforts to continue their recruitment of black and Hispanic students, once again excluding Asians. In April of 1990 for example, Bowdoin joined the Consortium for a Strong Minority Presence in the Liberal Arts, which was a national effort to contact 53,000 black and Hispanic students around the country. In January of 2001, three members of the Asian Student Association hung large white posters with large black writing on them. The posters read: "Asians are not white" and "Do you see me? For all that I am...Asian American!" The students who hung the posters were seeking to draw attention to the lack of resources for Asian students and the lagging focus on Asian-American issues in the classroom and otherwise. With regard to student reactions, very little is published in *The Orient* other than that students were surprised and intrigued (Hernandez 2001).

Ultimately, the history of Bowdoin is one of an institution that continuously excluded students of color despite their claims to a long commitment to their welfare. Despite the incidents that continued to occur, students of color and their allies became more active and more vocal against the institutional racism they experienced at the College. They pushed the administration to enact change at the academic and social level, and challenged the way the College handled racial tensions.

## **DISCUSSION**

The history of Bowdoin with regard to issues of race and inclusivity, one that is rarely told in its entirety. Bowdoin has constructed a narrative of racial inclusivity and progressiveness based on early historical moments like the admission of John Brown Russwurm and its Civil War legacy. In looking back at the College's history however, several things become evident. First, this narrative excludes important aspects of Russwurm's life, erases the stories of people like Phebe Jacobs and the medical students, and neglects an 84-year gap in which there were no black students at all. It also neglects important facets of campus culture, such as the minstrel shows, that played a prevalent role in constructing racial ideology amongst students. By doing so, Bowdoin obscures the fact that it may not have been as progressive as it lets on. The "150-year commitment to black Americans," as symbolized by the token representation of Russwurm, was sporadic at best until the 1960s, within those one-hundred fifty years there were several years when there were no black graduates at all. Though efforts began with the creation of student groups like Project '65 and BUCRO, it was still years before this diversity was felt. Additionally, the increased presence of students of color, as well as the changes the College made, such as the opening of the African American Center, the creation of an Afro-American Studies Department, and the adoption of a formal affirmative action plan in 1996, led to great backlash from white students and community members who felt challenged by the changes.

Second, the kinds of diversity discourses and efforts that have been adopted by the administration have occurred in a predictable pattern. The events of the 2015-16 school year were not isolated incidents of bias; rather, they are part of a much larger

pattern of bias that has existed at Bowdoin for the past six decades, in which Bowdoin has had, on average, an incident of racial bias every 3.5 years since 1964. With every incident, Bowdoin has engaged in solutions that only partially address the incidents. Committees are created, students of color are consulted, reports are published, and the College restates its commitment to diversity and to the success of its students of color. Each incident that occurs is followed by a push for dialogue and a recommitment to diversity. While these actions are successful at dealing with individual incidents and their perpetrators, they are ineffective at bringing about meaningful structural change and acknowledging the College's history with these incidents. Additionally, repeated claims of a recommitment to diversity and inclusivity suggest that diversity is seen as a remedy for the problems that the College has faced. Thus, action groups were formed, reports and surveys were commissioned, and admissions policies were revised with the goal of increasing the number of students of color at the College. This shows that despite best efforts, diversity is ultimately not the solution to racial bias and increasing racial tensions. Even if it does solve some problems, it only creates surface-level change rather than structural change. The most recent efforts by the College to respond after the Gangster Party and the Tequila Party are reminiscent of previous actions taken by administrators in the face of previous incidents.

Third, students play a unique role as agents of institutional change. Despite modest gains in increasing the enrollment of students of color, Bowdoin's culture and reputation as an elite, white institution has changed very little, if at all. This reputation stands in opposition to its projected image as a progressive institution that is always on the right side of history, and there was a lot of concern about what these changes meant

for the white majority of students. These were students who thought themselves to be suddenly contending for attention and support as more students of color began to slowly enroll in the College. As a result, white students began to clash with students of color over the significant changes that were being made and the new ideas that were being championed on campus. Additionally, students of color have entered this space and have been forced to navigate it as bodies in conflict with everything that the College, as a historically white space, stands for and represents. They exist in a double consciousness of sorts, where they are seen as Bowdoin students and are deracialized, or as students of color, who are not fully Bowdoin students because they exist as an other within the space.

Only years after the College began making changes in an effort to accommodate them, students of color pushed back and became vocal with both the administration and with other students with regard to their perceptions of Bowdoin and the changes that they felt needed to be made. Additionally, white students who felt that the school wasn't doing enough to diversify in the 1960s, took the matter into their own hands. They united and created student groups that highlighted the College's shortcomings and physically went out into poor communities to seek candidates for admission to Bowdoin. This history has shown the large role that students can play in pushing for institutional change, and the ways in which institutions react and implement the changes that students want.

In the next chapter I will examine three incidents of racial bias in particular, Cracksgiving, the "Gangster" Party, and the Tequila Party, and argue that these incidents are a manifestation of the othering process of the white space. These incidents provide an opportunity to examine how students of color resist administrative efforts to respond to these incidents in ways that aim to appease multiple constituencies of students. By



creating countercultural spaces and vocally challenging incidents of racial bias and their perpetrators, students of color aim to challenge the status quo of the institution, which is historically based in a culture of normative whiteness. I will then show how white students resist the institution as well and try to maintain the status quo through the creation of alternate spaces that reproduce the institutional culture that privileges them. Lastly, I will highlight how administrative discourse regarding race and diversity after these incidents is largely reactive, and rather than curbing racial conflicts, it actually reproduces white spaces and continues a cycle of violence against black students who traditionally don't belong in these spaces.

### **CHAPTER 3: NOT NOT A FIESTA**

On the evening of Wednesday, March 2, 2016, students packed into Daggett Hall for the weekly meeting of the Bowdoin Student Government. The BSG was considering bringing forward articles of impeachment against two of its members who had participated in the Tequila Party. This was the subject of the meeting. This particular night, the crowd in Daggett Hall, a large dining room typically reserved for special events, was very clearly divided. White students primarily occupied one side of the room, and students of color, with their white allies, stood on the other side. A wide space separated the two groups.

The debate took up most of the meeting time, as students representing both sides exchanged comments about the party, its aftermath, and the subsequent articles of impeachment. White students largely supported the students who were up for impeachment and spoke out against the trial. Conversely, students of color pushed fervently for the impeachment proceedings, and aired their grievances about the party and the lack of empathy from the opposition. It was an emotional evening. For many students of color, who felt that they weren't being heard, this provided an opportunity to express their frustration over the incident and its immediate aftermath. The opposition, however, proved just as vocal, supporting the moral character of the students who were on trial. Supporters of each side erupted in applause when one of their many speakers made an agreeable point. "It was literally segregated," Kate (white, female, senior) observed. She reflects on the tension in the room when she arrived at the meeting:

I showed up late, and so the side that was closer to the door, the right side of Daggett if you're looking in, was pretty much all the supporters of the kids being impeached and I was over there on that side sitting on the ground. Literally on the entire other side of it was either very

obvious white allies that were vocal or it was minority students. ... How can you actually think that this isn't a problem when you can literally see the divide? That was really striking.

This physical divide that existed at the meeting epitomizes the ideological and emotional divides on campus following each racial incident. Similar to the incidents that occurred throughout the Bowdoin's history, the three most recent incidents of racial bias at Bowdoin, Cracksgiving, the Gangster Party, and the Tequila Party, divided the student body, challenging the ways in which different groups relate to each other and to the College. Many were hurt by the incidents, seeing them as racially motivated. Others saw nothing wrong with them, while others remained neutral. Regardless, many students scapegoated the administration, mainly the Dean of Student Affairs, for many of the divisions percolating on campus.

Although scholars largely attribute the shaping of a campus' culture to administrators and student affairs personnel, I argue that students, through their actions and their resistance, also play a central role in the production of campus culture. Using Chapter 2 as a historical backdrop, I will use this chapter to explore the role that students of color play in shaping institutional culture, and explore the ways in which student resistance leads to institutional change. First, I will give an overview of racial tensions on Bowdoin's campus in the past seventeen years, including the Presidencies of Barry Mills and Clayton Rose. President Rose's administration in particular has taken several steps to combat racial insensitivity on campus. These presidents have drawn both praise and criticism for their actions, and students in particular have been a leading force in responding to and resisting the institutional action that has taken place under their respective administrations. Using interview data collected from thirty Bowdoin students,

I will show how students of color and white allies have vocalized their frustrations with the College and share their various experiences with race and difference. I will then examine how student resistance has manifested itself in the past four years in light of the diversity goals of the college. Both cases ultimately show that students have more institutional power than is typically attributed to them. Lastly, I will discuss the implications that these campus divisions have for the ability of students with different interests to essentially live together and share a common identity as Bowdoin students, and the implication of these divisions for the administration. In the next chapter I will discuss resistance from white students. Treating them as two different groups allows for an understanding of the different demands that students make upon an institution and the ways in which the institution itself is subject to pressure from within and from without as a result of student mobilization.

### **STUDENTS AS CAMPUS ACTORS**

The role of students in shaping and creating campus culture is largely dismissed in the sociological literature. Smith et al. (2007) argue that the institution bears most of the responsibility for either implicitly or explicitly endorsing the race-conscious actions that contribute to a negative racial climate. Iverson (2007) also contends that little research exists that investigates the role of institutional policies in actually alleviating racial conflict and how these policies address racial problems on college and university campuses. Rather, she argues, they create even more conflict by creating a binary of insiders and outsiders. Garcia et al. (2011) leave it to “student affairs practitioners” to acknowledge racism as a structural problem in their institutions. However, they add that colleges and universities are in and of themselves racialized social systems that create

hierarchies and perpetuate the racialization of students, often without recognition. There is evidently a consensus in the literature that administrators, or whoever the decision makers in a college or university are, play a major role in shaping campus environments, both positively and negatively, through their discourse around race and diversity, but there is less consensus as to what that role is.

