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Dear President Adams:

Congratulations on your appointment as President of Colby College. I trust that you have found the transition to both Maine and Colby a pleasant experience.

I recall that during the presidential search, students, staff and faculty all indicated "diversity" as a primary and ongoing concern in the community. More specifically, recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color was posed as a central challenge for the new president-elect. I have heard from a number of faculty that, indeed, you have placed educational equity at the forefront of your vision for the College. In the spirit of solidarity on this matter, I wish to share my experiences as a faculty member of color at Colby, hoping that it provides some insight to the common and everyday struggles of what it means to be a "minority" on campus. I also write to clarify the ways in which these struggles ultimately informed my decision to resign my position as Assistant Professor in the Program in Education and Human Development (1995-2000). Though I believe that my experience is typical, I do not claim it to be universal. In other words, while I recognize that the "community of color" is a complex and widely divergent polity, I also recognize that institutional forces create a common ground of struggle that links our experiences.

Immediately upon my arrival to Colby, I was apprised of the "revolving door" of faculty of color within the institution. Several explanations were offered for this phenomenon, each serving different aspects of institutional ideology. I heard that "they" leave because they long for the city and cannot adapt to the rural, predominantly white culture of Maine. I heard that "they" leave before coming up for tenure because ultimately affirmative action brings in inferior candidates who ultimately cannot "cut it" at Colby. Ironically, I also heard that "they" leave because Colby cannot compete with other, more elite, institutions that ultimately lure away prize minority candidates. Finally, I heard that "they" leave because they seek more "diverse" environments than that typically found at a New England liberal arts college. In an effort to address the obvious lack of analysis surrounding the issue of minority faculty retention, I write this letter to clarify my own reasons for leaving and to ensure that my departure does not get conscripted into the prevailing institutional mythology.

For the record, I did not leave Colby because I could not adapt to Maine's rural climate. In fact, Maine was one of the primary reasons I chose Colby and will be among those I miss the most. As far as my tenure-potential at Colby, I believe my record to be on par with other faculty candidates. Like many minority faculty, I came to Colby ABD. However, since the completion of my dissertation (spring, 1997) I have published several articles, all in reputable journals, including *The Harvard Educational Review*, and have completed the draft of a book manuscript. (Incidentally, all of my published work is based on new research and not derived from my dissertation and my areas of research and expertise are multicultural education, critical pedagogy, and American Indian education.) I have also recently been awarded a post-doctoral fellowship from the Ford Foundation; an award given to "those individuals who show the greatest promise for future achievement in basic research and academic scholarship on college

and university campuses" (National Research Council, 2000). Finally, upon completion of this Fellowship, I will join the faculty at Connecticut College - another New England liberal arts college - which did not "lure" me away with material promises but, rather, with progressive policy and a demonstrated record of structural support for both students and faculty of color.

Now that I have clarified the reasons that I *did not* leave Colby, I wish to articulate the reasons why I *did* leave. What follows is a description of particular aspects of the social and political climate at Colby that worked to cultivate feelings of "normalcy" and superiority among the Whitestream [Adapting from the feminist notion of "malestream," Denis (1997) defines Whitestream as the idea that while American society is not white in socio-demographic terms, it remains principally and fundamentally structured on the basis of the Anglo-European, white experience.] and to diffuse alienation and oppression among students and faculty of color. Though specific examples of injustice are provided, I want to be clear that no one-single or set of examples sufficiently characterizes the overall climate of racial discord. In other words, the reality of the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts.

1. The Liberal Zeitgeist:

It is common knowledge that President Cotter came of political age in the 1960's and 1970's, honing his legal acuity during a time when the lines of racism and discrimination were explicitly drawn. Not so coincidentally, this was also the time when multicultural education and diversity initiatives first appeared on the contested terrain of higher education. As someone who worked with President Cotter on several projects aimed at improving the racial climate (e.g. Task Force on Institutional Racism, Pugh Center Advisory Committee, Campus Community Committee) it did not appear to me that his vision of "diversity" and multicultural education ever grew much beyond these neo-liberal conceptions. To be clear, the 1960's liberal rhetoric of "integration" and "inclusion" emanated from a belief that individuals from diverse race, class, and gender groups shared a natural equality and intellectual sameness, allowing different people to compete equally for resources in a capitalist economy (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; McLaren, 1994). In spite of its good intentions, however, it is widely acknowledged that while liberal multiculturalism spoke the language of diversity, it tacitly maintained Whitestream culture as the nonn of reference.

