

## **Abstract**

This thesis analyzes how the American “university” reproduces oppression in a racial capitalist economic context. As a carceral institution, universities are “spaces of capture” in the abolitionist sense, enforcing status quo social norms rather than challenging them. Students of color and other historically-oppressed identities are most affected by these limitations on their present and future selves, both in terms of perceived future possibilities and current economic burdens. Although there has been much written on the topic of higher education and costs, this thesis addresses the research gap in the “imaginative” aspect of the university as a space of capture by examining how “the university” as an institution sustains the norm of attending college as an expectation. With special attention to ethical research methods, interviews with current students at a prestigious California university allow them to tell their stories of constraint and possibility in a racial capitalist system of higher education.