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It's Not Black and White: An Empirical Study of the 2015-2016 U.S. College Protests

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CLAREMONT MCKENNA COLLEGE

**It's Not Black and White:
An Empirical Study of the 2015-2016 U.S. College Protests**

submitted to

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and

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by

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for

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ABSTRACT

Beginning in October 2015, student protests erupted at many U.S. colleges and universities. This wave of demonstrations prompted an ongoing national debate over the following question: what caused this activism? Leveraging existing theoretical explanations, this paper attempts to answer this question through an empirical study of the 73 most prominent college protests from October 2015 to April 2016. I use an original data set with information collected from *U.S. News and World Report* to determine what factors at *these* 73 schools were most predictive of the protests.

My findings strongly suggest that the probability of a protest increases at larger, more selective institutions. I also find evidence against the dominant argument that the marginalization of minority students exclusively caused this activism. Using my empirical results, this paper presents a new theoretical explanation for the 2015-2016 protests. I argue that racial tensions sparked the first demonstration. However, as the protests spread to other campuses, they were driven less by racial grievances and more by a pervasive culture of political correctness. This paper concludes by applying this new theoretical framework to the budding wave of 2017 protests.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Beginning in October 2015, student protests erupted across U.S. colleges and universities. These protests began at the University of Missouri, and throughout the next seven months, this activism spread to 73 American institutions. The collective priority of these institutions was immediately ending the alleged institutional racism facing many black students.¹ To fight this “anti-blackness,” protesting schools demanded that their administrations address the systematic underrepresentation of black students and faculty at their respective colleges. These protestors also collectively criticized the lack of institutional funding and resources to support black college students against direct and indirect racism. Despite these common objectives, the 73 schools also had specific grievances and demands. Protestors at the University of the Princeton, for example, insisted that the school re-name its Woodrow Wilson School of Public Policy since its namesake supported segregationist policies during his tenure as the institution’s president.²

These campus protests prompted an ongoing national debate over the cause of the demonstrations. However, to the best of my knowledge, the existing discourse on the 2015-16 protests does not include an empirical study of the factors motivating this activism. This paper will begin filling that scholastic gap by empirically answering two key questions. First, why did the protests happen on *these* 73 college campuses? And second, were there certain similarities in these universities’ size, selectivity, or

¹ “Our Demands,” Black Liberation Collective, <http://www.blackliberationcollective.org/our-demands/>.

² Jack Dickey, The Revolution on America’s Campuses, *Time*, May 31, 2016, <http://time.com/4347099/college-campus-protests/>.

demographics, and if so, which factors were most predicative of a protest developing at a given school? Simply put, this paper seeks to provide the first empirical analysis of the 2015-16 protests in order to explain the main drivers behind these insurgencies.

Social theorists have developed three main frameworks to explain this rise of campus activism. The first theoretical argument, proposed by many left-leaning academic studies, newspapers and magazines, is the marginalization theory. This argument purports that over the last decade, as the percent of minority students at a given college has either stagnated or declined, many of these students have experienced more racially motivated repression. This racism has often taken the form of microaggressions or “small actions or word choices that seem on their face to have no malicious intent but that are thought of as a kind of violence nonetheless.”³ To fight this marginalization, students reacted in 2015-16 in waves of bitter protests.

The second explanation is the mismatch theory. Proposed by social theorists Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor, this framework argues that the development of affirmative action and the resulting pressure for colleges to admit an increasingly diverse student body has increased the number of minority students at selective universities. Crucially, to meet this diversity objective, several colleges have lowered their academic standards for many African American applicants.⁴ This “mismatch” in the academic profiles of white and black students has often left the latter group both academically and socially underprepared to succeed in the college setting. These academic challenges have

³ Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff, “The Coddling of the American Mind,” *The Atlantic*, September 2015.

⁴ Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor Jr., *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It's Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won't Admit It* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 99.

caused many black students immense frustration and have fostered their resentment towards higher achieving white students. These sentiments accumulated overtime and finally erupted in the 2015-16 protests.⁵

The third main theoretical argument is Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning's victimization theory. These social theorists argue that at highly elite institutions, a victim culture has developed where many minority students present themselves as victims of both overt racism and more unintentional microaggressive behavior. In addition to this intolerance of insults, an equally salient feature of this culture is the victims' dependence on third party authorities to police against interpersonal offenses.⁶ Keenly aware of highly selective colleges' prioritization of minority students' concerns, many students in these communities took advantage of this administrative focus and emphasized their legitimate and exaggerated grievances.⁷ To highlight their status as a "victim" and thus obtain sympathy and support from both students and administrators, self-proclaimed marginalized students began the 2015-16 protests.⁸

After identifying these three frameworks, I used the *U.S. News and World Report's* lists for "Best National Universities" and "Best Liberal Arts Colleges" to create a data set with 527 institutions. Then, I assigned a testable variable to each of the three theories to determine whether, and to what magnitude, each framework gave rise to the protests. To test Campbell and Manning's victimization theory, I included a variable measuring the colleges' selectivity levels as the authors argued that the victim culture that

⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁶ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures," *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 9.

⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁸ Ibid., 32.

caused the protests is most pronounced at the nation's most elite schools. For the marginalization theory, the probability of a protest is a function of the percent of minority students at a given college. Thus, I created a diversity variable that looks at the percentage of African American students in each college's fall 2015 freshmen class. With regards to the mismatch theory, I created a third affirmative action variable that distinguished between schools unconstrained in using affirmative action policies in their admission processes (i.e. private colleges and public institutions in states with no bans on affirmative action) and colleges that were constrained in their application of affirmative action (i.e. public schools in states with bans).

Additionally, I added a size variable to assess whether the number of undergraduates at a particular school affected the college's protest likelihood. The paper coded all 527 colleges as either small (less than 5,000 undergraduates), medium (between 5,000 and 15,000 undergraduates) and large (more than 15,000 undergraduates). The theoretical justification for evaluating the size of an institution to predict its protest probability centers on Doug McAdam's political process model. McAdam's model describes the catalysts behind social movements, but his theory is general enough to still be potentially relevant for explaining the 2015-16 protests. His theory argues that strong organization within the aggrieved community and extensive networks with groups outside the community are imperative for mobilizing a movement base.⁹ Crucially, this internal organization and these external networks allow for more interactions with potential recruits. According to McAdam, it is this contact with the movement that most

⁹ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 44.

consistently motivates participation.¹⁰ Given that small colleges typically have more connected, intimate social environments, McAdam's model implies that minorities at smaller schools, compared to those at larger universities, may have more interactions with protesting students. Because of this contact, minorities at small schools can more easily recruit new protestors. Thus, the political process model suggests that the probability of a protest is higher at smaller colleges than at larger institutions.

After collecting observations on these four variables for 527 schools, I ran multiple linear regressions to test the four theories. The regression results showed that the diversity and affirmative action variables were statistically insignificant, providing empirical evidence against both the marginalization and mismatch theories. The size and selectivity variables, however, were statistically significant, both at a confidence level of .001 ($p < .001$). As the institution's size increases from a small school (less than 5,000 students) to a medium sized school (between 5,000 and 15,000 students), the likelihood of a protest increases 7.2 percent, holding all other variables at their mean. Moving from a medium sized school to a large institution (more than 15,000 students) increases the probability of a protest by another 7.2 percent. This finding is inconsistent with the political process model's prediction that protests should be more likely at smaller schools. As a result of this inconsistency, the paper argues that simple probability rules, namely that larger schools have more people and thus a higher chance of enrolling student activists, offer a better explanation than McAdam's model for the effect of college size on protest probability. With regards to the selectivity variable, compared to a less selective institution, the probability of a protest increases 15.4 percent at a selective

¹⁰ Ibid.

school and 30.8 percent at a highly selective college. This result corroborates the victimization theory, suggesting that at the nation's most selective colleges, there is evidence of a victim culture that motivated the 2015-16 protests.

My results empirically support the victimization and political process theories and challenge the marginalization and affirmative action arguments. Given the statistical insignificance of the two theories involving race issues and dynamics, my paper challenges the popular idea that these protests were exclusively racially motivated. Instead, leveraging the statistical significance of the selectivity variable, this paper provides a more nuanced cultural explanation for this student activism. That is, a college's selectivity level, not its on-campus race relations, more closely predicted the rise of a protest.

Crucially, the paper acknowledges that this preliminary conclusion does not fully explain the distinct case of the University of Missouri. This school was the site of the first and arguably most contentious protest, yet it is not a highly selective college. To address this empirical puzzle, this paper contends that national racial events in close proximity to Missouri, namely the Michael Brown shooting in Ferguson, Missouri and the resulting Black Lives Matter Movement, sparked the Missouri protest. Thus, I argue that race played a role in the rise of Missouri's protest, but, importantly, it was tense race-relations *outside* the campus, rather than racial injustices *inside* the college setting, that bred this initial activism. Combining this race-related proximity hypothesis with the results of my selectivity variable, I propose a more comprehensive explanation for the 2015-16 protests: there was racial spark behind the Missouri demonstration, but the spread of these protests to the other 72 colleges was driven less by racial grievances and more by

cultural factors. That is, at highly selective colleges, the widespread culture of political correctness, perpetuated by administrative deference to many minority students' demands, prompted this activism.