Though President Cotter expanded upon the liberal notion of "sameness" to include an appreciation of pluralism, he also made it clear, in several public forums, that "diversity" was pursued as a means of "enrichment," not of achieving equity. Such an attitude not only served to exoticize difference but to position minority students (exotics) in service to majority students (consumers of exoticism). In other words, the administration [When referring to "the administration" I want to be clear that I am referring to those specific individuals who comprise "Senior Staff," as well as the entire Dean of Students Office Staff. Also, I feel compelled to exempt Dean of Faculty, Ed Yehterian from this otherwise blanket statement. Though I only had the pleasure of working with Dean Yehterian for one year, I greatly appreciated his earnest efforts to remain open-minded, to listen, and to provide leadership in matters of race and racism on campus.] cultivated an atmosphere of cultural tourism in which white students were invited to experience how "they" celebrated holidays, how "they" worshiped, without ever problematizing the Whitestream gaze. In this sense, while Colby may have achieved greater parity in matters of symbolic representation, it did so only as greater disparity grew in terms of the distribution of power. Lost in the liberal frenzy to teach ethnic "pride" and "celebrate" diversity, was the ever-critical distinction between psychological affirmation and political empowerment. Ultimately, the administration employed multicultural rhetoric as a means of imposing a false harmony and

to direct attention away from the imperial legacy of racism and social injustice that not only undergirds colleges such as Colby but the governing institutions of the United States.

I believe the above ideology provided the foundation for several oppressive policies and specious practices at Colby, the sum of which, helped fuel my decision to resign. To cite a few examples:

- While the administration measured its own "success" in terms of minority student enrollment (see Colby Magazine, summer 2000) it did not see fit to keep retention records.
- Students of color often fell victim to the phenomenon of diminishing aid or the practice of luring "recruits" with promises of ample funding, only to diminish those funds with each successive year. This practice led many students to either take on extra jobs or to drop out - both statistics not kept by the College. Incidentally, Financial Aid was the last category to meet its goal in the recent Capital Campaign - seemingly indicative of the College's priorities.
- The Admissions Office often conflated the categories of international and domestic "minority" students, demonstrating a fundamental lack of understanding of what it means to be a member of a historically oppressed and under-represented group in the United States. This practice also indicates that the College is less committed to extending equality of opportunity than to a "liberal" celebration of "diversity."
- The administration's choice to move away from "need blind" admissions continues to impact students from low SES families as well as to disproportionately affect students of color.
- Bates and Bowdoin have both recently received national acclaim (*Time*, September, 2000) for moving away from requiring students to report SAT scores, recognizing that they "discourage applications from minority and other students who are qualified but simply don't test well" (*Time*, September, 2000). *Time* reports that studies of schools that have dropped the SAT reveal no significant difference in overall student performance (measured by GRA) between reporters and non-reporters. Bates College reports that after it stopped requiring the SAT, minority applications doubled. Though this issue has been raised several times at Colby, the administration continues to require students to report SAT scores and to speak publicly of these scores as an indicator of their increasing selectivity."
- At Colby, students of color who reported race-related grievances to the Dean of Students Office were, as a matter of unwritten policy, referred for psychological counseling - often without consent. This attitude not only literally psychologizes the "problem" of racism but also places the burden of responsibility on the student to change (read: assimilate) while releasing the institution from culpability.
- Despite public misgivings about the poor rates of minority faculty retention and student recruitment, the administration chose not to hire a full-time affirmative action officer; one with specialized knowledge, training, and expertise in the area.

Such policies and practices, fueled by liberal multiculturalism, demonstrate that while great efforts were made to "include" students and faculty of color, little effort was expended to create a fair and just workplace and equitable educational environment.

2. Whiteness and its Discontents:

In its efforts to "promote diversity" the Colby administration not only exoticized difference but also normalized whiteness, creating an invisible yet empowering atmosphere for the already privileged. McLaren (1995) argues that unless we, "give white students a sense of their own

identity as an emergent ethnicity-we naturalize whiteness as a cultural marker against which otherness is defined" (p. 50). He furthermore argues that "if the goal is to defeat racism and achieve educational equity, we need to move away from a singular focus on diversity and inclusion, and give significant attention to the question of whiteness" - whiteness as race, as privilege, and as social construction. Michelle Fine similarly argues that we (scholars) need to "avert our gaze from the 'inequities' produced through 'colors' and turn, instead, to the 'merit' that accumulates within the hue of 'whiteness'" (Fine, 1997).