Students have an incredible amount of institutional power in that they both act upon and are acted upon by the institution. A major problem with the ways students are written about is that students are treated as one homogenous body. I argue that treating students in an institution of higher education as one large, homogenous body ultimately creates dissent and resistance on behalf of different student groups. Students of color have different experiences and make different institutional demands than white students, and even within that umbrella term, black students, Asian students, and Latino students all have different interests and different experiences as well. Despite the end goal, a degree, being the same for all students, their paths to that goal do not all look the same. Thus, to treat a student body, which is composed of various different constituencies, as though all students have the same experience severely limits institutions of higher education in their ability to create inclusive spaces and be diverse.

Another characteristic of these incidents is that students of color have become incredibly vocal about their needs and their negative experiences at Bowdoin, and similar to the movements of the twentieth century, have resisted the actions of the administration and of other students. Through protests and demonstrations, students have forced both the institution and white students to rethink racial relations at Bowdoin. Through these protests, they have pushed for others to acknowledge that students of color experience

Bowdoin differently from white students, which is a fact that they feel is consistently overlooked. Over time, this resistance has fundamentally shifted the way the College treats its underrepresented populations and has led to the creation of social and academic spaces that have accommodated the needs of minority students. In the twentieth century, it was students of color, in conjunction with white allies, who demanded an African American Center, and African American Studies Program, and other such changes at the College. Though met with resistance from the campus community, students were ultimately successful in getting the College to respond to their demands. Today, the College prides itself in having a Center for Multicultural and Religious Life (“30 College”), a Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity and Women’s Resource Center (“24 College”), and the Russwurm African American Center, in addition to a Dean for Multicultural Affairs and various other resources on campus. These spaces are representative of the College’s efforts to diversify and of the efforts of students to create safe, welcoming spaces where they can feel comfortable. These spaces are also countercultural in nature, as they directly challenge the white, masculine, heteronormativity of the broader campus. They have also counterintuitively changed the culture of the campus away from that of a white space, which is a shift that has been co-opted by the College in order to show that it is diverse and inclusive. Though this shift ultimately benefits the College, it has also created a mass of students who resent the changes and are taking the matter of creating a campus culture into their own hands through the creation of alternate spaces off-campus.

Students of color have traditionally perceived their campus climates more negatively than their white peers, and when incidents of racial bias occur, they are likely

to react in ways that challenge the normative whiteness of their campuses (Reid and Radhakrishnan 2003; Rankin and Reason 2005). This is very much the case at Bowdoin, as student interviews suggest that many students harbor feelings of resentment toward the administration and toward students who just don't seem to "get it." Students of color choose to express their discontent in several ways. At Bowdoin, the most prevalent model, which has been used by underrepresented students almost every decade since the 1960s, consists of presenting a list of demands to the administration of the College and an explanation of their grievances, with demands for immediate action. On February 13, 2015, students from various affinity groups on campus created a list of nineteen calls to action regarding race and diversity of Bowdoin's campus. This list was presented publically presented to the Bowdoin community in the middle of the student union, and presented to President Barry Mills. This list resurfaced in *The Bowdoin Orient* one year later on February 12, 2016, in between two incidents of racial bias that shook the campus community and drew great attention to issues of race and the administration's role in addressing them (Andrews and Chavez 2016). This list of demands is an example of how students of color mobilized to create a campus culture of inclusivity and openness that will welcome them in spite of Bowdoin historically being a primarily white institution. Speaking out after incidents of racial bias, bringing up conversations about race and inclusivity, and forcing the administration to take action are all ways of resisting white spaces. This resistance however, is often met by backlash from the College and from other students as well. In fact, many students have questioned the need for safe, inclusive spaces on campus, claiming that they are segregationist in principle and only serve to divide. These claims negate the need for intergroup solidarity, and are often given from a

position of privilege whereby white students are more likely to not experience or recognize that there are racial tensions on their campuses (Rankin and Reason 2005).

I argue that resistance by students of color at colleges and universities challenges that fundamental nature of these institutions and normalizes countercultural spaces that actively work against white spaces, though it is in a way that may ultimately benefit the institutions, who face increasing pressure to diversify and be more inclusive. Bowdoin has several such spaces, including: The Center for Multicultural and Religious Life, the Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity and Women's Resource Center, and the Russwurm African American Center. These spaces are countercultural in that they deviate from the general culture of the campus to create spaces that are actually welcoming to underrepresented students. The physical space itself, including the buildings, the people who they are named after, and the money that was used to build them all reflect a legacy of whiteness and privilege, so much so that most of the academic, extracurricular, and social spaces of the campus are largely white spaces. Though these spaces are open to any student, they are largely seen as being specifically designated safe spaces for students and are not frequented casually by students who those spaces do not specifically serve. The Russwurm Center in particular has always been a contentious space, as white students question what their relationship to that space should be, and feel they need an invitation to enter it, lest they be obstructing the space. Despite this tension, these spaces are increasingly representative of what Bowdoin is trying to be, which is a welcoming, inclusive campus space. Though the culture of the campus has not been completely changed, it can be argued that the creation of these spaces has created spaces where students can escape the normative culture of the campus, whether it be the



white, heteronormative, or masculine cultures that characterize other spaces and the campus more broadly. Additionally, they provide spaces of solidarity for minority students, and are used as spaces for affinity groups to gather.

### **BURSTING THE BUBBLE: RISING CAMPUS TENSIONS, 2009-2017**

After the enrollment of students of color decreased in the 1990s, President Barry Mills (2001-2015) was tasked with redirecting Bowdoin's diversity goals. President Mills' tenure in particular was riddled with various incidents of racial bias, as well as acts of resistance by students. He inherited a college that was rife with racial tension, though he is highly credited with the increased diversity of the college during his tenure as president. In his final year, Bowdoin was approximately 63% white. Engaging with third-party organizations like Upward Bound and strengthening the Bowdoin Experience program, Mills brought students of underrepresented backgrounds to Bowdoin on visits both in the fall and in the spring semester. Additionally, a separate day was set aside for low-income students from the state of Maine to visit. In 2002, President Mills invited students of color from around the country "to come and get to know our community. When we say we are diverse and committed, visitors need to get a sense of how true it really is. This small college in Maine is a picture of what America is" (Vivas 2002). These weekend events, which "called upon the aid of a myriad of administrators, faculty, and student volunteers" were campus-wide efforts, and were meant to "encourage admitted students of color to matriculate at Bowdoin" (Vivas 2002). The Class of 2019 was 31% students of color, compared to the dismal number in the classes at the beginning of Mills' administration (*see Appendix A*). Diversity became a primary goal of the

College during this time, and his administration focused beyond racial and ethnic diversity to include socioeconomic diversity as well.

Despite the efforts and the progress made during Mills' presidency, incidents of racial bias continued. On February 20, 2004, racial tensions rose at a Thursday Pub Night celebrating Black History Month. Two visiting black poets started provoking disruptive, white students, who criticized these performances as anti-white and offensive. One white, female student reported to *The Orient*, "I feel oppressed now," and told the event organizers that they should have picked a different time and place for the event (Dunn and Baber 2004). Not only have more incidents occurred in the past ten years, they have also been increasingly divisive, posing a great challenge to both students and administrators. In 2010 for example, racist graffiti were drawn on the door of a student apartment. Sometime between Tuesday night and the morning of Wednesday, March 2, 2011, someone changed the message on a white board outside a student apartment in Coles Tower from "I Love Meatless Mondays!" to "I Love Meatful Mondays! Meatless Mondays suck! Fag Nigger" (Mamdani 2011). Administrators swiftly denounced this incident. Dean of Student Affairs Tim Foster stated that "There's no place for this kind of behavior at Bowdoin, and when it happens, we need to shine a light on it, and we need to come together as a community."

A similar incident occurred in October of 2013, when a student found a swastika drawn on a white board at Brunswick Apartments, a student living complex. The student photographed the symbol and promptly erased it from the white board, sending the picture to campus security as part of her report. It was revealed during the investigation that earlier in the year, someone had also written "Niggers are the worst" on the same

white board (Wetsman 2013). Again, the response from the administration was swift, with Dean Foster writing in an email to the student body that there is “no place for violence, no place for hateful language, no place for hateful symbols” at Bowdoin. Additionally, the BSG decreed that the next month would be “No Hate November,” which was to become an annual event designed to “continuously fight bias on campus.” Designated a bottom-up program, it was meant to bring students, faculty, and staff together to engage in dialogue and in a variety of educational and social programs centered around the goal of responding to the bias incidents that had occurred and looking for ways to be more proactive than reactive (Robbins and Rube 2013).

These incidents began a succession of events that were meant to support those affected and to educate the student body about racial difference, cultural appropriation, and bias. A week after the incident, a student put together a photo display entitled “We Stand with You.” The display featured six-hundred seventy black and white portraits of Bowdoin students with the words “We Stand with You” emblazoned over their faces. It was displayed in Smith Union for all to see (Bumsted 2014). Two student groups, Inter-Group Dialogue and A.D.D.R.E.S.S., which had been created earlier in the fall of 2014 to spur more open conversations about race, gained prominence after a whiteboard campaign that urged students to display messages about what race means to them (Bumsted 2014). In the spring of 2014, there was a cultural appropriation teach-in, which featured professors, the BSG president, and Native American students, who talked about their experiences with cultural appropriation and racial bias. In particular, the Native student spoke about harmful stereotypes and the cultural significance of certain Native artifacts that are used nonchalantly by people at parties and as costumes (McGarry 2014).