CHAPTER 2: THE PROTESTING COLLEGES

73 U.S. colleges and universities experienced student protests from October 2015 to April 2016. Amongst these protesting institutions, the dominant characteristics were as follows: large in size with 15,000 or more undergraduates (43.8 percent of schools), selective (63.0 percent), low diversity with African Americans representing between zero and six percent of the 2015 freshman undergraduate class (45.2 percent) and unconstrained (private schools or public colleges in states with no bans on affirmative action) (86.3 percent). The full table presenting the summary statistics of these 73 colleges is below:

Summary Statistics of the 73 Protesting Colleges	
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Results</u>
Size	32 = large (43.8%) 19 = medium (26.0%) 22 = small (30.1%)
Selectivity	24 = most selective (32.9%) 46 = selective (63.0%) 3 = less selective (4.1%)
Diversity Ranking	13 = high diversity (17.8%) 27 = medium diversity (37.0%) 33 = low diversity (45.2%)
Affirmative Action	63 = unconstrained (86.3%) 10 = constrained (13.7%)

Of these 73 colleges, editors Alia Wong and Adrienne Green at *The Atlantic* magazine focused on nine universities – University of Missouri, University of Cincinnati, Ithaca College, Claremont McKenna College, Amherst College, Yale University, Brown University, Princeton University, and Harvard University, as these institutions had the most intense, highest profile protests.¹¹ Wong and Green provided detailed descriptions of each demonstration (see appendix), creating a clear timeline of this period of heightened student activism.¹² In these summaries, the editors highlight commonalities in the grievances of students at these nine schools. Protesting minorities shared complaints about their schools’ allegedly racist environments, unresponsive administrations, and underrepresentation of black students and faculty. In response to these injustices, common demands amongst protestors at these nine colleges included developing cross-cultural curriculum, opening diversity centers and making top-level administrative changes.¹³

There are also important similarities in the nine colleges’ size, selectivity, diversity level, and application of affirmative action policies. Of the nine schools, five colleges (55.6 percent) were medium sized universities with student populations ranging from 5,000 to 15,000 undergraduates, six (66.7 percent) were most selective schools, eight (88.9 percent) were medium diversity colleges and eight (88.9 percent) were unconstrained schools. Similar to the summary statistics of the 73 protesting colleges, schools that are medium to large in size, higher selectivity, medium diversity and

¹¹ Alia Wong and Adrienne Green, “Campus Politics: A Cheat Sheet,” *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/campus-protest-roundup/417570/>.

¹² *Ibid.* See Appendix (page 60).

¹³ *Ibid.*

unconstrained are overrepresented in this smaller subset of colleges. A full breakdown of the summary statistics of these nine schools is below:

Summary Statistics of the Nine Highest Profile Protests	
<u>Variables</u>	<u>Results</u>
Size	2 = large (22.2%) 5 = medium (55.6%) 2 = small (22.2%)
Selectivity	6 = most selective (66.7%) 3 = selective (33.3%) 0 = less selective (0.0%)
Diversity Ranking	0 = high diversity (0.0%) 8 = medium diversity (88.9%) 1 = low diversity (11.1%)
Affirmative Action	8 = unconstrained (88.9%) 1 = constrained (11.1%)

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Marginalization Theory

1. Microaggressions

In the post-civil rights period, multicultural psychologist Derald Wing Sue argues that prejudice and discrimination have taken a new form. The repression of marginalized groups including gays and lesbians, women and people of color is far less overt and transparent; discrimination in the modern era is instead characterized by subtly.¹⁴ Compared to traditional, more obvious examples of racist behavior, such as the hate crimes and racial harassment of White supremacists or Ku Klux Klan members, contemporary perpetrators are more covert racists who “on a conscious level may endorse egalitarian values, but on an unconscious level, harbor anti-minority values.”¹⁵

Social theorists refer to these daily examples of subtle, covert racism as “microaggressions.” Chester M. Pierce, a Harvard University professor and psychologist, originated the term in 1970 to describe how black Americans face “subtle, stunning, often automatic and nonverbal exchanges which are ‘put downs.’”¹⁶ In 2010, additional scholarly literature defined microaggressions as “subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously.”¹⁷ Most recently, Sue used the term to describe “the brief and commonplace daily verbal,

¹⁴ Derald Wing Sue, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁶ Chester M. Pierce, *The Black Seventies* (Boston: Porter Sargent Publisher, 1970), 66.

¹⁷ Daniel Solórzano, Miguel Ceja, and Tara Yosso, “Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate: The Experiences of African American College Students,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 69, no. 1 (2000): 60.

behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, and sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.”¹⁸ Common to these three most well-known definitions of microaggressions is an emphasis on their subtle yet pervasive nature. These looks, remarks and gestures have become so commonplace in daily communications that these microaggressions seem trivial and even benign.¹⁹ In reality, according to many theorists, it is both the invisible nature of this behavior and the perpetrator’s unawareness to his or her racism that makes these microaggressions particularly frustrating and painful for recipients.²⁰

Adding to the literature on microaggressions, Sue and his colleague Christina M. Capodilupo developed a “microaggression taxonomy.”²¹ This classification system identified common racist themes and specific examples of discriminatory messages frequently experienced by persons of color.²² The table below is Sue and Capodilupo’s comprehensive list of microaggressive themes and messages.²³

¹⁸ Derald Wing Sue. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ Derald Wing Sue, Kevin L. Nadel, Christina M. Capodilupo, Annie L. Lin, Gina C. Torino, and David P. Rivera, “Racial Microaggressions against Black Americans: Implications for Counseling,” *Journal of Counseling and Development* 86 (2008): 114-117.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

<u>Themes</u>	<u>Microaggression Message</u>
Alien in Own Land: Belief that visible racial/ethnic minority citizens are foreigners.	“You speak English very well.”
Color Blindness: Denial or pretense that a white person does not see color as race.	“When I look at you, I don’t see color.”
Myth of Meritocracy: Statements that assert that race plays a minor role in life success.	“I believe the most qualified person should get the job.”
Denial of Individual Racism: Denial of personal racism or one’s role in its perpetuation.	“I’m not a racist. I have several black friends.”
Ascription of Intelligence: Assigning a degree of intelligence to a person of color based on their race.	“You are a credit to your race.”
Second-Class Citizen: Treated as a lesser person or group.	Person of color mistaken for a service worker.
Pathologizing Culture Values/Communication Styles: Notion that the values and communication styles of people of color are abnormal.	Asking a black person: “Why do you have to be so loud/animated?”
Assumption of Criminal Status: Presumed to be a criminal, dangerous or deviant based on race.	A white man or woman clutches their purse or checks their wallet as a black or Latino approaches or passes.

To best understand these discriminatory themes, I will focus on two specific microaggressions mentioned in Sue’s 2010 book, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation*.

- “Telling an African American ‘you are so articulate. You do not sound black.’”²⁴
- “Clutching one’s purse when an African American walks onto an elevator.”²⁵

²⁴ Ibid., 15.

²⁵ Kevin L Nadal, Julie Sriken, Kristin C. Davidoff, Yinglee Wong, and Kathryn McLean, “Microaggressions within Families: Experiences of Multiracial People,” *Family Relations* 62, no.1 (2013): 190.

In the first example, the microaggressive theme of “ascription of intelligence” is particularly pronounced. The speaker acknowledges the black individual’s eloquence, leading some to conclude that the speaker praised the African American.²⁶ However, according to Sue, this is an example of a racial microaggression. The speaker implies that the black individual is an exception to his race, thereby reinforcing the stereotype that people of color are typically less intelligent than white individuals.²⁷ Sue argues that the speaker may have intended to compliment the black man, but from the student’s perspective, the speaker insulted him by suggesting that most blacks do not share his coherence.

With the second example, the woman clutching her purse makes an “assumption of criminal status” about the black individual. The woman shows that she distrusts the black person and fears that the African American may steal her belongings. She has not communicated or even interacted with the black man to have an inclination that this man is criminal. Rather, from Sue’s perspective, the woman’s action illustrates her biased perception that all black men have crooked tendencies.²⁸ This particular individual is black, and thus, he too must be a thief. There was no interaction between the two individuals, yet the woman’s potentially unconscious and unintentional act still demonstrated racial bias.

Multiple social theorists have also analyzed microaggressions’ destructive psychological impact on recipients. Pierce, for example, argued that the subtle, invisible

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

and unintentional nature of microaggressions causes significant mental and emotional harm to the target:

The very brevity and subtlety [of microaggressions] lead the target into self-doubt about whether or not something racist or sexist actually happened, and they make it even harder to obtain legal redress or even the support from family and friends, because the manifestations can too easily be deemed minor and the target overly sensitive if unable or unwilling to shrug it off. Due to this lack of validation and support, the consequences of microaggressions include feeling insecure, unself-confident, self-doubting... frustrated, isolated and silenced (35).

Pierce and his colleagues emphasize that these students of color regularly experience microaggressions, and it is this continuous exposure that prompts the above feelings of self-doubt, despondency, frustration and hopelessness. Highlighting this phenomenon, Sue states, “when one considers that people of color are exposed continually to microaggressions and that their effects are cumulative, it becomes easier to understand the psychological toll they may take on recipients’ well-being.”²⁹

2. Connecting Microaggression Theory to the 2015-16 Student Protests

The 2014 Voices of Diversity (VOD) project applied this discourse on microaggressions to many U.S. college students’ experiences with this behavior. The VOD project, directed by psychologists Paula J. Caplan and Jordan C. Ford, studied “the daily experiences of students of color at predominantly white universities that made them feel unwelcome, unaccepted and discouraged.”³⁰ To understand minority students’ perspectives about racism at their respective colleges, Caplan and Ford studied four institutions, Missouri State University (MSU), Midwest University, South University and Ivy University. Confidentiality statutes prevented three of the four campuses from using

²⁹ Derald Wing Sue. *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), 279.

³⁰ Paula J. Caplan and Jordan C. Ford, “The Voices of Diversity,” *Aporia* 6, no.3 (2014): 30

their actual university names, but these four schools had varying admission standards and diversity policies.³¹ On each campus, the study collected the opinions of at least 50 minority students from four ethnic/racial groups: African-American, Asian-American, Latina/o, and Native American.³² The results of these interviews were clear: across all four campuses, perceived racism in the form of microaggressions was the most pronounced challenge facing minority students.³³

Despite the widespread racism at the four universities, most VOD study participants claimed that they kept quiet about this discriminatory behavior. Across MSU, Midwest, South and Ivy Universities, the shared sentiment among study participants was “you have to keep the peace and keep silent on this campus in order to succeed.”³⁴ Typifying this coping strategy for many minority students, Krystal, an African American VOD participant, recalls repeatedly controlling her temper despite microaggressive class commentary. Given the VOD’s finding that many students “dealt” with this microaggressive behavior by simply ignoring it, we are left with an important question: what prompted students to abandon the “keep quiet” approach and begin actively protesting this racism in 2015-16?

To answer this question, one must examine the recent growth in college websites dedicated to sharing microaggressions. Beginning as early as May 2011, two Columbia University students, Vivian Lu and David Zhou, created “The Microaggressions Project: Notes on Power, Privilege and Everyday Life,” a blog that posts submissions of

³¹ Ibid., 36.

³² Ibid., 37.

³³ Ibid., 40.