The forces of whiteness came to define Colby, where students and faculty of color were "invited" to participate in the institution, but only came to occupy what Chalmers refers to as "permanent guest status." She states, "although warmly welcomed, people of color remain outsiders, expendable and never really able to influence the core of the institution - guests come and go without much consequence" (Chalmers, 1997). In fact, students of color recently had their "permanent guest status" institutionalized by the Student Government Association (SGA, spring 1999) who voted to deny the proposed minority representative the right to vote, determining that they only be allowed to "sit-in" as a "guest" of the SGA. This act alone, demonstrates the power and privileges of whiteness at Colby and typifies Frankenburg's (1993) description of whiteness as "a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced as well as intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination."

Moreover, it is important to note that whiteness transcends the fact of simply being "white" to include a "white-skin privilege politics" or the practice of actively partaking in the privileges of being white in U.S. society (McIntosh, 1989). Ignatiev and Garvey, editors of the journal *Race Traitor*, maintain that people are "not favored socially because they are white; rather they are defined as "white" because they are favored" (1996). This important distinction explains the forces set in motion when white individuals choose to fight alongside people of color. The authors maintain that such individuals are ultimately viewed as "race traitors" or defectors from the ranks of whiteness; daring to analyze the forces that hold it together and collectively working to disrupt them (Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996). This deftly describes the experience of politically active white students and faculty at Colby who oftentimes endured public reprimand and risked political marginalization - the standard penalties for fighting for racial justice and educational equity.

The largely unchecked climate of white privilege and "whiteness" at Colby ripened the conditions for a number of transgressions exacted against all those working to dismantle its power, especially students and faculty of color. The omnipresence of this climate also influenced my decision to resign. To cite a few examples:

- Whenever issues concerning racism were brought to the attention of the administration, the invariable response was that change was not possible without the help (read: labor) of students and faculty of color. Such a response not only created untenable labor conditions but also freed the administration from shouldering the responsibility for social change.
- The Colby *Echo*, which during my tenure failed to retain a student of color on staff, often served as the voice and forum of majority students and as a source of frustration and disempowerment for students of color. Though students of color were always "invited" to respond to the views of the newspaper (via editorial letters) such an attitude placed an untenable burden on students of color, whose time and labor was already overextended, if not, overexploited by the institution. The administration's refusal to intervene on any level on behalf of the students of color, and the President's public apologies on behalf of the *Echo* staff, served to further empower the already privileged voices of majority students.

- In an open meeting (May, 1999) shortly after the student take-over of the Presidents office (spring, 1999) President Cotter chastised a student for failing to inform him of the meaning of institutional racism. [It should be noted that prior to this meeting President Cotter corresponded with at least one faculty member who provided him with a definition of the term "institutional racism" and a list of scholarly references.] He said, "I don't know what that term means. I asked last year for someone to give me the definition of institutional racism and I'm still waiting." Though one would expect a civil rights lawyer to have come across the term, the President clearly perceived it to be the students' job to educate him and not his responsibility to educate himself.
- Students often reported that when issues were raised with professors (e.g. regarding the lack of attention to race in either course curriculum or class discussion) that professors often elicited the "help" of the student in rectifying the situation. Again, while the professor may have perceived his or her actions to be empowering, they ultimately contributed to a sense among students of color that it was their responsibility to educate whites on campus. Though many students initially welcomed the "opportunity," most eventually succumbed to the cumulative effects of the overwhelming demands on their time and labor-demands not otherwise placed on white students.
- The high profile racial harassment case initiated by a student against the College (fall, 1998) is, perhaps, the quintessential example of the way in which the power and privilege of whiteness at Colby works to disempower and disenfranchise students of color.

3. "The Manufacture of Consent":

Whenever the administration *did* play an active role in bringing about change, it tended to do so in a manner reflective of Noam Chomsky's notion of the "manufacture of consent." According to Chomsky, the "manufacture of consent" is a tactic employed to keep power in the hands of the elite class who, in turn, managed the masses through sophisticated forms of public relations. Chomsky proclaims that, in this context, the powerful: (1) provide the people with the means of ratifying decisions that have already been made; (2) limit the means by which the people can organize; and, (3) find ways to engineer decision making while maintaining the appearance that the people are in control. The politics of "manufactured consent" imposed a procedural democracy on the Colby polity, forcing several undesired changes in institutional structure. The ensuing sense of disempowerment and disenfranchisement greatly contributed to my decision to resign. To cite a few examples:

- Though the Pugh Center is often upheld as a prime example of students of color working together with the administration, careful perusal of historical documents indicates that while students consented to the construction of the Center, it was, in effect, their only option. Their initial demand--multicultural housing [The proposed Multicultural House was to be inclusive, open to all students interested in living in a multicultural environment. It should also be noted that voting among the student body at Colby is done at the dorm level. In the current system, students of color are widely dispersed and, thus, never comprise a voting majority. In addition to providing a housing option desired by some students of color, the more important point, is that a Multicultural House would have politically enfranchised the currently disenfranchised.]--was dismissed as being too divisive and for presenting a potential violation of College policy which forbid "special interest housing." Since its construction, the Pugh Center has been co-opted as an "inclusive" space for all students. In fact, students giving campus tours are explicitly instructed not to refer to the Center as the multicultural center. Though "inclusivity" is a

laudable project, the initial protest launched by Students of Color United for Change was spirited by a need for their own institutional space, a space that could serve as a basis for building community and political empowerment.

- The Senior Housing Complex was built despite protests by students of color that the complex, in its *exclusivity*, had the potential to be divisive and that it stood in violation of college policy against "special interest housing."
- Though students approved of establishing the position of Assistant Dean of Multicultural Affairs (as part of the negotiations after the protest by Students of Color United for Change) the expectation was that it would be structured as an autonomous entity - to be filled by an independent, institutional advocate for students of color. Instead, the position was created as a Dean-ship - one closely monitored by the Presidents Office. In addition, though students were "included" and asked to participate in the hiring process, the individual hired was not one recommended by the students, but rather, chosen by the President. Though the students protested both the process and the choice (via petition), the decision remained intact.
- After the student take-over of the Presidents Office in the spring of 1999, students worked to establish a Task Force on Institutional Racism. The President, in both public discussion and published documents, continually referred to this Task Force as the Task Force on Racial Concerns; a rather explicit attempt to both dismiss student reality as well as rewrite institutional history.

It is the cumulative effects of the administrations efforts to deny the daily reality of racism on campus, to impose a false harmony, to dismiss the saliency of the power and privileges of Whiteness, and to govern through "manufactured consent" that led to my resignation at Colby. As a faculty member I was over-labored and ultimately exhausted by a system that failed to provide sustained, institutional support for liberatory pedagogical practices that worked to defeat racism, to insist upon the critical analysis of whiteness, and to examine the intersecting relations of domination. As a faculty resident and student advocate, I shared the exasperation of students of color who worked to resist their "permanent guest status" and struggled daily to gain equitable representation on a campus defined by whiteness. While my concerns appear to relate exclusively to students and faculty of color, I believe that greater understanding of race and racism works to raise the general level of discourse for all participants, as well as to elevate the overall intellectual climate of the institution.

The struggle for equity and social justice is undoubtedly a complex and arduous process. Indeed, democracy is designed to be a never-ending project and continuous pursuit. Thus, while I did not expect to find academic paradise at Colby, I did expect to find an institution of higher learning, one as organic and transformative as the democracy within it is situated. I expected to find an institution as interested in creating an intellectual climate as it was to building "Camp Colby," the Club-Med of liberal arts colleges. I expected to find an institution as committed to struggling for social justice and racial equity as it was to marketing commodified images of Colby "others" and to staging multicultural performances of racial harmony. Finally, I expected to find an institution as interested in working to retain students and faculty of color as it was in recruiting them.

I wish to be clear that, in spite of the above, my Colby experience had both merit and value. In fact, as the school year gets underway, I find myself reflecting on the more positive aspects of my experience. I am deeply appreciative of the privileges that were afforded me as a scholar at an institution with ample and efficient distribution of faculty resources and services. I was similarly privileged to work with faculty colleagues who not only supported my work, but also

engaged in their own efforts to create an equitable workplace and just environment that respects, and serves students of color. [For example, during my sabbatical year (1999) it was the tireless efforts of my students and colleagues that resulted in the establishment of the new Committee on Multicultural Affairs and the Committee on Race and Racism; both significant and long overdue changes in institutional structure. Moreover, it is significant to note that these changes did not come about through administrative leadership but rather stand as the products of countless hours of labor, sustained acts of resistance, and courageous feats of transgression.] Most of all, I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Colby students who, through their own perseverance and intellectual fortitude, reinvigorated my faith in the political project.

As the new President of Colby College, I encourage you to investigate for yourself the history of racial unrest at Colby, especially as it relates to the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. If one of the goals of your administration is to stop the revolving door of students, staff and faculty of color, careful analysis of the ways in which institutional structure and policy work to deeply compromise the livelihood of this constituency will need to ensue. Finally, as true leadership requires great moral courage, I wish you well in your endeavors and great resolve in your journey.

Sincerely,

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