## CRACKSGIVING

These efforts were undermined the following No Hate November, when the men's lacrosse team hosted their annual Thanksgiving party, "Cracksgiving," at 83 ½ Harpswell Road. This off-campus house was rented by members of the team and was known colloquially as Crack House. Members of the house hosted an annual Thanksgiving party called "Cracksgiving," at which fourteen members of the lacrosse team dressed up as Native Americans. They wore headdresses and painted their faces and torsos with war paint. By the end of the night, many of the headdresses were on the beer-soaked floor, trampled under the feet of intoxicated students, who repeatedly stepped on them. At several points during the party, a member of the team let out what were meant to be Native American war cries. His team mates would respond with similar cries and shrieks.

In contrast to the aforementioned incidents, the administration was accused by *The Orient* of falling silent on the incident. Dean Foster sent an email on December 9<sup>th</sup> expressing his disappointment in students who should have known better. Students criticized Dean Foster's email both openly and anonymously, through the social media app Yik Yak. One "yak" read: "Foster's emails only make these events worse by getting the whole campus into an uproar and no real dialogue ever happens and the real world doesn't care about you being offended so it's pointless [sic]." With the exception of this post, very little was heard from others connected to the event. When asked to comment on the party, Dean Foster, along with Athletic Director Tim Ryan, Lacrosse Coach Jason Archbell, and the team captains, refused to provide comment for *The Orient* (Andrews 2015).

Cracksgiving set in motion student-led events that were meant to educate the student body about the impact of cultural appropriation and the significance of the events that had transpired. It also signified a shift in the way the College thought about appropriation and racial conflict on campus. Some students began to see incidents of racial bias as purposefully hostile actions, while others began to perceive the reactions of students of color and of the administration as being emblematic of a fight for political correctness and absolute social control. For example, after Cracksgiving, the Residential Life staff met with members of Ladd House to discuss their annual Inappropriate Party. This party invited students to dress in inappropriate attire, but due to the potential for offensive attire and cultural appropriation, house officers and the Office of Residential Life determined that it would be best to cancel the party (De Wet 2015). Students reacted negatively to the cancellation of the party, and accused Bowdoin of giving in to political correctness and seeking to control too many aspects of student life. In an annual survey administered by the Government and Legal Studies Department to gauge the campus climate, 68.4% of respondents saw political correctness as a problem on Bowdoin's campus, 47.2% disapproved of the way the administration handled Cracksgiving, and 38.3% of students believed that Ladd was unfairly pressured into cancelling the Inappropriate Party. Three hundred students responded to this survey, which was administered in the spring of 2015 (Allen and Diprinzio 2015).

### **THE GANGSTER PARTY**

On the evening of Thursday, October 22, 2015, members of the Bowdoin Sailing team walked into Thorne dining hall after hosting their annual Gangster party dressed in "Gangster attire": bucket hats, baggy clothes, basketball jerseys, and chains. Some had

braided their hair into cornrows (Branch 2015). Several students of color, offended by the display, confronted the partiers. News quickly hit Yik Yak, and students began to debate whether the party was a problem to begin with, coming to the defense of the sailing team. “I guess we should wage war against all non-black people wearing and acting like gangsters. Here we come Eminem and half of Detroit,” read one yak. Another post appropriated the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag and stated: “You have appropriated and disvalued the experiences of older ethnic gangsters like Al Capone and Whitey Bulger by stealing the term ‘gangster.’ #AllGangstersMatter.” Finally, in an explicit connection to the idea of the iconic ghetto, one post read: “Might be expressing a minority opinion but ... Gangster culture probably should be ridiculed., dishonored, and eliminated. It brings about drug use, homicide, domestic violence, & generational poverty.”

The following day, members of the team met with members of the African American Society and the administration over the incident. By Wednesday, Dean Foster sent a campus-wide email, stating: “Let me be clear. Racial and ethnic stereotyping is not acceptable at Bowdoin.” He encouraged students to resolve the tensions on their own. “In our [President Rose and the Student Affairs staff’s] view, the most powerful and effective response is an honest, open discussion between the students who dressed as they did, those who were stereotyped, and the larger student community.” He goes on to state that the administration will work to facilitate constructive conversations with all parties involved. That same night, BSG unanimously issued a Statement of Solidarity in support of students who were impacted by this event.

The Gangster Party occurred only one day after Concerned Student 1950 demanded the resignation of University of Missouri President Tim Wolfe. Because this

party and its aftermath happened almost simultaneously with the strife at Mizzou, Bowdoin students remained conscious of the national dialogue around racial bias and the actions being taken at other schools. For example, many students adopted a banner created by the African American Society as their Facebook cover pictures. The picture stated solidarity with Yale, Mizzou, Claremont McKenna, and Ithaca. Students became emboldened in their resistance and opposition, and began planning events and protests that borrowed from movements at other institutions. This tense and divisive campus climate fractured the student body between those who were hurt by the incident and those who didn't see anything wrong with it, as well as those who didn't feel strongly either way. On the one hand, students of color were tired of having the additional burden of having to teach their peers and administrators about race, and white students were tired of hearing about race and racism. Once again, students turned to the anonymous social platform Yik Yak to voice their opposition to both Dean Foster's response and to the reactions of students of color. One such post read, "People on this campus just like to be offended for the sake of being offended."

Though students largely attacked each other at first, the administration emerged as a target for both sides of this issue. Students expressed growing dissatisfaction with the way the administration had handled the party and its aftermath through their posts and debates. Eventually the students' words became action, however, and the growing dissatisfaction with the College was no longer anonymous. On November 4, 2015, two weeks after the Gangster party, a group of faculty and students walked into the David Saul Smith Union dressed in black tee shirts and with duct tape over their mouths. The tape read, "We will not be silenced." Upon reaching the center of the Union, this group

began chanting a part of Hyde's *Offer of the College*. Megan (black, female, senior), a student who played a role in organizing a handful of protests and student movements in the course of her four years at Bowdoin, said with regard to the protest and the use of the *Offer*:

I wasn't getting what I signed up for. The "best four years of your life" part? It was not coming together and all that knowledge that was promised, it was ... I can't even say it was offered. It was presented but I can't say that it was offered because clearly some people were just not getting it. And I felt like the offer just represents Bowdoin. It draws people to Bowdoin. That's where Bowdoin's hat is at.

Bowdoin takes great pride in the *Offer of the College*, and uses it as a prominent selling point for prospective students. Megan's quote speaks to how students of color often feel as though they are presented a different picture of their colleges during the admissions process, only to be disappointed upon arriving at the lack of diversity. As students chanted the last line of the offer, "...cooperate with others for common ends, this is the offer of the College for the best four years of your life," several white students made disparaging comments about the inconvenience of holding the protest in such a public space (Wetsman 2016). According to Kerry (black, female, senior), "a lot of people just said some really mean, aggressive, nasty things for something that wasn't that serious, and it just showed how deep and ugly this place can really get." In another two weeks, on November 20, 2015, the African American Society created a Bias Incident Display in the student union to raise awareness of racial issues on campus (Ryan 2015). In this series, each poster had a story shared by a Bowdoin student about their experiences with any kind of bias, not necessarily just race.

On December 8, 2015, President Clayton Rose held a town hall meeting in response to the Gangster party titled "Why Do Issues of Race Matter if I'm White?" This



talk was given before a large crowd of approximately five-hundred students, staff, faculty, and community members in the student union, and sought to highlight the importance of recognizing why cultural appropriation and other racial issues are a problem and should matter to white people (Allen 2015).

### **THE TEQUILA PARTY**

On Saturday, February 20, 2016, an invitation went out via email inviting select students to a “Tequila” Party. “We’re not saying it’s a fiesta,” read the email, “but, we’re also not not saying that :) (We’re not saying that)” (Branch and Gruber 2016). Within hours, this invitation made its way onto Yik Yak, and students immediately began to react. Some posts questioned why the house leaders, one of whom was Latina, didn’t stop the party. Others, in the same vein as the posts that followed the Gangster Party, provided hypotheticals and questioned why cultural appropriation was such a bad thing. One post harkened back to the fall semester and the aftermath of the Gangster Party: “Regardless of your personal opinions on cultural appropriation, you have to be dumb to throw a ‘[group of people/stereotype] themed party’ after all that happened last semester,” admonished another post.

As the night wore on and more information came out via social media, it was revealed that attendees at the Tequila Party wore stereotypical Mexican attire such as sombreros and mustaches. Confusion over the meaning and significance of appropriation dominated debate among students. One questioned: “If I have a whiskey themed party and people come dressed in their southern best is that cultural appropriation?” Another chided: “Guys are we really going to say that you have to be a certain ethnicity or race to wear a sombrero, a poncho, or anything non-European? And then try and reprimand those

who do wear that?” A Mexican student posted, “So what a Mexican themed party was thrown? I am Mexican and I wish I would have been invited.” This diversity of responses once again speaks to the lack of clarity students had about these incidents, and shows that months after a prior incident, there was still not a clear understanding of what it means to appropriate a culture.