³⁴ Ibid., 45

individuals' experiences with microaggressions.³⁵ Stories featured on this site include the frustrated submission of a black couple whose reservation at a hotel was “accidentally given” to a white guest.³⁶ Another submission featured the angry remarks of a black woman who watched two white women clutch their purses when she sat next to them at a baseball game.³⁷ Following the creation of the Microaggressions Project, in 2013, Oberlin College developed a similar online blogging platform called, “Oberlin Microaggressions,” where marginalized students can share their experiences with microaggressive comments.³⁸ Submissions include a Hispanic student telling a white teammate who used the word “futbol” to “keep my language out of your mouth.”³⁹ The site strongly encourages posts similar to this one in order to “demonstrate that these acts are not simply isolated incidents, but rather part of structural inequalities.”⁴⁰

Many other academic institutions embraced the medium and message of “Oberlin Microaggressions,” developing their own websites for students to post their frustrations.⁴¹ Since 2013, the list of schools that followed Oberlin’s lead and created a microaggressions website includes Brown University, Carleton College, Dartmouth College, Harvard University, St. Olaf College, Swarthmore College and Willamette

³⁵ Allison McCarthy, “The Microaggressions Project: An Interview with Vivian Lu and David Zhou,” *Ms. Blog Magazine*, May 2011, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Vivian Lu and David Zhou, “Microaggressions Project: Power, Privilege and Everyday Life” (blog), Retrieved November 16, 2016, <http://www.microaggressions.com/>.

³⁸ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, “Microaggression and Moral Cultures,” *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 3.

³⁹ “Oberlin Microaggressions” (blog), October 8, 2013, Retrieved November 16, 2016, <http://obiemicroaggressions.tumblr.com/>.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, “Microaggression and Moral Cultures,” *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 4.

University.⁴² These sites provided many marginalized undergraduates with a platform to vocalize both the reoccurring and crippling nature of microaggressive behavior. With this platform, minority students finally felt empowered to abandon their former approach of quietly ignoring microaggressions and to begin actively protesting against them.

3. The Marginalization Theory⁴³

The marginalization theory argues that there is an important connection between this increasingly outspoken fight against microaggressive behavior and a college's level of racial diversity. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has information on U.S. colleges' diversity levels over the last four decades. For this time period, the NCES looked at black enrollment at many four-year, selective institutions including Ivy League colleges, small, private liberal arts schools such as Amherst College and Claremont McKenna College as well as larger public universities such as UCLA and University of Michigan. The NCES found that from 1994-2013, black enrollment at this wide range of schools remained relatively flat at an average six percent.⁴⁴ Commenting on this trend, editor Andrew McGill at the *Atlantic* states, "while some schools have had success [increasing blacks' share of a college population] – the University of Missouri has actually increased its black share by 3 percentage points since 1994 – the median schools barely budged."⁴⁵ McGill even cites some examples of declining black

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Andrew McGill, "The Missing Black Students at Elite American Universities," *The Atlantic*, November 23, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/11/black-college-student-body/417189/>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

enrollment such as Harvard University, which from 1994 to 2014 reduced its black population from 7.4 percent to 6.5 percent.⁴⁶

Many academic studies and magazine articles argue that the underrepresentation of black students at these institutions caused the 2015-16 protests. Concisely articulating this popular argument, Andrew McGill argued that the racial demographics at these schools made the protests “less [of] a spontaneous uprising of discontent, and more of an inevitability.”⁴⁷ To defend this point, McGill cites UCLA’s Associate Dean for Equity and Inclusion Tyrone Howard who claims that when black students remain drastically underrepresented at these schools, many feel increasingly insignificant, ignored, and sidelined.⁴⁸ From the perspective of McGill and Howard – an opinion shared by many researchers – these sentiments of marginalization drove the embittered social activism in 2015-16.⁴⁹

The marginalization theory, from my perspective, may provide a partial explanation for this outbreak of protests. The number of students at U.S. colleges claiming to be “victims” of microaggressions cannot be understated. As previously mentioned, institutions ranging from Brown University to St. Olaf College to Willamette University have many students using online websites to verbalize their experiences with microaggressive behavior.⁵⁰ Regardless of whether one considers microaggressions a modern example of racism, the pervasiveness of this alleged form of marginalization is

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, “Microaggression and Moral Cultures,” *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 4.

difficult to deny. The NCES' finding of stagnating black undergraduate populations, coupled with this notion that many minority students feel continually slighted at U.S. colleges, lends some credibility to the marginalization explanation for the protests. Looking at the 73 protesting schools, 33 institutions (45.2 percent) had low levels of racial diversity with black students representing six percent or less of the 2015 freshman undergraduate class. At these 33 schools, the marginalization theory may be a plausible explanation for the protests as black students were underrepresented here and thus microaggressive behavior may have been more pervasive.

However, the marginalization theory falls short in explaining the demonstrations at the other 40 protesting schools. As of fall 2015, according to the U.S. Department of Education, African Americans represented 14 percent of the United States' total undergraduate population.⁵¹ These 40 protesting colleges, which include eight of the nine most widely publicized demonstrations, have medium or high levels of diversity. Colleges with medium diversity (six to 14 percent of freshman undergraduates are black) and high diversity (more than 14 percent are black) have African American student populations that are in line with or above the average number of blacks in college. In these 40 cases, the marginalization argument is less persuasive because blacks' representation at these schools is proportional to their representation in the total American college population. Given these 40 schools' larger black populations, their minority students, at least according to the theory, experience less microaggressive behavior. As a result, minority students do not feel as marginalized or frustrated, thereby

⁵¹ "Digest of Educational Statistics, 2015," *U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics*, 2016, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>

reducing their motivation for protesting. Thus, in these 40 cases, the marginalization theory provides an incomplete explanation for this activism, leading us to the second argument for the protests: the mismatch theory.

The Mismatch Theory

In their book, *Mismatch*, legal experts and co-authors, Richard H. Sander and Stuart Taylor discuss the development of affirmative action in higher education. Originating in the 1960s, affirmative action, according to the authors, was a “noble effort to jump-start racial integration” at universities across the country.⁵² Most colleges’ early affirmative action efforts included contacting students at primarily black high schools and inviting them to apply.⁵³ These first initiatives also featured summer programs for minority students to experience these colleges first hand.⁵⁴ Though well intentioned, these early efforts failed to significantly increase blacks’ representation at top tier schools.

To address this issue, beginning in 1967 and 1968, most universities adjusted their approach, focusing far less on outreach and instead prioritizing racial preferences in admission decisions.⁵⁵ According to Sander and Taylor, it is now common practice in admission offices to award an “admissions plus” to certain achievements such as perfect SAT score, national debate champion or student body president.⁵⁶ Crucially though, in the late 1960s, admission officers also began giving this “plus” to black students.⁵⁷ Racial

⁵² Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor Jr., *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It’s Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won’t Admit It* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

preferences grew significantly over the next ten years.⁵⁸ In fact, these authors claim that by 1980, over 75 percent of black students at highly selective colleges gained admission due to a diversity preference.⁵⁹

Analyzing enumerable admission figures at highly selective institutions, Sander and Taylor further highlight the extent to which college admission officers use racial preferences in their selection decisions. From this extensive research, the authors find that across the nation, there is a “300-point white-black gap in composite SAT scores and a 0.4 GPA difference in high school grades.”⁶⁰ Presented another way, white applicants are ninety percent more likely to be in the highest academic indices (the top fortieth percentile of all applicants) whereas blacks are three times as likely to place into the lowest indices (the bottom tenth of applicants).⁶¹ This significant difference in white and black students’ high school grades and test scores (collectively referred to as the “academic index gap”) has remained consistent over the last 35 years.⁶² Thus, according to Sander and Taylor, racial preferences are not “tie-breakers” in admission decisions between two equally qualified applicants.⁶³ Instead, these preferences lead admission officers to admit minority students over thousands of more qualified white and Asian applicants.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 6.

⁶³ Ibid., 17.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

This extensive use of affirmative action, according to Sander and Taylor, has the most detrimental impact on the communities this policy intends to help.⁶⁵ Enrolling students based on race rather than academic qualifications results in what Sander and Taylor call an “academic mismatch.”⁶⁶ That is, by admitting black students with significantly lower credentials than those of white or Asian applicants, these authors argue that colleges enormously disadvantage these students. Without the qualifications to succeed at these elite schools, blacks often perform worse in class and drop out of college at higher rates.⁶⁷ Importantly, Sander and Taylor emphasize that many black students’ academic struggles are not the result of their inferior academic abilities.⁶⁸ Instead, these challenges are an “unintended side effect of large racial preferences, which systematically put minority students in academic environments where they feel overwhelmed.”⁶⁹ Nevertheless, these affirmative action policies, at least from Sander and Taylor’s perspective, make minority students’ academic challenges inevitable.⁷⁰

Sander and Taylor assert that this material academic index gap at tier one colleges is also tremendously problematic because it prompted the 2015-2016 protests. Upon acceptance to these elite schools, most minority students fully expect to continue their high school successes in college.⁷¹ Thus, when many black undergraduates begin to struggle in their classes, these students quickly recognize that they are immensely

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁷¹ Ibid., 20-25.

underprepared for these elite schools.⁷² As these students receive low grades in many of their courses, overwhelming sentiments of dismay, frustration and self-doubt set in. To cope with these challenges, Sander and Taylor argue that many minority students find other mismatched individuals with similar academic struggles.⁷³ These students then “withdraw into a racial enclave within the campus, seeking to foster a separate community in which the minority student can... feel more confident and consider herself a better ‘fit.’”⁷⁴ This self-segregating process leads many white students to describe minority students as “off-putting and clannish.” Moreover, many white undergraduates notice black students’ poor performances in class and often attribute their struggles to the destructive stereotype that minority students are intellectually inferior to white students. These negative opinions create hostile rather than healthy race relations at these colleges. Thus, according to Sander and Taylor, many minorities’ immensely frustrating academic experiences, which directly result from affirmative action policies and often become exacerbated by their colleges’ racially hostile environments, led them to protest in 2015-2016.

Sander and Taylor convincingly demonstrate the detrimental effect of affirmative action on black students’ self-image and perception towards white students. Intense disappointment from poor academic performance is a feeling that most of us have likely experienced. By recalling my own academic struggles, I obtained greater perspective on the legitimate differences between my difficulties and those of minority students. That is, for white and Asian students, there is maybe one or two college classes where these

⁷² Ibid., 23.