The Tequila Party once again provoked many debates about what it means to be in the majority versus the minority at Bowdoin, and about who has the right to bring up issues of race, if they should be brought up at all. Additionally, the debate morphed from being about racial issues and cultural appropriation to being about political correctness and the perceived policing of fun. However, the response was much quicker and much more heated after the Tequila party than it was for the Gangster Party, because the campus was just beginning to rebound from the Gangster Party when it occurred. The reaction from students of color received massive backlash from some white students, who pushed back against the “PC” and “coddled” nature of the offended students by sharing their feelings with external publications. Days after the Tequila Party, a white male sophomore sent in a letter to Barstool Sports in which he lamented the “authoritarian take over by PC culture and its crooked army.” This blog post, titled “The Pussification of Bowdoin: Campus in Chaos after Tequila Party,” was published by the website on February 29, 2016, just over a week after the incident. Students reacted negatively to the article and its references to the “PC rats,” who were accused by this student of attacking anyone with a different opinion. On the same day, a blog website called Turtleboy Sports published a post titled “Tequila Themed Party Deemed Racist by Bowdoin Students who had their Feelings Hurt.” This post attacked individual students who were involved in

speaking out against the party, and went so far as to publish photos from their personal social media accounts and criticizing their appearance. Other major news sources, like the *Washington Post*, picked up this story, and continued attacks on Bowdoin's political correctness, admonishing the fuss over the party and criticizing students and administrators for "going ballistic" (Rampell 2016).

On Wednesday, March 2, 2016 the Student Center for Multicultural Life staged a photo shoot in response to the party and the articles. The theme of the photo shoot was "My culture is not a costume," and featured students of color holding up white boards with this phrase written on them. Some students chose to hold flags with their countries of origin. Students who identified as allies also participated, and held white boards that said, "Their culture is not a costume." As with the Gangster Party in the fall semester, the campus became fractured and divided along ideological and racial lines, though this time around, they felt more sharply drawn. Students took to *The Orient* to express, through editorials, their feelings about the party, the actions taken by the administration, and political correctness. This being the second incident of racial bias of the year, many students of color reported being tired of repeatedly having the same conversations and the same dialogue.

In response to the Gangster and Tequila Parties, Bowdoin administrators worked to move forward in light of a turbulent year. President Clayton Rose (2015 - Present), faced with these two incidents in the beginning of his tenure as the President of the College, took several steps to improve racial and ideological division on campus and foster an environment of acceptance and learning. After the Gangster party, President Rose commissioned a report from two external researchers, Camille Charles and Rory

Kramer (Branch 2015). This report was compiled throughout the Spring 2016 semester, and sought to explore the major issues that Bowdoin still faces regarding inclusion.

Ultimately, it provides several recommendations for the College that the Ad Hoc Committee on Inclusion hopes to address. The report recommends that Bowdoin do the following: 1) create an office for diversity and inclusion that reports directly to the president, 2) review the curriculum for elements of intellectual inclusivity, 3) plan and promote education trainings for all members of the community, 4) actively strive to diversify and retain those who come to the College, and 5) provide a venue for students, faculty, and staff to discuss race, racism, and inequality (Charles and Kramer 2016).

### **STUDENT RESISTANCE**

Both President Mills and President Rose made efforts to create inclusivity and reinforce community after these incidents. However, their efforts garnered mixed reviews from both white students and students of color, as both “sides” directed efforts of resistance against the administration, which is typically blamed for the racial tensions on campus and criticized for their slow speed of response, the messages they send out to the student body, and the punishments doled out on perpetrators of incidents of racial bias. Student reactions to administrative efforts reflects a failure of the administration to make the campus culture truly inclusive. The reasons these efforts have failed to create a welcoming space is because the administration’s understanding of what it means to be diverse and what it means to be inclusive does not address the structural foundation of the problems on campus. Anne (black, female, junior) reflects:

So I feel like when Bowdoin thinks of diversity, they are thinking about statistics and think about how many non-pale faces are in a crowd, and it seems very surface level to me. Their definition of diversity, also seems like it’s a checkmark type of thing, where like, you can claim you have

diversity in your job. I think the way they use it is very surface level and it's very misleading, especially to prospective students.

Anne believes that Bowdoin has a purely numerical understanding of diversity that checks off boxes rather than having structural implications for the College. This “happy talk” approach to diversity and the proposed solutions, such as debates and conversations, are a means by which the College continues to reproduce white spaces because it gives people “the ability to talk about race without ever acknowledging the unequal realities and experiences of racial differences in American society” (Bell 2007). This became evident to Samantha (female, Asian, junior), who felt that the efforts of the administration were ineffective because the College is ultimately a white space.

Coming to Bowdoin has been kind of disappointing in a way, cause I feel like, obviously we think so much about race and ethnicity and culture and we talk about it and have so many discussions around it, but Bowdoin does feel like a very white space regardless of those conversations.

Samantha describes feeling as though these efforts are not enough, and reflect a hopelessness in knowing that no matter how many conversations are encouraged and how many discussions students and staff have, it is not enough to make Bowdoin a more inclusive space.

The administration’s responses to bias incidents continuously reproduce white spaces despite repeated efforts by students of color to challenge these spaces and educate their peers. White spaces are most evident at Bowdoin in the exclusive spaces that students of color feel that they cannot enter or maneuver, and through the incidents themselves, which continue to occur despite all the College’s efforts. College Houses for example, and the parties that they throw, have a reputation for being spaces where racial tensions have flared on multiple occasions. In the following quote, Hannah, a senior

student who identifies as mixed race, describes an incident where she was made to feel uncomfortable at a College House because of her race:

I don't really go to college house parties anymore, but in the past when I would I remember freshman year like, the only racist ... encounter that I've ever experienced. I was in Baxter basement freshman year and I asked a guy to dance and he said, "No, you're too dark." And I first was shocked cause I wasn't sure if he meant like, the lighting, but then I was like no, that is a racist comment. That's like a really overt thing. I think that's kind of made me nervous to approach parties.

This incident proved to Hannah that she was not desired in these spaces, and was not the right "type" to be there. She became wary of attending these parties, especially alone, which is an experience that many students of color shared in their interviews. Another kind of white space are the academic buildings and spaces where whiteness is prominently on display. Anne reflects on how academic buildings, athletic spaces, and social spaces are perceived as predominantly white and make her feel othered:

Hubbard for me just seems so white because it's so historical and there's like, pictures of presidents all around so it's just white men staring at you. And it has the Government department and the Economics department. ... I take Econ classes, the whitest classes I ever take, [and] when I go to office hours, I always feel really uncomfortable. Whereas I go to Africana Studies professors and it's like, a relaxation time, because with professors I always feel like I have to prove myself. ... In the dining hall it's like, the sports teams dominate the space and those are mostly white, and then I guess - like in certain study spaces it just seems like mostly like, white students, so it just feels not necessarily unfriendly, it's just very obviously a white space. Like, that's where I'm more conscious of my blackness. Like, I'm just very aware of my skin color when I go there.

Anne's statement shows that in addition to the College Houses, certain spaces, such as tables in the dining halls are typically associated with white, male sports teams. For example, in Moulton Union, one of two dining halls on campus, the "Hockey Table" is a social staple of the Bowdoin dining experience. Primarily occupied by the men's hockey team, this table is seen as an impenetrable space that is exclusively reserved for members

of the team. This table's reputation transcends the presence of the actual team, as other students do not sit at the table when the team is not there, and it is often empty during busy meal times because it is seen as a campus norm to not sit there. There are other tables as well as are perceived as "belonging" to a certain group of students, specifically sports teams, though none equal the Hockey Table in its infamy. Kelly (black, female, senior) reflects on how uncomfortable these team tables make her feel:

I mean, the hockey table. That's one thing I still feel uncomfortable sitting at the hockey table, or sometimes on the right side of Thorne, which I know is problematic, but sometimes I just don't wanna get weird looks from athletes who are like, "This is my table." You know what I mean? I'd rather not put myself in that situation, which is problematic I realize. So, those are two dining hall places where I would feel uncomfortable. I still do feel uncomfortable.

Though these are examples of smaller spaces at Bowdoin that are seen as being white spaces, they reinforce that the campus as a whole is a white space that "belongs" to some groups more than others. This idea of belonging is also constantly reproduced by incidents of racial bias and microaggressions that students experience almost daily on campus.

According to Elijah Anderson (2015), white spaces have historically excluded people of color, but they have slowly become integrated over time, so contemporary white spaces are not exclusively all white, and actually do have people of color within them. They actually appear to be more diverse than they are because of the presence of up and coming minorities who have gained conditional access to the space. People of color may even come to feel that they belong in these spaces. However, white spaces function to other people of color when they become too complacent and start to feel that they truly belong. Thus, the acceptance of anyone who is not white is purely conditional.

In fact, white people within these spaces will take it upon themselves to remind the offending person of color that they do not actually belong in those spaces. In the following passage, Ellen (black, female, senior) describes how she felt her freshman year after somebody had drawn swastikas and “Niggers are the Worst” on a white board at a student living complex.

When I heard about it I was kind of angry. ... I don't want to use the word unsafe, but there was definitely a threat to my existence. Not necessarily like a deathly threat, but I felt that I wasn't wanted. About the same time, I didn't feel like I could do anything because I didn't necessarily feel like Bowdoin was my school as I do now, if that makes any sense. I felt like I was just a freshman just coming here, and I mean, I was just getting the lay of the land ... Bowdoin wasn't my home yet.

This overt act of racial bias made Ellen feel as though she did not belong at Bowdoin, and most importantly, like she was not wanted at Bowdoin. Because she did not feel like she belonged at Bowdoin yet, she also felt powerless to act.

I argue that incidents of racial bias are examples of what Elijah Anderson (2012) calls “nigger moments,” which are times when people of color are explicitly reminded that they do not belong in traditional white spaces. In order to show what a nigger moment looks like, Anderson gives an example of an incident that is reminiscent of the kinds of incidents that are becoming more common in the United States. He tells the story of a young, black, law student who was accosted by the police while waiting for a bus. The neighbors had heard that there was a shooting nearby, and seeing that there was a young, black man sitting at a bus stop in a predominantly white neighborhood, they assumed that it had to be him (Anderson 2012). They called the police and the student was harassed and embarrassed in front of his peers. Regardless of the fact that he was sitting in a bus stop in front of the law school and carrying groceries, the law student still



fit the stereotype of the young criminal that his white neighbors associated with blackness. This experience not only served to remind him that he didn't belong in that space, but also that no matter how normal he looked or acted, and no matter how hard he worked in law school, he would always be perceived primarily by his skin color. The fact that ideas about black people as criminals and as undeserving of certain privileges are still prevalent in the institutions of higher education, despite the fact that these spaces are becoming more inclusive and multiethnic, suggests that diversification may not be enough to combat and fundamentally change white spaces.