⁷³ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

students struggle.⁷⁵ More often though, the first test in the class goes poorly, but many white and Asian students have the ability to draw on their rigorous high school experiences to improve on subsequent exams.⁷⁶ Most minority students, in contrast, find themselves seriously underprepared in *all* their classes.⁷⁷ They also do not have the high school backgrounds to work through these academic challenges.⁷⁸ Given the frustration I have felt from my own academic missteps, it makes sense that these minority students' comparatively more frequent and intense academic struggles would illicit significant discouragement and dissatisfaction. Thus, I agree with Sander and Taylor that the academic gap created by affirmative action would make minority students sufficiently frustrated to start a protest.

In addition to this anecdotal defense, the summary statistics for the 73 protesting schools provide meaningful support for the mismatch theory. According to Sander and Taylor, by using affirmative action, colleges widen the white-black academic index gap at their schools and thus increase the probability of a protest. Therefore, at unconstrained schools that are free to practice affirmative action in admission decisions, one would expect more demonstrations. In contrast, the likelihood of a protest would decrease at constrained schools which ban affirmative action considerations in the college admission process. Looking at the summary statistics, 63 of the 73 protesting colleges (86.3 percent) and eight of the nine high profile demonstrating institutions (88.9 percent) are

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

unconstrained. This concentration of protests at unconstrained schools provides some initial statistical support for the mismatch theory.

Sander and Taylor's theory, however, cannot fully explain these protests due to the timing difference between the implementation of affirmative action and the occurrence of the demonstrations. As previously mentioned, affirmative action did not become fully entrenched in colleges' admission decisions until the 1980s.⁷⁹ If affirmative action created the academic mismatch that caused the 2015-16 protests, then, the demonstrations should have occurred in the 1980s when the effects of this mismatch had fully materialized on college campuses. Moreover, since the 1980s, the degree of the white-black mismatch has remained consistent.⁸⁰ Given this consistency, the effects of this mismatch, namely black students' academic frustrations and exposure to racially hostile campuses, also did not change. If campus conditions presumably stayed the same over that period, what caused these protests to occur in 2015? The mismatch theory cannot answer this question. Thus, even though Sander and Taylor can potentially explain why black students were sufficiently frustrated to protest, their theory cannot determine why these protests happened when they did. Given this significant timing issue, the paper moves on to the third framework: the victimization theory.

The Victimization Theory

Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, two prominent sociologists at UCLA and West Virginia University respectively, discuss the theory of microaggressions from a distinct perspective. They argue that students experiencing microaggressions often

⁷⁹ Ibid., 15-16.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 7.

emphasize their victimization and highlight their oppressors' dominance.⁸¹ Campbell and Manning claim that there is also an equally pronounced tendency for "victims" of microaggressions to seek third party support and assistance. These two social conditions breed a culture of victimhood where "individuals and groups display high sensitivity to slight, have a tendency to handle conflicts through complaints to third parties, and seek to cultivate an image of being victims who deserve assistance."⁸²

In 2011, Campbell, Manning and contemporary sociologist Donald Black first discussed the purported harm of microaggressions, namely that this behavior creates inequality, "overstratification" and "underdiversity."⁸³ Conduct is offensive when one group increases its dominance over another, making the victim unequal to the oppressor. The inequality in this relationship – a social state Black calls "overstratification" – can arise when anyone "rises or falls below others in status."⁸⁴ This occurs most obviously when an individual physically harms someone, but it can also happen when one group simply attempts to dominate another through insults, slights or any other disparaging behavior. In addition to overstratification, Black argues that microaggressions often involve "underdiversity [or] the rejection of a culture," which includes large instances of underdiversity such as genocide against a particular race as well as much smaller examples such as racial jokes.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures," *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

After explaining microaggressions' allegedly problematic effects, Campbell, Manning and Black describe the environment most inflicted by overstratification and underdiversity. In his novel, *Moral Time*, Black argues that "overstratification conflict varies inversely with stratification."⁸⁶ That is, a moral code that champions equality and rejects oppression will most often arise in a setting where high levels of equality and diversity already exist.⁸⁷ Underdiversity, according to Black, operates in a similar manner. That is, as environments become more diverse, underdiversity is more deplorable.⁸⁸ Campbell and Manning argue that Black's theories are most apparent at elite American universities. Since the late 1960s with the rise of affirmative action and the broader civil rights movements, the country's most prestigious universities have made it their priority to increase racial and ethnic diversity.⁸⁹ This commitment led to greater minority representation at college campuses.⁹⁰ Crucially, this increased diversity has also resulted in an increased sensitivity towards actions that threaten these more diverse, egalitarian ideals. Simply put, as diversity and equality became larger collegiate priorities, sexist and racist behavior became all the more reprehensible at the country's universities.

As for the second condition of victim culture, namely students' dependence on third parties, Manning and Campbell argue that this reliance is common in hierarchical environments with clear organizational authorities. At the nation's most prestigious

⁸⁶ Donald Black, *Moral Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 139.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures," *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 20.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

colleges, this second condition is also particularly pronounced. There are many administrators at these schools to manage conflict among students and to enforce policies against plagiarism, cheating and other misconduct. Increasingly, these administrators have also been policing against “interpersonal offenses.”⁹¹ Examples of this more recent enforcement include Fordham University’s 2012 prohibition against sending insulting emails and New York University’s 2012 ban against mocking others.⁹² In addition to this seemingly ever-expanding list of “offensive” behaviors, several American colleges also continue to employ more and more authorities to regulate student conduct. To illustrate this point, Manning and Campbell reference a 2013 incident at Dartmouth College where two Chinese students reported a third student who “verbally harassed them by speaking gibberish that was perceived to be mock Chinese.”⁹³ The two students reported the offense to the College’s Office of Pluralism and Leadership, prompting the institution’s Department of Safety and its Bias Incident Response Team to investigate the incident.⁹⁴ With multiple authorities tasked to police student behavior, Manning and Campbell argue that students no longer re-establish justice by “shrugging off the offense” or directly confronting the offender.⁹⁵ Instead, college students increasingly seek administrative support to solve their problems.⁹⁶

According to Manning and Campbell, this victim culture at the nation’s most elite schools motivated the 2015-16 protests. In this culture, there is a zero tolerance policy for

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

both intentional and inadvertent offenses.⁹⁷ However, for many minority students at the country's most selective schools, both microaggressive behavior and even more overtly racist conduct allegedly characterize these campuses' culture.⁹⁸ Committed to fighting these perceived injustices, "victimized" students in 2015-16 publicly protested legitimate and exaggerated grievances to garner other students' sympathy and to obtain administrative support.⁹⁹

Based on the summary statistics of the 73 protesting colleges, the victimization theory offers the most convincing potential explanation for the 2015-16 college protests. Of the 73 demonstrating schools, 70 schools (95.6 percent) were either most selective or selective institutions. Only three schools (4.4 percent) fell into the less selective category. Thus, based on these statistics, there is initial evidence that this activism occurred at more selective schools. This finding suggests that Bradley and Campbell may be correct. Administrations at these highly selective, incredibly politically correct colleges prioritized aggrieved students' needs, leading many "victimized" students to protest their grievances in 2015-16.

The Political Process Model

This paper focuses on the three theoretical frameworks that specifically explain the 2015-16 college protests. However, I will also engage Doug McAdam's political process model given its applicability to these protests as well as its preeminence in the broader social movement literature. McAdam's theory argues that an excluded group's ability to mobilize support depends on the degree of organization within the oppressed

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

population. Internal organization also pertains to the “existent networks” in the group that link existing members together and that enable interaction with potential new members.¹⁰⁰ Emphasizing the importance of this indigenous organization, McAdam states that a rare consistent conclusion in social movement literature is that “recruitment [occurs] along established lines of interaction.”¹⁰¹ That is, individuals decide to join movements because they have interacted with current participants. Thus, McAdam argues that to expand its movement base, the repressed group must have a high level of internal organization with extensive external networks.

Although it is debatable whether the 2015-16 college protests developed into a social movement, McAdam’s model is still relevant for potentially explaining this student activism. Applying this framework to the demonstrations, this paper argues that college size best estimates the level of organization within student minority groups. Compared to larger colleges, smaller schools have, by definition, smaller, more intimate environments, often leading to increased connection between students at these institutions. As a result, I make the reasonable assumption that this heightened feeling of connectedness at small schools also fosters an internal cohesion within the minority group. These schools’ small size also crucially allows the minority group to interact more frequently and intimately with potential recruits. In contrast, I make the equally plausible claim that larger universities usually have comparatively less intimate campus environments, leading to potentially more fragmented minority groups. Additionally, it is often more difficult for minority students at these schools to have multiple meaningful interactions with

¹⁰⁰ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 44.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

individuals outside their groups. Thus, due to weaker associations with other communities, minority groups at a bigger school may find it difficult to recruit a significant protesting base. Thus, McAdam's model suggests that the 2015-16 protests were more likely to occur at smaller institutions where minority communities were more internally organized and had stronger ties with other student groups.

The summary statistics on the 73 protesting colleges provide additional information about how school size may effect protest likelihood. Among these 73 schools, there were 22 small colleges, 19 medium sized and 32 large colleges. The fact that over one third of demonstrating schools were small colleges provides some support for McAdam's theory. That is, the probability of a protest is predominantly a function of a minority community's internal organization. Highly organized minority groups are potentially most common at smaller schools, which may explain why over 30 percent of protesting schools were small. However, large schools represented the greatest percentage (43.8 percent) of protesting schools. This evidence may challenge McAdam's theory as an overly complicated explanation of how school size effects protest probability. Instead, college protests may actually be more likely at larger schools simply because larger schools have more students. With a larger student body, there is a higher likelihood that the school will have student activists willing to participate in the protests.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

To empirically test these three theories, I assigned a variable to each framework. For the marginalization theory, the diversity variable classifies colleges as low diversity (blacks represent zero to six percent of the 2015 freshman undergraduate class), medium diversity (blacks account for six to 14 percent) and high diversity (blacks are more than 15 percent). In determining these percent ranges, I calibrated the medium diversity ranking to the historic range for the percent of African Americans in college (10 percent to 14 percent from 1976 to 2014).¹⁰² The low and high diversity specifications developed from the medium classification. I also ensured that this lower range included the schools with blacks representing zero percent of the 2015 entering class and that this upper range contained the colleges where all 2015 freshmen were African Americans.

The diversity variable provides a fair measurement of the marginalization theory, but it does have limitations worth noting. This theory centers on a core idea: in schools where blacks represent a lower percentage of the student body, these students usually experience more microaggressions, leading them to more vigorously protest their marginalization. The diversity variable effectively measures the percent of black undergraduates at a given school. However, this variable does not approximate the level of microaggressive behavior facing black students. Instead, it uses diversity as a proxy for this experienced marginalization. A more sophisticated study would directly measure these microaggressions and thus more closely assess the potential link between students' perceived marginalization and their likelihood to protest. To be fair, a microaggression

¹⁰² U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities."

measurement would be incredibly difficult to systematically approximate across multiple colleges. It would require meeting several black students at every college and inquiring about the prevalence of microaggressions on each campus. Given this limitation, the diversity variable serves as a crude but reasonable test of the marginalization theory.

To test the mismatch theory, I created an affirmative action dummy variable that coded between constrained and unconstrained schools. Institutions allowed to freely practice affirmative action in their admission decisions – all private schools and public colleges in states without bans on affirmative actions – were unconstrained. Public schools in one of the eight states with bans on affirmative action (California, Washington, Michigan, Nebraska, Arizona, Oklahoma, Florida, and New Hampshire) were constrained. This variable is a good measure of the mismatch theory because it clearly distinguishes between schools that use affirmative action in their admission processes and those that do not. As a result, the variable can easily determine whether unconstrained schools had more protests, thereby also assessing the potential validity of the mismatch theory.

One problem with this variable is that it does not code for the magnitude of affirmative action use. For example, at Howard University, the historically black school, African Americans represent 91 percent of the 2015 freshman class. Compared to Howard University, Claremont McKenna College, another unconstrained institution, employs affirmative action much less intensely with blacks representing only 4 percent of the 2015 class. Evident from this example, unconstrained schools apply affirmative action differently. Thus, adding a magnitude measurement would provide more information on how the degree to which a school uses affirmative action effects a

school's protest probability. However, this information on schools' racial preferences and diversity quotas is extremely confidential, making it difficult to address the magnitude problem.

A selectivity variable, which utilizes *U.S. News and World Report's* selectivity classification for all 527 colleges, tests the victimization argument. *U.S. News* includes the following five selectivity rankings: 1) most selective, 2) more selective, 3) selective, 4) less selective or 5) least selective. *U.S. News* determines the selectivity for the fall 2015 entering class based on a weighted average of the college's acceptance rate (10 percent weight), the "high school class standing in the top 10 percent (25 percent weight), and the critical reading and math portions of the SAT and composite ACT scores (65 percent weight)."¹⁰³ The selectivity variable effectively tests the victimization theory because it codes for selectivity differences between the 527 colleges. Campbell and Manning's theory hinges on a school's selectivity, as it argues that the cultural prerequisites for a protest arise at the nation's most elite colleges. To simplify the classification system and isolate the effect of the "most selective" distinction on protest probability, I made some important changes to *U.S. News's* system. I kept the first classification of "most selective" but combined the second and third classifications into a "selective" ranking and consolidated the fourth and fifth classifications into a "less selective" ranking.

While the variable's focus on selectivity is crucial, a better test of this theory would include a measurement of the number of third party associations at each college. According to Campbell and Manning, as the number of associations increases, there is a

¹⁰³ Robert Morse and Eric Brooks, "Best Colleges Ranking Criteria and Weights," *U.S. News and World Report*, September 12, 2016, <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/ranking-criteria-and-weights>.

greater tendency for students to seek administrative support for perceived racial diversity issues.¹⁰⁴ With additional third parties, more students would likely protest their grievances to obtain further attention and support from the administration. However, it would be tremendously tedious to determine the number of associations, as well as their administrative power, at every school in my data set. Thus, my selectivity variable is admittedly an imperfect assessment of the marginalization theory, but it still effectively tests the theory's core focus on selectivity.

In addition to these three main variables, I included a size variable to determine whether the number of undergraduates at a college impacted its protest probability. To determine student body size, I used College Board's size classification system: small colleges have less than 5,000 undergraduates, medium schools have between 5,000 and 15,000 undergraduates, and large institutions have over 15,000 undergraduates.¹⁰⁵ This size variable tested McAdam's political process model. At smaller schools, an aggrieved community can more easily leverage the intimate environment to frequently interact with potential new student protestors. However, larger schools often have less connected environments, making it comparatively more difficult for protestors to interact with other student groups and obtain additional support.¹⁰⁶ This variable directly measures college size, making it an effective measurement of the predicted relationship between size and protest probability.

¹⁰⁴ Bradley Campbell and Jason Manning, "Microaggression and Moral Cultures," *Comparative Sociology* 13, (2014): 31-32.

¹⁰⁵ College Board, *College Handbook 2017* (College Board, July 5, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

Despite this advantage of the size variable, there are also important shortcomings. Central to McAdam's theory is the argument that successful insurgencies require minority communities to have significant internal organization. The variable uses school size as a crude measure of a community's internal organization. I admittedly do not communicate with community leaders or members to obtain a more direct approximation of the degree of organization in each community. However, it would have been incredibly difficult to collect this information from every student minority group at all 527 colleges. Even if I had retrieved this data, providing a systematic classification of each group's level of internal organization would have been excessively burdensome. Given this serious limitation, which cannot be easily addressed, the size variable is an imperfect but fair test of McAdams' theory.

After determining four testable variables, I collected data using the *U.S. News and World Report's* lists for "Best Liberal Arts Colleges" and "Best National Universities." These lists collectively featured 513 schools with 296 universities and 217 colleges.¹⁰⁷ For each school, this site also had the necessary information for all four variables. Next, I visited "thedemands.org," the main website documenting the 73 protesting campuses and their demands.¹⁰⁸ Thedemands.org site included 18 schools that *U.S. News* did not include in their best colleges or universities lists. 14 of these schools were not in these two lists because *U.S. News* had classified them as regional universities. I added all 14

¹⁰⁷ These two lists actually include 310 universities and 239 colleges for a total of 549 schools. However, to run my regressions, I removed the 36 schools where *U.S. News* did not have information on one or more of my four variables.

¹⁰⁸ Thedemands.org website listed all protesting campuses in both the United States and Canada. My project focuses exclusively on American colleges and universities, so I did not include the following schools in my data set as they are Canadian institutions: University of Guelph, University of Ottawa and the University of Toronto.

schools, including the information for each variable, to my data set.¹⁰⁹ *U.S. News* did not have selectivity information for Babson College and Rhode Island School of Design, so my data set does not include these two protesting colleges. *U.S. News and World Report* also had no listing for the last two protesting colleges (St. Louis Christian College and Atlanta University Center Consortium), so I did not add these schools in my data set. After making these adjustments, the total data set includes 527 colleges, a sufficiently large sample size for running multivariable regressions.

After developing my full data set, I created the dependent dummy variable, distinguishing between schools with protests and those without demonstrations. All 73 protesting schools received a value of “1.” The other 454 institutions had a value of “0,” indicating that these schools had no protests. I also appropriately coded each of my four independent variables. For the size variable, I assigned small colleges a value of “1,” medium universities a “2” and large schools a “3.” Low selective, selective, and most selective institutions received values of “1,” “2” and “3,” respectively. For the diversity variable, I used a similar coding method with low, medium and high diversity schools receiving the same “1,” “2” and “3” respective designations. The fourth affirmative action variable was a dummy variable with unconstrained schools marked with a “0” value and constrained colleges with a “1.”

With my dependent and independent variables appropriately coded, I then ran multivariable probit regressions in Stata. The paper uses the probit model for two main

¹⁰⁹ The 14 schools added were California State University – East Bay, California Polytechnic State University – San Luis Obispo, Ithaca College, Loyola University Maryland, Missouri State University, Notre Dame of Maryland University, Providence College, Santa Clara University, Simmons College, SUNY Potsdam, Towson University, University of Baltimore, California State University Los Angeles and Webster University.

reasons. First, my dependent variable is binomial. And second, this model shows the marginal effect of a unit change in an independent variable on the probability of the dependent variable, holding all other independent variables at their mean.¹¹⁰ The model's second advantage allows me to isolate the marginal effect of a percentage increase in each of my four variables on the probability of a protest, thereby effectively testing the theoretical frameworks.

¹¹⁰ Alexander Spermann, "The Probit Model" (presentation, University of Freiburg, Germany, 2009).

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regression Results

Using the probit model and the marginal effects test (margin, dydx (*)), I had the following regression results for my four variables – size, selectivity, diversity and affirmative action:

```
. margins, dydx (*)

Average marginal effects           Number of obs   =       527
Model VCE      : OIM

Expression      : Pr(protest), predict()
dy/dx w.r.t.   : size selectivity diversity affirmativeaction
```

	Delta-method				
	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]
size	.0716894	.0174977	4.10	0.000	.0373946 .1059842
selectivity	.1539081	.0321321	4.79	0.000	.0909303 .2168858
diversity	.0137214	.0206085	0.67	0.506	-.0266705 .0541133
affirmativeaction	.0399655	.0493604	0.81	0.418	-.0567791 .1367102

Table 1: STATA regression results for the probit model with four variables.

The size and selectivity variables are statistically significant, both at the 99 percent confidence level. With the size variable, the probability of a protest increases by 7.2 percent from a small to medium school and by 14.4 percent from a small to large institution. For the selectivity variable, the probability of protest increases by 15.4 percent from a low selective school to a selective college and by 30.8 percent from a low selective college to a most selective institution. Neither the diversity nor affirmative action variables are statistically significant.

Discussion

1. The Affirmative Action Variable

The affirmative action variable – a test of Sander and Taylor’s mismatch theory – was not statistically significant, thereby providing empirical evidence against the authors’ framework. By accepting minority students who often do not meet a school’s GPA and SAT score standards, affirmative action, according to the authors, creates a significant achievement gap between white and minority undergraduates.¹¹¹ As a result, many black students experience immense academic frustration. The authors argue that this distress can partially explain some of these students’ decision to protest. My regression results do not support this conclusion. Thus, affirmative action in college admission decisions and its purported negative effect on blacks’ educational achievement and social acclimation was likely not a motivating factor behind the 2015-16 protests.