The reproduction of white spaces reinforces the double consciousness of students of color, as they become aware of their exclusion. Part of the need for students to mobilize and create safe spaces is the need to mitigate the feelings of double consciousness that they experience, which means that in order to experience Bowdoin and potentially gain acceptance, they must separate their racial and ethnic identities from their position as Bowdoin students. However, the desire that students of color have to identify with their particular racial or ethnic groups challenges this notion, because by doing so, they are no longer just "Bowdoin students," but rather "students of color at Bowdoin." This parallels Du Bois' idea of the double consciousness, where "One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (1903). This sentiment is reflected in the following comment by Alice (female, black, junior) who stated that:

Blackness is certainly important to me but I don't know if that matters to the administration so long as I'm not creating a big stink about, for example, the Gangster Party that happened. I don't think they really care about my race other than promoting a more diverse campus. But do they

care about me as a student of color? Yeah, I don't think they care about my “of color” status so much as it affects my ability to succeed as a student and as much as we make a big fuss about certain things happening on campus, but I do think that they care about me as a student.

She recognizes that Bowdoin does not necessarily consider her race, and prefers to see her as just a student, which is fine until her race becomes relevant, as in the case of an incident of bias.

Kerry (black, female, senior) shares an experience she had her sophomore year, the year Cracksgiving occurred, where she and her friends were called out by another white student for making people uncomfortable in the dining hall. According to Kerry, she was with her black friends in the dining hall when a song they liked came on over the speakers.

I was like in the dining hall. I was like talking to some friends and like, there's always music playing in Thorne, so some song came on. We were excited too, we were dancing. And then one of my other friends, who's not - most of the friends I was standing with are black and my other friend who's not black is like, “Kerry, stop it, you guys are making people uncomfortable.” And I'm like, “Okay, well now we're uncomfortable” cause ... we're in the dining hall. It's not like we're in the library where it should be silent.

This kind of scrutiny and judgment is a common experience that many of the minority students interviewed shared, and suggests that even though Bowdoin claims to be inclusive and welcoming, there are still instances where black and brown bodies are scrutinized more closely and sometimes even policed by white students. This othering is what makes students of color seek out spaces in which they can share their experiences and find community in a way that they typically could not in other campus spaces. Additionally, it gives them the opportunity to escape the judgment and the resistance that they face when they try to be themselves. Ellen describes an act that she feels she, and

other students of color, has to put on at Bowdoin to show that they too belong at the College.

Because there's an act you have to put on right? Where you have to let people know that you know what the hell you're talking about and I'm not just here because I'm just here, you know what I mean. It's like, I worked my ass off to get here and I'm still here. And people don't understand that. Like, oh you got help to get here. Nah ... if I'm still here then who's helping me, you know?

She feels as though she is constantly having to prove that she does belong and that she worked just as hard as anyone to get here. This feeling of belonging is difficult to come by when there are racist incidents happening, and when there are students who are questioning the experiences of students of color because they don't coincide with the image of Bowdoin that many other students have. This is why minority students demand spaces of their own. When these spaces are created, they reproduce an inclusive culture that minority students may not have experienced otherwise on campus.

In the next chapter I will examine how the perceived diversification of Bowdoin and efforts by the administration and students of color to challenge the College as a fundamentally white space has led to resistance by white students, who feel that the administration is doing too much to appease students of color while destroying the white campus culture in which these other students have thrived for so long. This resistance has largely manifested itself in the creation of off-campus spaces that have essentially shifted social life at Bowdoin away from the control of the College and to these other spaces, which reproduce the same kinds of values and ideas that the College seems to be shying away from. These students are largely resisting the increased amount of institutional policies surrounding the consumption of alcohol, the regulation of parties through a registration process, and the implementation of a bias incident protocol, which is a

guideline for addressing racial bias and cultural appropriation by students at parties and other events. White students also feel pressure from students of color, who are becoming increasingly more vocal about challenging racial bias when they see it and demanding action when they feel that a student has committed an act of racial bias.

## **CHAPTER 4: IS BAX HAPENNING?**

While students of color have also become increasingly vocal in drawing campus-wide attention to incidents of racial bias, outraged white students have been just as vocal about getting their views heard. Many turned to *Yik Yak* and *The Orient* to express opinions that they perceived as being against the liberal sensitivities of the student body, and against the increasingly politically correct campus climate. These students felt that the traditions that defined the Bowdoin experience were being taken away by a hypervigilant force of students and administrators. Still others spoke up in defense of students of color, and admonished their white peers for not being able to empathize or be allies. Spring 2016 became particularly contentious after the Tequila Party, as students of color on campus demanded that members of the Student Government be impeached for their participation in the event. This party created deep racial tensions on campus, all of which became evident during BSG meetings, when the divide was clearly visible.

During the aftermath of the party, white students felt that their actions, which likely would have gone unchallenged at another time in Bowdoin's history, were being increasingly policed by both the administration and by "oversensitive" students of color. They did not understand how dressing up in a sombrero and drinking tequila, or dressing up as a gangster for that matter, could be discriminatory, and resented that students were being punished very severely despite the fact that there was no prejudice behind it. Many *Yik Yak* posts and *Orient* articles reflected frustration at white students being repeatedly told to care about issues that only matter to a small group of people. "I love to get offended by things that are marginally relevant to me.' – 97% of Bowdoin," quoted one *Yak* in a sarcastic interpretation of the "typical" Bowdoin student. Another wrote,

“People on this campus just like to be offended for the sake of being offended.” In particular, they perceived these groups as encroaching on their parties and their fun via institutional policies regulating alcohol consumption and parties, as well as racial bias and cultural appropriation. The policies, in conjunction with increased efforts to become a diverse and welcoming campus for underrepresented groups, challenges Bowdoin’s institutional whiteness and the privileged white culture that has always been cultivated among the student body. White student responses to the incidents and to students of color reflect their frustration at being ignored and repeatedly disregarded in the white space. The actions of white students after these incidents indicate that despite the perception that students of color are the primary agents of resistance over matters of race on college campuses, white students are also a resistant force, especially when their interests and institutional privileges are being challenged.

When the white institutional culture that they are accustomed to is being challenged, there is a direct threat to the well-being of privileged white students at Bowdoin. This whiteness is evident in many aspects of the campus, but it is most evident in the creation of spaces that aim to preserve or reproduce this whiteness. While there are some white spaces that are more implicit on campus, because they actively promote diversity and inclusion, there are others that are explicitly understood as being white, such as the College Houses, athletic teams, and the Outing Club, among others. These spaces are a result of long-standing institutional traditions privileging elite, white men, traditions which are being increasingly challenged by the presence of minorities and the College’s efforts to become a more diverse space. As the College works to diversify these spaces, many white, college students have responded by finding innovative ways to

create white spaces to preserve the traditions that they feel are becoming endangered. In this chapter, I will discuss how resistance by white students against the institution and students of color aims to preserve white spaces and continue to reproduce a campus culture that is centered around white privilege in spite of increased efforts by the College to create an inclusive space. White students tend to have the social and economic resources to create new white spaces that undermine efforts to create a diverse campus community. I refer to these new spaces as hypercultural white spaces – spaces that are reproduced outside of an institution in order to push back against the values and traditions that the institution itself is undermining through diversification and policies of inclusion. They are a form of countercultural space, but rather than countering the normative culture, they aim to reproduce it at its extreme. Hypercultural white spaces expand on Anderson's concept of white spaces by showing what whites do, beyond othering people of color through nigger moments, when they feel that they are being challenged in their own spaces by the very institutional forces that are supposed to be privileging them. Anderson does not necessarily consider how white spaces can be reproduced elsewhere as a form of resistance. The production of hypercultural white spaces shows the social, economic and political resources that many white students wield on campus, revealing their personal investment to preserve the historically white traditions and cultural norms that, while privileging their presence at Bowdoin, also define for them the quintessential Bowdoin experience.

### **INCIDENTS OF RACIAL BIAS**

Incidents of racial bias have been a regular occurrence on the Bowdoin College campus since the College began to diversify in earnest in the 1960s. Thus, Cracksgiving

and events of the 2015-16 school year were not isolated incidents of bias. Rather, they are part of a much larger pattern of bias that has existed at Bowdoin for the past six decades. Not all of these incidents have been intentional, but regardless of intent, their effect, which has been to other students of color and make them feel as though they don't belong, has been the same every time. These incidents persist because some white people experience a cognitive dissonance when they encounter blacks in white spaces, or spaces that were not meant to include people of color (Anderson, 2015). According to Anderson, this dissonance reflects a tension between their perceptions of people of color and their experiences of them in white spaces. White spaces epitomize white privilege; whites never have to question their right to occupy these spaces on the basis of their race. However, many whites see increasing efforts to diversify white spaces as a challenge to the privileges that these institutions have historically granted them.