There are three main explanations for this variable’s insignificance. First, affirmative action principles, contrary to Sander and Taylor’s argument, do not create an academic gap between whites and blacks. However, this argument is weak given the authors’ extensive and convincing research showing a material and consistent white-black SAT and GPA gap over the last 35 years.¹¹² The second plausible explanation is that the gap exists but that it was not substantial enough to incite the 2015-16 demonstrations. Sander and Taylor’s detailed accounts of struggling minority students make it difficult to dismiss the gap as an insufficient catalyst for the protests. The third and most probable argument for the variable’s insignificance focuses on a timing issue.

¹¹¹ Richard Sander and Stuart Taylor Jr., *Mismatch: How Affirmative Action Hurts Students It’s Intended to Help, and Why Universities Won’t Admit It* (New York: Basic Books, 2012), 16.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Affirmative action has been central to college admission decisions since the 1980s. If the protests were a direct result of affirmative action policies, the 2015-16 college protests should have occurred 35 years ago. This substantial lag in the proposed cause of the protest and the actual occurrence of the demonstrations makes it difficult to infer a causal link between affirmative action and the 2015-16 college demonstrations.

It is also important to acknowledge the limitations of the affirmative action variable as a potential explanation for its insignificance. The variable simply looks at how an unconstrained college's use of affirmative action affects the school's protest probability. Crucially, as mentioned briefly in the "Methods" section, the variable does not measure the varying degrees to which affirmative action impacts admission officers' decisions. That is, it overlooks the fact that from one private school to the next, there may be material differences between unconstrained schools' racial diversity goals. More importantly, this variable does not measure how the application of affirmative action has changed overtime. For example, at certain unconstrained colleges, there may have been spikes in the use of affirmative action in the years leading up to the protests, thereby more directly linking this policy to the protests. My affirmative action variable does not include this extremely important information because it is often highly confidential and thus difficult to acquire. A future, more sophisticated version of the variable would work around these constraints. The new variable would not just measure whether a college employs affirmative action, but instead, it would also evaluate the magnitude of policy use at each college and how that utilization level has varied overtime.

2. The Diversity Variable

The diversity variable was also not statistically significant – a regression result that empirically challenges the marginalization theory. The variable uses the percent of black students in each college's 2015 freshmen class as a measurement of the repression facing this population. According to the theory, as blacks' representation at a college decreases, the marginalization faced by this community increases. The results of my model, however, contest that conclusion, suggesting that the microaggressions experienced by minority students did not prompt the college protests. Crucially, my findings do not reject the existence of microaggressions. Instead, I challenge the theory that this marginalization was the major driver behind the 2015-16 campus demonstrations.

The diversity variable's statistical insignificance may also be attributable to its imperfect assumption that the size of a college's black student population predicts this group's level of experienced marginalization. Central to this variable is the following premise: the number of black students at a given college is proportional to the marginalization faced by members of this minority community. However, the number of black students at a college is an overly simplistic measure of the black community's marginalization. In my data set, for example, there were no protests at 204 of the 237 schools with the lowest values for the diversity variable. Perhaps black communities at these lowest diversity institutions experienced enough repression to protest but did not have the internal organization to mount an insurgency. However, there is an equally likely probability that the black students at these 204 schools did not face marginalization or that the level of repression experienced did not justify a protest. Either way, these

examples demonstrate that there is not a perfect, inverse relationship between the number of black students at a college and the extent of marginalization faced by these undergraduates.

Future research should address black communities' perceived level of repression across the 527 colleges. The researchers would then need to develop a systematic way to measure and quantify this marginalization. Compared to the current diversity variable, this new measurement of blacks' stated repression would more effectively test the marginalization theory. However, given the lengthiness of the data collection process and the subsequent difficulty of methodically quantifying black students' oppression, I did not use this more sophisticated variable in my model.

3. The Size Variable

My regression results showed that increasing the size of school from small to medium or small to large increased the protest probability by 7.2 percent and 14.4 percent, respectively. To provide additional empirical evidence that larger schools have a higher chance of protesting, I re-ran my probit model with a liberal arts variable. This variable coded all 527 colleges as liberal arts schools (designated with a "1") or universities (non-liberal arts colleges) (marked with a "0"). Liberal arts colleges are typically much smaller than universities. For example, for the 527 colleges in my data set, the average enrollment size for liberal arts colleges is 1,699 students compared to an average size of 14,503 students for non-liberal arts schools. Thus, this regression provided another test of whether college size effects protest likelihood. The liberal arts variable was statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level. Moreover, the results of the liberal arts variable are consistent with the findings of the size variable.

That is, as one moves from a non-liberal arts college (larger school) to a liberal arts school (smaller school), the likelihood of a demonstration decreases by 8.1 percent.

```
. margins, dydx (*)
Average marginal effects          Number of obs   =       527
Model VCE      : OIM

Expression      : Pr(protest), predict()
dy/dx w.r.t.   : size selectivity diversity affirmativeaction liberalartsflag
```

	Delta-method					
	dy/dx	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
size	.0412057	.0237704	1.73	0.083	-.0053835	.0877949
selectivity	.1485856	.031835	4.67	0.000	.0861902	.210981
diversity	.0075629	.0206638	0.37	0.714	-.0329374	.0480632
affirmativeaction	.0393165	.0488295	0.81	0.421	-.0563875	.1350205
liberalartsflag	-.0811813	.044765	-1.81	0.070	-.1689191	.0065564

Table 2: Probit regression model with liberal arts variable.

These results, however, are inconsistent with the prediction of the political process model. McAdam's theory suggests that smaller colleges should have more protests. At smaller schools, there is a more cohesive environment where students interact much more frequently and intimately. McAdam's theory implies that this heightened connection between students will foster greater internal organization in a minority community on a small campus compared to one at a larger school. My empirical results suggest otherwise. Importantly, this paper does not argue that a minority group's indigenous structure is not valuable for recruiting new members or for organizing a protest. Instead, these findings demonstrate that minority communities' internal organization, which again arguably develops more easily at smaller schools, was not particularly relevant for predicting the 2015-16 protests.

Crucially, the size variable's theoretically unexpected result could be attributable to the political process model's overly complicated argument for why college size effects protest likelihood. Rather than using McAdam's more elaborate discussion of internal organization, one could make a simple probability argument. Schools with large undergraduate populations (15,000 students or more), compared to small, liberal arts colleges (5,000 students or less), have more students. With more students, there is a comparatively higher possibility that some students are activists who feel compelled to protest their perceived marginalization. Thus, the 2015-16 protests occurred at larger universities simply because there are more people or potential protestors at these schools.

4. The Selectivity Variable

In addition to being statistically significant, the selectivity variable also has the largest estimated coefficient, providing strong support for the victimization theory. Significant at the 99 percent confidence level, this variable shows that moving from a less selective college to a selective school increases the probability of a protest by 15.4 percent (Table 1). Compared to a selective institution, the likelihood of a demonstration increases an additional 15.4 percent at the country's most selective colleges. These results, particularly the magnitude of the coefficient, suggest that the nation's most selective universities have a distinct culture that contributed significantly to the 2015-16 insurgencies. More specifically, as Manning and Campbell convincingly argue, there is a culture of victimhood on these campuses where both purposeful and unintentional offenses are unacceptable. The "victims" of the perceived aggressions appeal to third party administrators and publicly protest their repression rather than resolving their issues directly and quietly with the aggressor(s). In this environment, the respect and sympathy

afforded to the victim from both students and administrators motivates students to overemphasize their marginalization, resulting in the embittered 2015-16 protests.

Although my regression results offer strong support for the victimization theory, this framework is not a perfect explanation for the 2015-16 protests. Of the 69 most selective colleges in my data set, only 24 schools (approximately 35 percent) protested. Thus, it is not simply a college's selectivity that determines the likelihood of a protest. Instead, I hypothesize that it also these colleges' definition of offensive behavior and the amount of administrative support dedicated to enforcing these policies that impact a college's protest probability.

This point is particularly evident by comparing two of the nation's most prestigious schools: Harvard University, one of the highest profile protesting schools, and the University of Chicago, a non-protesting institution. At Harvard University, there are administrators, namely Dean Martha L. Minow, who have likened racial microaggressions to "violence, bullying and sexual assault."¹¹³ In stark contrast, the University of Chicago has a comparatively narrow definition of offensive behavior and strongly defends college as place of "free and open inquiry" where students must confront "views they reject or even loathe."¹¹⁴ My selectivity variable does not account for this variation in Harvard and the University of Chicago's responses to microaggressions. This omission is due to the difficulty of collecting and quantifying this information, especially for a larger set of 527 colleges. A better future test of the

¹¹³ Claire E. Parker, "Minow Calls on Michigan Graduates to Combat Injustice," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 23, 2015, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2015/12/23/Minow-University-Michigan-Commencement/>.

¹¹⁴ Geoffrey Stone, "Statement on Principles of Free Inquiry," *UChicago News*, July 2012, <https://news.uchicago.edu/behind-the-news/free-expression/statement-principles-free-inquiry>.

victimization theory would measure each college's definition of offensive behavior and quantify the administration's policies, if any, against this conduct. I would expect that as the school's definition of offensive behavior broadens and the level of administrative intolerance for this conduct increases, the likelihood of a protest would also rise.

CHAPTER 6: PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

My regression results show that the two variables testing race-related theories are insignificant, challenging the popular belief that the 2015-16 protests had exclusively racial motivations. Both the marginalization and mismatch theories have a shared focus on race. Minority students' underrepresentation in many U.S. colleges in the former theory and minorities' discontent with the material white-black academic gap in the case of the latter framework prompted the campus insurgencies. However, my findings challenge both conclusions. In doing so, these results urge the national discourse on this student activism to expand beyond its main race-related explanation for the 2015-16 protests.

This additional explanation originates from the results of the selectivity variable. The double digit magnitude of this variable's coefficient provides strong support for the victimization theory. More generally though, it offers a cultural explanation, rather than a racial one, for the 2015-16 protests. That is, at the nation's most selective colleges, there is a prevalent culture of heightened sensitivity to the most minor, often unintentional slights. The administrations at these colleges have an equally common tendency to appeal to "victims" demands. This culture of political correctness, reinforced by administrators' frequent compliance with minority students' requests, led many aggrieved groups to protest their alleged grievances and demand administrative support in the 2015-16 demonstrations.