Given that most American institutions are built around whiteness and the exclusion of other racial groups as the norm, this is what white people expect when they enter institutions that were traditionally meant to privilege them, such as institutions of higher education. The dissonance that white people go through is a clash between what they have been taught to expect, which is that people of color will fulfill certain stereotypes surrounding poverty, criminality, and the iconic ghetto, and the reality, which is that people of color are fully realized individuals, who may have no relation to the iconic ghetto whatsoever. However, when whites find their spaces threatened by the presence of upwardly mobile people of color, or people of color of equal or greater status, who challenge racialized stereotypes, many fall back on prejudices, using abusive behavior and language to put people of color back "in their place." Thus, nigger moments



still happen, as white people try to place the people of color within a type of racial hierarchy and try to figure out what their purpose is in that space. Whether intentional or not, these acts ultimately emerge as forms of resistance against changes to the composition of white spaces.

Bowdoin itself is a historically white institution, as it was initially founded by the New England elite in the late eighteenth century to educate the sons of politicians and businessmen. The continued exclusion of people of color throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries set the stage for turbulent racial relations at the end of the twentieth century as the College began to diversify. Today, this whiteness is physically represented within a variety of campus spaces. When asked to identify what spaces on Bowdoin's campus they perceived as being white spaces, or spaces and groups on campus that especially lack diversity, students most frequently identified the College Houses, the Bowdoin Outing Club, certain teams and athletic spaces, and some academic departments as fitting this description. Phoebe (white, female, senior) describes the kinds of limitations that students may face when entering spaces on campus that are perceived as being "for" a particular group of people.

There are physical spaces that whole groups of people never go into. Like, the Outing Club, if only because you have to pay \$40 a semester and yes you can get it waived but the burden's on you to get it waived. Or Baxter basement, which is mostly white baseball players and the girls that have crushes on them, and AfAm and the ways in which I wouldn't go there to do my homework, as much as I think that's my own insecurities more than it is anybody not making an inclusive space.

Phoebe's reflection shows how students have economic, social, racial, and even personal reservations about entering a space that they do not believe is welcoming to them. Ally

(white, female, senior) reflects on how the dining halls can be perceived as particularly white spaces as well.

I think in the dining halls too, particularly when the sports teams that are primarily white sit together, that becomes a very obvious difference, but more specifically with them than with the dining hall at large, although there can be times when tables are gonna be all white or all students of color and it feels segregated that way.

Ally's observations of the dining room show how non-diverse athletic teams, and in this example, the baseball team, are seen as bringing their whiteness with them to all-inclusive spaces like the dining hall. The tables where they sit and the spaces they choose to occupy then become these white spaces that are perceived as being off-limits and exclusive. Academic spaces are not exempt from being perceived as white spaces, as Valerie (white, female, junior) reflects in an anecdote about one of her friends of color.

I have a friend who's taken a number of Econ classes and he said that he wants to drop his Econ minor because he feels so uncomfortable being the only person of color in the room. And I mean, like, it's such a sad thing that someone who's so talented and smart at something just can't take that social climate. And it's sucks that that happens but it definitely happens.

This anecdote shows how something as seemingly insignificant as being the only person of color in a room can dramatically affect students of color, who face unique pressures, such as having to be the sole representative of their entire race, in these situations.

### **HYPERCULTURAL WHITE SPACES**

Incidents of racial bias are only one form of resistance used by white students to counter a rapidly changing campus culture. Another form that has become increasingly prevalent at Bowdoin has been the creation of hypercultural white spaces, which aim to reproduce Bowdoin's culture of whiteness through self-segregation, and typically in resistance to, rather than in conjunction with, the policies of the administration that aim to

ensure that all activities, spaces, and organizations are inclusive. Some students of color are typically accused of being self-segregating because they primarily interact with other students of color, but it is evident that white students also use it as a tactic. Self-segregation is withdrawal or separation from an institution because of “discomfort and lack of a feeling of institutional membership” (Fisher and Hartman 1995). It provides students of color with group solidarity and a sense of empowerment that is derived from shared experiences and interests. It essentially allows them to find sanctuary from white spaces and create spaces in which they can celebrate their culture without impediment. However, when students of color create these spaces, they are typically regarded as being anti-white and against campus unity, such as when white students protested the creation of the Russwurm African American Center. By separating themselves from the institution, white students also seek a form of solidarity. This solidarity in self-segregation may be as a result of shared interests, such as athletics. However, those in hypercultural white spaces seek solidarity in order to protect traditional white spaces. Although self-segregation among white students serves a very similar purpose to the creation of the countercultural spaces on campus, their actions have not led to the same kind of scorn that black students received. These spaces have been deemed by white students to be safe havens from the policies of the institution, which they now feel is diluting the normative whiteness of the institution; rather than working against the normative whiteness of the campus, they are actively seeking to reproduce it. By creating these spaces, they are also taking collective action against the institution for policing their actions and seemingly acting against their interests. According to Ellen (black, female,

senior) the administration has shown that certain actions will no longer be acceptable, which does not sit well with some white students.

More and more I think that they are showing that there are certain activities and certain decisions that students can't do and can't make anymore. And that shit like this won't just fly under the radar any longer. I don't know what the hell happened to those kids who wrote like the swastikas and "Niggers are the worst," but I know that if that happened today? I don't even know why they would do it in the first place, but I know that they would get some serious reprimand. And I think that movements that the administration are making that are like those ... really shape the climate of this campus too. Because they're the ones with the iron fists and students can't just get away with things anymore.

Ellen's reflection alludes to the fact that Bowdoin is being increasingly punitive with perpetrators of bias incidents, as evidenced by the drastic change in punishment from the Gangster Party to the Tequila Party. Students perceive this change as a sign that the College is becoming increasingly vigilant and is showing what is and is not acceptable through punishment, and feel that in order to have the full college experience, they need to get away from such overbearing control.

In the past three years, the number of students moving into off-campus housing has increased rapidly. In the Fall of 2014, there were only 144 students living off-campus in housing that is not controlled by the College. This number increased to 165 in the Fall of 2015 and 217 in the Fall of 2016, which is 12% of the entire student body for the 2016-17 academic year. Because the College is not as lenient as some students may wish, their solution is to move off-campus to create spaces where they can be free to do what they want and include who they want without the College being able to have any say in the inclusivity of the spaces. I argue that off-campus housing, and in particular, the housing that is associated with white, male, sports teams, is a primary example of a hypercultural

white space. The students who live in these houses have formed white spaces that have been consciously created to be incredibly exclusive and often require special invitation or social connections to access. Thus they are able to create a cultural habitus that can be associated with the quintessential Bowdoin experience.

Given the power of these spaces to shift the social culture of the campus, it is important to consider who is living in these spaces and reproducing these cultures of exclusivity. In a report sent to the student body on February 15, 2017, the Dean of Student Affairs detailed the demographic composition of the students living off-campus. It was revealed that 81% of off-campus students are white, and only 19% are students of color or international students. Additionally, 61% of residents are men, and 39% are women. Already it is evident that off-campus housing is largely white and male, which again reflects the nature of the sports teams that certain houses are associated with and the culture of these teams as well. These off-campus spaces are also sites of extreme privilege, as 72% of off-campus residents do not receive financial aid from the College. This is incredibly significant, because students who depend on grants and loans to pay for room and board on campus may not have the opportunity to pay rent to live somewhere else, skewing the composition of off-campus residents toward those who are more financially well off. Additionally, housing is guaranteed for first year and sophomore students, so it is primarily upperclassmen who choose to live off-campus when they can. Lastly, it was reported that 55% of off-campus residents participate in varsity athletics, 21% participate in Junior Varsity or Club athletics, and 24% are not associated with athletics or other campus groups. As this demographic data shows, the population living in off-campus housing is largely white men who are associated with athletic teams. It is

significant that this group has left the campus in the largest numbers because this is essentially the population that Bowdoin, as an institution, was meant to serve, and the population that enjoys the most institutional privileges. If they are moving to off-campus housing and choose to not reside at the College, then it is evident that the College is no longer providing them with something they fundamentally need to survive in the space.

Institutions become white spaces as a result of various historical and social factors, and they stay white spaces through the conscious and unconscious actions and discourses of white individuals within those spaces, who may repeatedly other people of color and remind them that they do not belong in those spaces. These off-campus houses, which have been created to push back against College policies and against the perceived policing of potentially insensitive parties, and subsequently freedom of speech by students of color, go beyond Anderson's understanding of white spaces. Hypercultural white spaces are not institutionally based. Rather they represent a separation from an institution that is working with minority students to challenge its own exclusionary history and the legacy of whiteness on campus. These efforts may be seen as being increasingly "PC," and as Janet (white, female, sophomore) astutely points out, it is not received well by some students that the College is pushing a PC culture down the throats of those who don't necessarily subscribe to such views.

If the administration is saying Bowdoin is PC and has to be, and you just don't believe in that. ... it would be annoying if someone told you, "This is what you have to believe. This is how you have to act," and I think for students that were offended, it could be a comfort to them, like "Good, the school's on my side," in theory. But if you're someone who's along for the ride and doesn't see why this is an issue, and the school keeps telling you, "You're wrong" ... I don't see that being taken well.

This observation demonstrates that while some students may feel protected by the PC culture, others do not, and actively push back against them.

Though not all students who live off-campus are athletes or are white, these houses are largely associated with many of the primarily white, male, sports teams on campus, such as football, hockey, baseball, lacrosse, rugby, and soccer, among others. The primary examples of such spaces were the former “Crack” House, which was rented by members of the men’s lacrosse team and is where Cracksgiving took place, and Garrison House, which is owned by members of the football team. While there are women’s sports houses as well, they do have the same kind of social significance that the male sports houses do, despite the fact that Bowdoin’s women’s teams are more successful. The parties that are held at the women’s houses are not as central to the party scene as the men’s houses, so while the women’s spaces may also be hypercultural white spaces, they are not as culturally significant as the men’s houses with regard to social culture at Bowdoin. These spaces are socially attractive because they hold exclusive social events that are limited to invite-only guests or guests with very close connections to the teams. Students who do not have this kind of access may not even know where these houses are located in Brunswick, let alone who occupies them.

However, word gets around about the exclusivity of these spaces. In Fall 2016, for example, the men’s lacrosse team reportedly held an exclusive party in which they mailed bracelets to what they determined to be the sixty most attractive women on campus. These bracelets were the only way to get in to this exclusive party, which was held at the off-campus lacrosse house, and was therefore not subject to the policies of the College. This is an example of the kind of exclusivity that can be propagated by these spaces,

which directly conflict with the diversity goals of the College. Additionally, this shows how closely these houses and the events that their residents host impact social life at Bowdoin. Arguably, these students believe that the status quo, which allows them to do as they please, even at the risk of harming other students and perpetuating exclusivity based on race and gender, is more preferable than the alternative, which is an inclusive, albeit regulated, space.

Due to the infamy of these spaces, students know that they cannot just go there without an invitation or a strong connection to a resident of the space, which is indicative of the heightened inclusivity of these off-campus spaces in comparison to on-campus social spaces. For example, Richard (Latino, male, sophomore) experienced the Gangster Party and the Tequila Party during his first year at Bowdoin, and describes his frustration in wanting to join different sports teams on campus but finding that they lacked diversity.

I didn't want to do sports here because I looked at the teams, I looked at the rosters, I didn't even look at the pictures. I just read the names. It was like white, white, white, white, white, Latino - where is he from? White. And then I just basically went down the roster, and then I thought about playing rugby and it's the same thing. It's a mostly white team.

Additionally, he gives insight into the conditionality of the hypercultural off-campus houses. He was close to a member of the hockey team, and so he occasionally went to their parties, but he did not go to any other athletic houses, especially the women's houses. Though women's teams also have athletic houses, they do not shape social culture as much as the men's sports team do, and so their houses do not receive the same kind of attention.

I don't go to athlete houses. I do not go to athlete houses, with the exception of the hockey team, but anybody else's house I wouldn't dare. And if it's a girl athlete house? No way in hell I'm stepping in there



because somebody is gonna try to come and step me up and I'm getting a little sick of that. I don't wanna put myself in a situation where I slip up.

Richard recognizes the potential for conflict if he puts himself in a space where he may be perceived as not belonging, or worse, as being an intruder. Rather than taking the risk, he stays away from those spaces, and sticks to spaces where he knows he won't get into any trouble. By keeping these spaces so exclusive, the white students who live in them are effectively counteracting the goals of the college by creating spaces that are especially exclusive and privileged. They are ultimately successful because they are not allowing Bowdoin to be truly inclusive. Even though these houses are off-campus, the athletes who live in them and the teams that they are on still represent Bowdoin, and they are seen as Bowdoin parties. This means that they are creating another aspect of social life that is only an option for certain students, and are doing so in a way that is free from institutional restrictions. Additionally, there is only so much the institution can do to control such deviance, which speaks to the power that students have at institutions of higher education. If these white students don't like what the institution is doing, they can find another way to resist and occupy other spaces. Ultimately, they are able to stay ahead of the institution in a way that the institution is reactive rather than proactive when attempting to address such student-driven change.

## **DISCUSSION**

Though this may not seem significant, the shift to off-campus housing is a massive response to the institution's culture surrounding parties, alcohol, housing, and inclusivity. It is very significant that from one academic year to the next, over fifty students decided to move off campus and out of institutional reach. The primary challenge that off-campus housing poses for the College is that students are going to

these houses for exclusive parties that are out of the control of the College and potentially engaging in unsafe and problematic behavior. Before these spaces opened up, College House parties were the primary aspect of social life at Bowdoin. College House parties are open to the entire campus, though the Houses themselves are still considered to be white spaces. They were typically hosted by athletic teams, campus groups, or the houses themselves, and though these parties still take place, they are not as popular as the once were primarily because the athletic teams have taken their parties off-campus. By moving off-campus, athletic houses have pulled Bowdoin's social culture off-campus with them and away from the College-owned houses. Being invited to these private spaces is a signifier of status and privilege that many students are not afforded. In particular, many students of color and other students who would challenge the white maleness of these spaces are typically not asked to participate. If they do participate, they do so knowing that they may not have full institutional support if something were to transpire in an off-campus space. Thus, these white students are creating spaces where they can reproduce and preserve a campus culture that is rooted in whiteness and exclusivity in spite of the changes taking place on campus that aim to address this very issue.

According to C. Wright Mills (1959) when people cherish a set of values and feel that these values are being threatened, they enter a state of crisis. If they feel that all of their values are being threatened, they experience panic. As traditionally white spaces, institutions of higher education typically represent a sense of safety, of belonging and acceptance, and of lack of threat for white students, who may not consciously think about the privileges that are afforded to them in such spaces because they do not need to. They are simply a fact for these students. However, they do recognize when these privileges

are being challenged, and this translates into a state of crisis in which they resist the actors who are challenging them. Kevin, a white, male junior, explains the kinds of expectations that white students have and how these expectations clash with the aims of the administration.

I think there's a group of students, of particularly privileged students, on Bowdoin's campus who hate the administration because they're shutting down their "fun." You know, they're students that have a wealth of friends at large institutions and large fraternities or large sororities, and they're exposed to that type of college experience, and they're aware of it, and they wish that Bowdoin could be a little bit more like that, and so those students may not have the best perspective of the executive office.

In particular, Kevin is referring to the College's regulations regarding alcohol and parties, which have recently been tied to a potential for incidents of racial bias after Cracksgiving, the Gangster party, and the Tequila Party. There is a degree of regulation that is imposed that challenges this freedom, and when this regulation seemingly favors an other, it is seen as being against the values of white students. For these students, their values of white privilege and unbridled "fun," which is rooted in their institutional role as the primary creators of Bowdoin's culture throughout history, have been increasingly threatened by the diversification of the college and by active and vocal students of color. It is important to recognize however, that it is a very specific subset of the Bowdoin population that creates these hypercultural spaces. After all, only 12% of the student body lives off-campus, and not all of those 217 people are white, male athletes. It is largely students who are associated with sports teams and other campus groups, and have a degree of economic privilege, who are engaging in the creation of hypercultural spaces. In other words, it is the students who have felt most threatened by the uprising and increasingly vocal students of color who are strongly pushing for institutional change.

Also, not all white students partake in these spaces. It is important to remember however, that even those white students who consider themselves allies of students of color still enjoy the same degree of privilege that the off-campus students enjoy. They would also not have the same kinds of restrictions placed upon them if they wanted to enter these spaces, because they are white and spaces like these are meant to benefit them and their place at the College.

Beyond simply challenging efforts to become inclusive, students who live off-campus have forced the administration to act and create new housing policies in order to maintain the status of the College as a residential college, to preserve the integrity of College alcohol and party policies, and to show that they can respond to this resistance. In response to the sudden surge in the popularity of off-campus housing, the College is instituting a limit on how many students can live off-campus every academic year. In January of 2017, students received an email from the Dean of Student Affairs and from the Office of Residential Life stating that in the future, no more than two hundred students would be allowed to live off-campus at once. However, it can be argued that these spaces have developed some clout on campus, and that students will continue to seek them out despite the fact that the College is attempting to exert some kind of control over them. After all, the point of these houses is that students do not have to physically live there to continue to reproduce these spaces as hypercultural spaces. As long as these spaces exist and are tied to the College through athletics and other social connections, they offer a refuge for white students against increased efforts to diversify and create a multicultural campus. This speaks greatly to the relationship that students have with the administration in shaping campus culture and institutional policies.

As long as white students can create these spaces that challenge or resist diversity, it will be difficult for institutions to adopt the comprehensive social change that they are being pushed to pursue by students of color. These hypercultural spaces promote the idea that the status quo of whiteness, exclusivity, and prejudice is more favorable than the alternative, which is an inclusive diverse space. While these spaces reproduce the same culture of exclusion and privilege, they are created in a conscious act of resistance by students who feel displeased with the institutions' handling of various incidents and their perceived persecution. What is significant about these spaces is that they have forced the administrators to act and show that the College still has power in this situation. New housing policies will attempt to limit the number of students living off-campus in the future, which shows that it is in the interest of the College to keep these students on campus. It is especially in the economic interest of the College to keep them on campus, as the rise in off-campus students represents about \$514,836 in lost revenue for the College.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

This ambiguity between students and administrators within the context of the white space begs the question of what can be done by the College to ensure that administrative actions are received and accepted by all students on route to being the diverse, multicultural institution that Bowdoin wants to be. While the aim of this thesis is not to provide solutions to the institutional problems that arose in the past year, several observations can be made. Ultimately, the history of the institution caters to a certain kind of student. Since the founding of the College, the elite, white, male has thrived at Bowdoin, and though the College has since integrated women and people of color into its staff, faculty, and student body, vestiges of this institutional culture still exist and are evident in the creation and reproduction of whiteness on campus, as well as resistance to diversification. The incidents of racial bias that I have examined in depth are by no means isolated incidents. Rather, they are a continuation of a long legacy of racial exclusion and the ill-treatment of students of color at the College despite claims that it is a progressive institution. The ways in which the institution has responded to such incidents over the past six or seven decades has perpetuated an institutional culture in which incidents of racial bias can continue to happen to this day. Diversity, as in the physical presence of people of color, has been the major tool used by administrators to combat racial tensions over time, with the illogical assumption that simply being around people of color will make students more accepting. Taking diversity at face value in this way, however, does nothing to change the nature of the institution as an exclusionary white space. This is why nigger moments, as Anderson (2012) calls them, have continued to happen and the students of color are repeatedly forced to contend with insensitive incidents.