An Outlier: The University of Missouri

While this cultural-based argument for the 2015-16 protests is consistent with my regression results, it does not fully explain the motivation behind the first demonstrations

at the University of Missouri. Given that the Missouri protest was arguably the most widely covered demonstration, one would expect this school's profile to closely fit my regression results. My findings suggest that larger, more selective colleges were more likely to protest, so to be consistent with my results, Missouri would need to be a large, highly elite institution. While Missouri is in fact larger than the other eight most widely covered protesting colleges, it is far less selective. Missouri, for example, has a 78 percent acceptance rate compared to a single digit rate for most of the other eight schools.¹¹⁵ Thus, this college's protest presents an interesting puzzle: Missouri had the most well-known protest yet its school profile is noticeably distinct from most of the other nine colleges.

To solve this puzzle, it is first important to highlight how the Missouri protest is consistent with my regression results. With such a large student body (27,812 undergraduates), one would expect that based on simple probability rules, Missouri would have a higher chance of protesting. In terms of selectivity, Missouri is a selective college, not a less selective institution. Thus, there may certainly be a more pronounced victim culture at Missouri than at other less selective colleges. Perhaps, the mild existence of this culture at Missouri moderately increased its protest likelihood. However, this argument still does not explain the enormous intensity of this protest despite the school's lower selectivity.

As a result, this paper proposes a new race-related explanation for the Missouri case. Crucially though, this argument does not endorse the popular belief that racist

¹¹⁵ "Best National Universities," *U.S. News & World Report*, <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges>.

incidents *inside* the campus prompted this activism. Compared to the other eight colleges, Missouri does not have a lower percentage of black students. To be sure, blacks represented seven percent of Missouri's 2015 freshmen class, in line with the average black representation at the other eight colleges (7.3 percent).¹¹⁶ Given Missouri's average degree of minority representation, it seems less likely that the marginalization of Missouri's minority students caused the intensity of their protest. Instead, my argument hinges on the idea that race played a much different and external role in the protest. More specifically, rather than on-campus racial issues, this paper argues that the race-related tensions *outside* Missouri's gates motivated the college's protests.

To understand this external racial trigger, it is important to situate the Missouri protest in its historical context. On August 9, 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, a white police officer shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, following his alleged robbery of a nearby convenience store.¹¹⁷ The Brown shooting headlined major newspapers and sparked a national debate on the country's allegedly racist criminal justice system. The event also initiated Black Lives Matter – a national movement fighting the purported systematic injustices facing black individuals and communities. Compared to most of the other eight colleges, which are largely clustered in the northeast, University of Missouri is in Columbia, only 116 miles from Ferguson, Missouri. Given the college's relatively close proximity to the Brown shooting, Missouri's minority students most likely experienced the event more directly and intensely than the aggrieved communities at the eight other schools.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Michael Pearson, "A Timeline of the University of Missouri Protests," *CNN*, November 10, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/09/us/missouri-protest-timeline/>.

My hypothesis is as follows: Missouri students witnessed Brown's death and the subsequent uprisings first hand. As a result, they most directly experienced the growing national sentiment that Brown's death was an unjust, racist tragedy. Unlike minority students at Harvard, Princeton or Brown, for example, who followed the shooting and its aftermath online, Missouri's minority communities more closely experienced the Ferguson events. Their proximity to this tragedy, which many deemed a violent, racist act, motivated their impassioned activism. Moreover, as the Black Lives Matter Movement grew dramatically between August and November 2015, there was finally a platform for Missouri students to share harbored grievances. These students seized this opportunity to demand support and began the November 2015 protests. Thus, the events catalyzing this activism were indeed race-related, but the racial trigger occurred outside Missouri's gates. More specifically, the nation's broader racial climate, namely the growing sense of injustice towards minority communities, rather than specific on-campus racial tensions, sparked Missouri's activism.

This potential explanation for the Missouri protests has important implications for the diversity variable. More specifically, the marginalization theory considers the relationship between the proportion of black students at a college and that institution's protest probability. However, based on the Missouri protests, the level of marginalization experienced by minority students may also be a function of their exposure to racial incidents outside the college setting. A preliminary analysis of the 79 colleges in my data set closest to Ferguson, Missouri provides initial support for this argument. For the 33 colleges within 300 miles of Ferguson, 6 schools (18.2 percent) had protests. In contrast, for the schools outside the 300-mile marker (between 301 and 598 miles from Ferguson),

the percent of protesting schools dropped dramatically to 8.7 percent. These results suggest that schools closer to the Ferguson events were more likely to protest.

Checking the size and selectivity of the colleges within the 300-mile radius compared to those outside this range offers additional support to this proximity hypothesis. In terms of selectivity, for the 33 schools within 300 miles, 32 schools (97 percent) were selective institutions, and for the 46 schools outside 300 miles, 39 schools (85 percent) were selective colleges. Given the similarity in selectivity, this variable does not explain the 9.5 percent difference between the percent of protesting schools in these groups. With regards to college size, my other statistically significant variable, there are also major similarities between the schools outside and inside the 300-mile range. Small colleges represent 23.9 percent of the group outside the 300 mile range and 24.2 percent for the institutions within that range. Medium and larger schools represented 18.2 and 54.5 percent respectively for the latter group and 19.6 percent and 56.5 percent for the former group. The similarity in the size variable between the two groups also implies that college size does not fully explain the higher protest probability for schools within the 300-mile radius. Thus, my two prevailing explanations for a college's higher protest likelihood (size and selectivity) do not explain this result, lending more credibility to my finding that Missouri's proximity to an external, race-related event increased its protest probability.

Future researchers should conduct additional event studies to determine if minority students' exposure to a national, allegedly racist incident increases the likelihood of a protest. An example of a relatively recent racially charged homicide is the Renisha McBride shooting. On November 11, 2013 in Dearborn Heights, Michigan,

Theodore Wafer, a white man, shot Renisha McBride, an unarmed, 19-year-old black woman who had knocked on Wafer's door after her car broke down.¹¹⁸ A second relevant racially charged homicide was the Kimani Gray incident. In March 10, 2013, two police officers shot and killed Kimani Gray, a 16-year-old teenage boy in Brooklyn, New York.¹¹⁹ He allegedly pointed a gun at a policeman, but Gray's parents earnestly contested that allegation.¹²⁰ The Black Lives Movement considered both deaths to be examples of "racist police killings with no justice served."¹²¹ Future research should determine which minority students at which colleges in New York and Michigan experienced these incidents directly. The researchers could then determine whether the students at the colleges who encountered these shootings were more likely to protest in 2015-16.

¹¹⁸ Alana Semuels, "Detroit-Area Man Gets 17 to 32 Years for Shooting Visitor on Porch," *The Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-porch-killer-sentenced-20140903-story.html>.

¹¹⁹ David J. Goodman and Tim Stelloh, "Police Kill 16-Year-Old They Say Pointed a Handgun," *The New York Times*, March 10, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/11/nyregion/16-year-old-killed-by-new-york-police.html>.

¹²⁰ Simon Vozick-Levinson, "Black Lives Matter: 11 Racist Police Killings with No Justice Served," *Rolling Stone*, December 4, 2014, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/black-lives-matter-11-racist-police-killings-with-no-justice-served-20141204>.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It's Not Black and White

Considering the racial motivations of the Missouri protest with the cultural argument for the spread of this activism provides a more nuanced explanation for the 2015-16 protests. The Ferguson events intensified the deep seated grievances of many Missouri students. The national outrage following Brown's shootings then provided an opportunity for these students to publicly and passionately vocalize these frustrations. Thus, a highly divisive, racially charged event outside the college sparked the Missouri protest. However, as this activism spread to other campuses, these demonstrations were driven less by racial tensions and more by a pervasive culture of political correctness.

After Missouri, the protests erupted at larger, more selective universities. These colleges' sensitivity towards any potentially offensive or triggering behavior fostered an environment where many minority students deeply sympathized with Missouri's struggles. However, minorities at these most elite schools also had the administrative backing to articulate their own struggles. Thus, as corroborated by the strong results of my selectivity variable, the spread of the protests from Missouri to the rest of the nation was driven by a distinct culture at the country's most elite schools. Combining this result with my finding that the diversity variable was statistically insignificant challenges the widespread belief that race was the exclusive motivation behind the 2015 protests. Racial tensions were the flame that ignited the Missouri protests. However, the demonstrations moved to other more selective colleges because these schools' culture of political correctness and administrative deference fueled this fiery activism.

Beyond the 2015-16 Protests

This conclusion is also relevant in the more recent 2017 wave of protests. Since February 2017, minority students at a growing list of colleges have violently protested on-campus presentations by conservative speakers. For example, in early February 2017, students at UC Berkeley aggressively protested conservative commentator Milo Yiannopoulos' planned speech, leading the administration to cancel the event and costing the school \$100,000 in damage fees.¹²² An equally salient attack on free speech occurred in early March when Middlebury students violently shutdown a speech from conservative author Charles Murray.¹²³ And most recently on April 6, student protestors at Claremont McKenna College prevented conservative journalist Heather Mac Donald from presenting at the college's Athenaeum.¹²⁴ Crucially, all three colleges are highly selective institutions. The rise of these 2017 protests on the three campuses is consistent with my regression results for the 2015-16 demonstrations. That is, at more elite colleges, there is once again a higher protest probability.

The relevance of the selectivity variable is particularly interesting in the case of CMC as this school had one of the highest profile 2015-16 protests. I would argue that this resurgence in student activism may be attributable to the school's increasingly pronounced culture of political correctness and administrative compliance. In the

¹²² Kyung Lah and Madison Park, "Berkeley Protests of Yiannopoulos Cause \$100,000 in Damage," *CNN*, February 2, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/02/01/us/milo-yiannopoulos-berkeley/>.

¹²³ Scott Jaschik, "Middlebury Students Shout Down Controversial Writer Charles Murray," *PBS NewsHour*, March 6, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/middlebury-students-shout-controversial-writer-charles-murray/>.