Though one would think that the administration is the entity most capable of creating the kind of institutional change that is needed to combat the whiteness of the space, I suggest that it is actually students, through their resistance, who have played the major role in shaping the institutional culture over time. Student demonstrations at colleges and universities around the country have shed light on the amount of institutional power that students have. At Mizzou, for example, students got the University President to resign after weeks of demonstrations, a hunger strike, and football boycott that would have cost the school \$1 million. Though Mizzou was an extreme case, its narrative, like those of other institutions, has been one sided. Resistant students have been portrayed as either one large, united front or as angry students of color demanding to be coddled and listened to despite the best interest of their institutions. The reality, which I have sought to portray through the examination of Bowdoin College as a case in point, is that student resistance is a powerful and multi-faceted tool for institutional change that has been deeply mischaracterized. It is a phenomenon in which different institutional actors are engaged in a power struggle over the culture of an institution. While some want to maintain the status quo of the past two-hundred years, others still want to push for change on all fronts, with administrators forced to negotiate between the interests of both sides as well as the pressures being exerted upon them by external actors, such as trustees, donors, and the media.

Despite the institutional power that students have been proven to have, they still perceive administrators as having the greatest ability to shape a campus' culture around race and inclusivity. Many students identify the power of the administration to say what is and is not acceptable at Bowdoin as being a primary factor in shaping the culture of the

campus, and promoting values of inclusivity, open dialogue, and free-speech. Though they are perceived as having this power, the administration is ultimately seen by students on both sides of the recent issues as being ineffective because they have been unable to make decisions that please both groups. As Samantha, a sophomore student of color, explains, they are perpetually seen as being in the wrong.

They are definitely perceived as the bad people because it's easy to see them as the bad people. From all sides. People who were saying the tequila party was absolutely not okay, that it shouldn't have happened. ... And from the people who were like, "That wasn't bad at all." I think both of those parties were angry at the administration. [The administration] was just like, "We're gonna try to do the best we can," but that was an example of them totally getting caught in the crossfire of different wants from different students.

This narrative of the administration being ineffective has led to several negative perceptions by students, who have come to believe that 1) the administration and the College are hypercritical, 2) they are scared to actually engage these issues, and 3) they are not proactive, but reactive. These portrayals of the administration are not consistent with the perception that they have the power to shape institutional culture. It seems as though the administration will be heavily criticized regardless of what policies they enact and what kind of culture they seem to want to create. I argue that this is primarily because the institution treats the student body as one homogenous and highly progressive group of people. Nonetheless, it has become increasingly evident that when it comes to issues of racism on campus, there are different constituencies of students within the student body that desire different things from the administration. It is within this context that student resistance needs to be understood.

There is a misunderstanding between what different student groups and administrators see as the best course of action for fixing the College's racial tension and



the recurring bias incidents. If Bowdoin naturally caters to the majority, it makes sense that this majority will feel threatened and shut out when minority students speak up and want their needs addressed. The institution and those that it was created for are being told to include those that it is naturally and purposefully designed to exclude, and this is where the tension is created. If Bowdoin is catering to a minority, then it isn't catering to the majority, and this disrupts the historical legacy of the institution. White students, on the other hand, disrupt efforts to diversify when they feel that they are being threatened by institutional changes that favor underrepresented groups. As a result of these different interests, the institution can never be completely diverse or completely exclusive, and seems to be stuck in a push-pull relationship with the interests of different students.

Underrepresented students have continuously pushed for inclusive, safe spaces where they can share their culture and their experiences. The creation of these non-white, male spaces, as well as academic departments and staff positions that aim to accommodate the presence of these students at the College, has indeed challenged the normative whiteness of the campus. However, white students have also been a resistant force over time, and have challenged the creation of these spaces and the apparent shift of the College away from a culture of whiteness and privilege to a multicultural, inclusive campus culture. Incidents of racial bias and the creation of hypercultural white spaces have been the two main ways in which white students have resisted the changes to the institutional culture. Incidents of racial bias constantly remind students of color that despite all they have achieved and despite their presence at the College, they are not welcome. These incidents constantly reinforce for these students that the College is a white space in which they do not belong. Hypercultural spaces are also exclusive spaces,

though they are created in resistance to institutional regulations around alcohol consumption and parties, as well as increased policing of parties and other events by students of color and by administrators, who seek to prevent more instances of cultural appropriation and racial insensitivity. Ultimately these spaces, which are primarily occupied by privileged, white, male athletes, reproduce the status quo of whiteness and have challenged the College to act in order to prevent the increased proliferation of these spaces, which have pulled the social culture of the College away from the campus and out of institutional control.

Recent student movements over racial insensitivity on their campuses are also indicative of an ongoing national dialogue about racial relations in the United States both on college campuses and across the country as well. In particular, the upraise in student activism has occurred in conjunction with the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which was formed in response to the large number of police incidents ending in the death of young black men. The incidents on college campuses have garnered a lot of attention because of the parallels between the anti-police brutality protests with the student protests in response to racism and bias incidents. Only months before the uproar at the University of Missouri, the shooting of Michael Brown had occurred only miles away at Ferguson, Missouri. This event and others like it were followed by large demonstrations and the organization of black communities in cities around the country. These protests are evidence of the increasing tensions between the black community and white systems of justice and power. They also show that racial tensions are becoming increasingly more salient in contemporary America, despite the fact that the country is supposedly entering a post-racial state. The theory that a post-racial state has emerged takes root in the belief

that the Civil Rights Movement fixed all the segregation, racism, and inequality of the early to mid-twentieth century (Bonilla-Silva 2006). However, the fact that students of color still face many of the same issues that students faced then, including marginalization, overt racial prejudice, inattentive institutional leadership, and a lack of representation within these institutions, suggests that this is not the case. Just as instances of police brutality have led to wide-spread demonstrations by black communities around the country, student movements are forcing well-known and traditionally white institutions to not only acknowledge that race relations are not as positive as they seem, but also take action and publically distance themselves from the perpetrators of racist actions.

Future research should expand this work beyond the small, private liberal arts college and examine if and how the relations explored in this research are present at different kinds of institutions. In particular, the histories of other institutions should be examined closely. Looking at Bowdoin's history with students of color and racial conflict helped contextualize many of the incidents that have happened recently, and it provided organizational context for the ways in which the College has responded and acted after such incidents. Another way in which this research can be expanded is to sample a larger and more representative sample in order to gather a larger collection of opinions and experiences. The sample that was gathered was limited by time and location, and while it proved useful for the context of this work, it is not fully representative of Bowdoin's student body. In particular, it may be interesting to interview more white students in order to get a fuller picture of the variety of experiences within the student body. An archival limitation to this work was that I was denied access to files and documents from the

Office of the Dean of Student Affairs, which would have been integral to piecing together Bowdoin's history and understanding incidents of racial bias to a fuller extent, especially at the end of the twentieth century. Thus, archival research relied primarily on articles from *The Bowdoin Orient* and from archives that were readily accessible to the public. Lastly, it would be beneficial to explore the role of social media, Yik Yak and Facebook in particular, in fostering divisive campus attitudes on campus. Yik Yak was an important vehicle for the transmission of information between students, and was even used by the administration to keep tabs on shifting tensions on campus. This presents difficulties of course, due to Yik Yak being an anonymous platform, but it may present an interesting lens into exploring white spaces beyond just their physical iterations.

As Bowdoin looks to the future after a turbulent year of racial incidents, the power struggle between students and administrators over the creation of campus culture and the role of diversity and inclusivity has stayed alive and well. It is unclear whether there is anything the institution can do to change the attitudes of students who feel challenged by the push away from whiteness, or to make underrepresented students feel completely included in a space that was traditionally meant to exclude them. It is also unclear whether student actions are enough to create total institutional overhaul. At best, the solution can be found at some combination of these two approaches. In the past year, Bowdoin has taken important steps to promote inclusion and effective dialogue among students and the institution, and President Rose in particular has been lauded by many for taking large steps toward opening the College to dialogue about difference. Other institutions, such as Georgetown University, Princeton University, and Columbia University have taken similar initial steps by acknowledging and discussing their pasts

and their involvement with slavery and the institutional exclusion of people of color. Though the actions of these individual institutions are commendable, this is a national issue, and large scale commitment to solving these problems and preventing another Mizzou have not been addressed adequately. However, the effort of these institutions has successfully started the kinds of conversations needed at institutions of higher education to create truly effective change in welcoming underrepresented students.

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Appendix A: Figures

**Figure 1.** The advertisement placed in *Black Enterprise Magazine's* "Carvers of Opportunity" issue in February, 1988.



In 1826,  
Bowdoin  
College  
graduated  
its first  
Afro-American:  
*John Brown Russworm.*

How many colleges can  
point to such a long-standing  
commitment to black  
Americans?

For over 150 years the  
tradition has continued. Be a  
part of the next 150 at  
Bowdoin—one of the finest  
colleges in America.

Write to us.

Admissions Office  
Box 11  
Bowdoin College  
Brunswick ME 04011

**Figure 2.** Bowdoin College: Black Alumni, Graduates per corresponding year. Years not listed indicate zero black graduates. Data compiled by two different students as part of research projects on race at Bowdoin.

Year	Number of Graduates
1826	0
1910	1
1917	2
1926	1
1930	1
1935	1
1937	1
1940	1
1941	1
1942	1
1945	1
1947	1
1948	1
1949	1
1954	1
1955	1
1960	1
1961	1
1962	3
1963	1
1965	1
1966	2
1967	4
1968	3
1969	7
1970	3
1971	7
1972	12
1973	28
1974	22
1975	20
1976	21
1977	16
1978	14
1979	12
1980	5
1981	6
1982	10

**Figure 3.** Fall semester students by race, 1995 to 2009. Source: *Bowdoin College Fact Book 2009-10*.