¹²⁴ "Claremont Students Shut Down Heather Mac Donald's Speech," *Fox Business*, April 11, 2017, <http://www.foxbusiness.com/features/2017/04/11/claremont-students-shut-down-heather-mac-donalds-speech.html>.

aftermath of the 2015 demonstration, the CMC administration addressed many minority students' grievances including their requests for a resource center and for more diversity in Athenaeum speakers.¹²⁵ In response, the school opened the CARE center to offer these students a safe space for study and dialogue and to provide them with more institutional resources.¹²⁶ Additionally, and somewhat ironically, this year, the Athenaeum has hosted many speakers from multiple different minority communities. Typifying the school's increased commitment to inviting speakers from diverse backgrounds, Cornell William Brooks, President and CEO of the NAACP, opened the spring 2017 semester with a discussion of Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy.¹²⁷ A week later, Phyllis Morris-Green, a public defender in San Bernardino County, presented on "racial disparity in the criminal justice court system."¹²⁸ CMC's heightened sensitivity to minority groups' concerns and the administration's significant compliance with many of the demanded changes gave the 2015 protestors every incentive to continue protesting in 2017. Thus, the administration's conciliatory response to the 2015 protest arguably laid the groundwork for the 2017 demonstration.

Similar to the Ferguson events' triggering effect on the Missouri protest, one can also make the case that the hostile racial climate preceding the 2017 demonstrations may have contributed to this more recent insurgency. In 2015, race played an external role in motivating the protests. That is, broader racial tensions outside Missouri, not necessarily

¹²⁵ "Our Demands," Black Liberation Collective, <http://www.blackliberationcollective.org/our-demands/>.

¹²⁶ "Care Center." *Claremont McKenna College*. <https://www.cmc.edu/care-center>.

¹²⁷ "Current Semester Schedule," *Claremont McKenna College Marian Miner Cook Athenaeum*, <https://www.cmc.edu/athenaeum/schedules/current-semester-schedule>.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

hostile race relations inside the college's gates, prompted the protest. Similarly, in January 2017, Donald Trump, a president widely criticized for his racist, unjust treatment of many minority groups, took office. Thus, specific race-related incidents at CMC may have not prompted the demonstration. Instead, the country's larger political environment – one widely held as hateful and unjust towards minority communities – likely motivated the on-campus activism.

While the 2015 protests prompted Mary Spellman's disappointing resignation from her six-year position as Dean of Students, the 2017 protest had arguably more severe results. The administration's response to the 2015 protest set a precedent that the school will comply with many of the protestors' demands. Less than a month ago, the protesters acted on this precedent and successfully shut down Heather Mac Donald's talk. In doing so, these students egregiously violated the school's commitment to free speech and critical inquiry.¹²⁹ The protesters denied many CMC students and faculty their fundamental right to free expression and severely compromised the values of the college.

To prevent this problem from happening again, CMC administrations, as well as the leaders at other elite colleges, should acknowledge the cultural motivations behind these student insurgences. Continued emphasis on the popular notion that racial tensions predominately catalyzed this student activism misses the deeper cultural explanation and provides dangerous momentum to the budding wave of 2017 demonstrations. Many elite colleges' politically correct culture, which administrations have reinforced through their passive, compliant approach to aggrieved minority students' demands, has already eroded

¹²⁹ Hiram Chodosh, "Strengthening Our Community and Our Resolve," e-mail message to the CMC Community, November 24, 2015.

critical debate and freedom of expression at three prominent U.S. institutions. Thus, this paper concludes with a direct request to administrators at elite colleges: first, control this culture of political correctness. And second, adopt a firm, punitive approach to students who violate colleges' policies against stifling others' free speech, vandalizing campus property, or barricading school buildings. Act now because free expression and critical inquiry – the lifeblood of the American college experience – are at stake.

APPENDIX

Summaries of the Nine Highest Profile Protests

1. University of Missouri (10/20/2015)

School profile: large in size, selective, medium diversity, constrained

Protest recap: In late October 2015, undergraduates at the University of Missouri found a swastika drawn in feces in a dormitory bathroom.¹³⁰ This drawing infuriated many minority students as it represented the tipping point at an institution with an allegedly “segregated and unwelcoming environment that administrators [had repeatedly] failed to address.”¹³¹ At the school’s homecoming game, Concerned Student 1950, the institution’s racial activist group, confronted the University’s president Tim Wolfe about the swastika.¹³² Protestors used a microphone to detail the school’s racist history, identifying examples of discriminatory behavior dating back to the institution’s founding in 1830. President Wolfe allegedly remained silent during the confrontation, igniting activist behavior including “a hunger strike by graduate student Jonathan Butler, a mass student demonstration and faculty walkout, and a strike by the university’s football team.”¹³³ The Missouri protest was the first demonstration in this wave of activism, and it prompted similar protests across the nation.

2. University of Cincinnati (11/9/2015)

School summary: large in size, selective, medium diversity, unconstrained

¹³⁰ Alia Wong and Adrienne Green, “Campus Politics: A Cheat Sheet,” *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/campus-protest-roundup/417570/>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

Protest recap: In July 2015, during a traffic stop, a white police officer at the University of Cincinnati (UC) shot and killed Samuel DuBose, a black, unarmed man.¹³⁴ Following the shooting, several embittered students formed the Irate 8, representing the percentage of black students at UC.¹³⁵ This group, which has subsequently dedicated itself to addressing race-related issues on campus, created and distributed a list of demands including a more racially inclusive curriculum and the “recruitment and retention of black students and faculty.”¹³⁶ In addition to presenting these demands, several undergraduates staged a silent protest on November 18, 2015 to illustrate their allegiance with Irate 8 and the Missouri protestors.

3. Ithaca College (11/11/2015)

School Profile: medium in size, selective, medium diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: During family weekend in November 2015, the People of Color of Ithaca College organized a “solidarity walkout,” showing their support for the Missouri protest and specifically demanding for the resignation of Ithaca President, Tom Rochon.¹³⁷

Protestors widely distributed a letter titled, “The Case Against Tom Rochon,” which condemned the president for his “incompetent and autocratic leadership.”¹³⁸ These student demonstrators also listed several specific critiques against Rochon including his creation of campus wide initiatives without student or faculty consent and his failure to meaningfully improve the college’s student diversity.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ “Open Letter: The Case Against Tom Rochon,” *The Ithacan* (Ithaca, NY), November 7, 2015.

4. Claremont McKenna College (11/11/2015)

School Profile: Small in size, most selective, low diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: A group of minority students at Claremont McKenna College as early as April 2015 wrote to President Hiram Chodosh outlining its' demands for a more inclusive, diverse campus environment.¹⁴⁰ This list included "greater faculty diversity, more funding for multicultural services... and a center dedicated to diversity, identity and free speech."¹⁴¹ In early November, these original grievances resurfaced when Dean of Students Mary Spellman sent a poorly worded email to a Hispanic student.¹⁴² In response to this Hispanic student's op-ed censuring the college for its limited resources for minority undergraduates, Spellman vowed to better serve students who "don't fit our CMC fold."¹⁴³ Her expression, for many students, illustrated the administration's continued inability to represent and support minority students, and ultimately, led to college wide protests and a two student hunger strike.

5. Amherst College (11/12/2015)

School Profile: Small in size, most selective, high diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: Expressing their solidarity with the growing national movement while also fighting against their own institutional injustices, Amherst students organized a sit-in in early November.¹⁴⁴ The students leading this protest, collectively known as Amherst Uprising, spoke passionately about the discrimination facing students of color at

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Alia Wong and Adrienne Green, "Campus Politics: A Cheat Sheet," *The Atlantic*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/04/campus-protest-roundup/417570/>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Amherst.¹⁴⁵ This group also demanded that the college remove its mascot, Lord Jeff, who allegedly killed many Native Americans by giving them small pox blankets.¹⁴⁶

6. Yale University (11/13/15)

School Profile: Medium in size, most selective, medium diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: Students in “Next Yale” and the Black Student Alliance mobilized over 1,000 supporters in a “March of Resilience.”¹⁴⁷ This event protested a series of race-related events at the university including the alleged banning of black women from a fraternity party, the drawing of swastikas around campus, and a letter from Yale lecturer, Erika Christakis, instructing students offended by “culturally insensitive” Halloween costumes to simply “look away.”¹⁴⁸ The march ended in the Afro-American cultural center where students spent hours criticizing President Peter Salovey.¹⁴⁹ The protestors condemned Yale’s discriminatory environment and demanded more “cultural centers and mental health support for minority students.”¹⁵⁰

7. Brown University (11/16/2015)

School Profile: Medium in size, most selective, medium diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: In mid-November, a Brown police officer threw a Dartmouth College student on the ground and handcuffed this man while he was attending the annual Latinx Ivy League Conference.¹⁵¹ Hundreds of Brown students joined with Providence College

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

to protest this “heated and physical” altercation.¹⁵² These students also protested in support of their peers at the University of Missouri and at other colleges.¹⁵³ Brown and Providence held a “blackout” where students dressed in black to represent the racism facing their peers on-campus and at other colleges. Several minority students also spoke one-by-one into a megaphone about the racial discrimination they had experienced at Brown.¹⁵⁴

8. Princeton University

School Profile: Medium in size, most selective, medium diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: In November 2015, Princeton University’s Black Justice League (BJL) initiated a 32-hour protest and sit-in at Princeton President Christopher Eisgruber’s office.¹⁵⁵ The BJL demanded that the president remove Woodrow Wilson’s name from the institution’s Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and the Woodrow Wilson College, one of the school’s dorms.¹⁵⁶ When Wilson served as Princeton’s president in 1902, he supported segregationist policies, discouraging black admittance to Princeton and actively supporting the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁵⁷ The BJL labeled Wilson a white supremacist and demanded that the institution erase his legacy from the school.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ “Brown University latest to be hit with anti-racism protests,” *CBSNews* (Providence, RI), November 16, 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

9. Harvard University

School Profile: Medium in size, most selective, medium diversity, unconstrained

Protest Recap: Around the same time as the University of Missouri and Princeton

protests, Harvard University experienced similar racial tensions when students found

black tape covering the portraits of black law school professors.¹⁵⁹ Widely regarded as a

reprehensible hate crime, hundreds of students, faculty and staff came together to protest

Harvard Law School's "racist and unwelcoming environment."¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

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