

# The **Burden** of Student Debt

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**SHEEO Communities of Practice:  
Supporting Student Loan Borrowers**

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## *Student Debt in America: Lend With a Smile, Collect With a Fist*

Give this article   217



Liz Kelley, left, and her sister and fellow teacher, Sheryl Silverberg, 45, at Ms. Kelley's home in Ballwin, Mo. Ms. Kelley, a high school English teacher and mother of four, has accrued \$410,000 in student loan debt. Whitney Curtis for The New York Times



Jodi Meyers stands in front of the house she purchased despite her \$55,000 in student debt. Jodi Meyers



### **Tiela Halpin**

32, Evanston  
B.A. in photography  
Columbia College Chicago, 2012

**About \$80,000 in student loan debt**

*"I fully expect to die before I finish paying it off. There's little hope."*



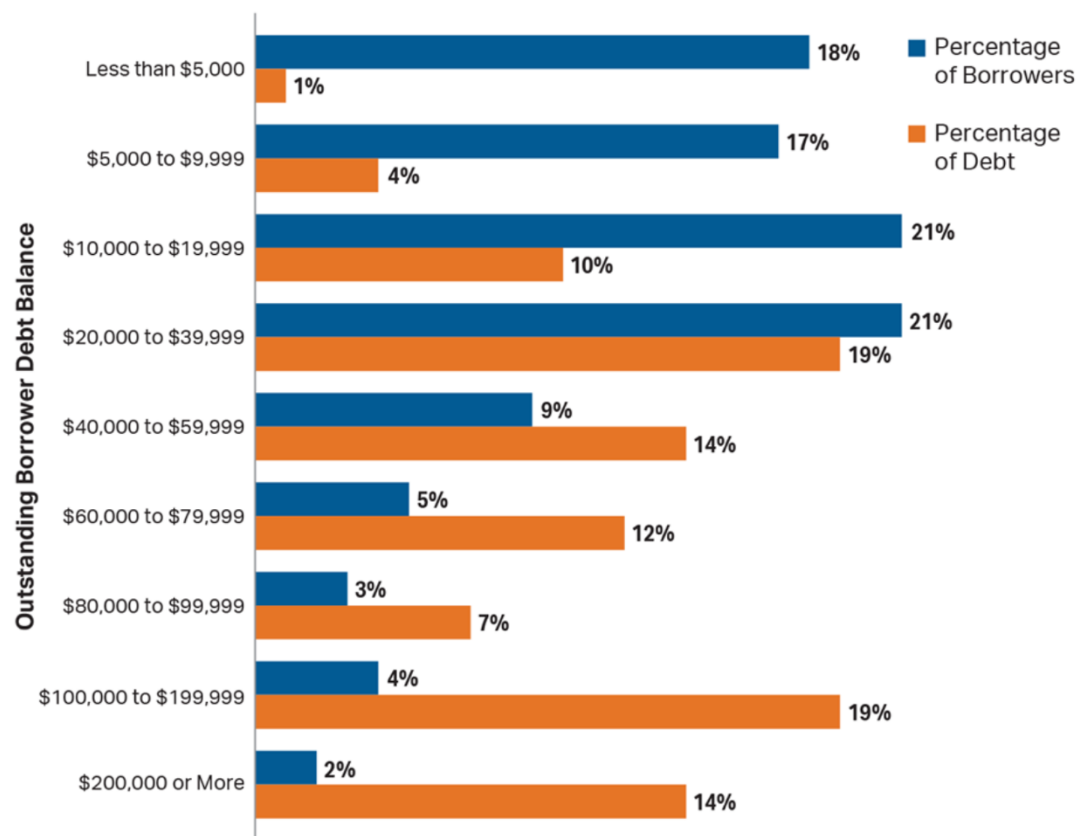
### **Amanda Spizzirri**

23, North Center  
B.A. in Peace, Justice and Conflict Studies  
DePaul University, 2017

**About \$90,000 in student loan debt**

*"Currently I'm working as a server, and as a barista, and I walk dogs in my free time, all to try and make a little bit of money back."*

# Share of Amount Borrowed



# Struggles with Repayment

The screenshot shows the top portion of a news article on the Pew Research Center website. The article title is 'The U.S. Is Facing a Student Loan Repayment Crisis', dated October 9, 2018, by Sarah Sattelmeyer and Rich Williams. The article is categorized under 'Fiscal & Economic Policy' and 'U.S. State Policy'. Below the title is a large image of a student with a backpack. To the right, there is a 'RELATED EXPERTS' section featuring Sarah Sattelmeyer, Manager of Student Loans, and another article titled '4 Things You Should Know About Student Loan Repayment' from September 4, 2018.





# Missing Race in the Student Debt Debate

*When leaving college:*

*10 years after leaving college:*

*Black students hold **85%**  
more debt than Whites*

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*Black young adults hold **170%**  
more debt than Whites*

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*10 years after leaving college:*

*Black students hold **85%**  
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*Black young adults hold **170%**  
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Black young adults owe more 10 years after  
college than the average White student did  
when they left college.

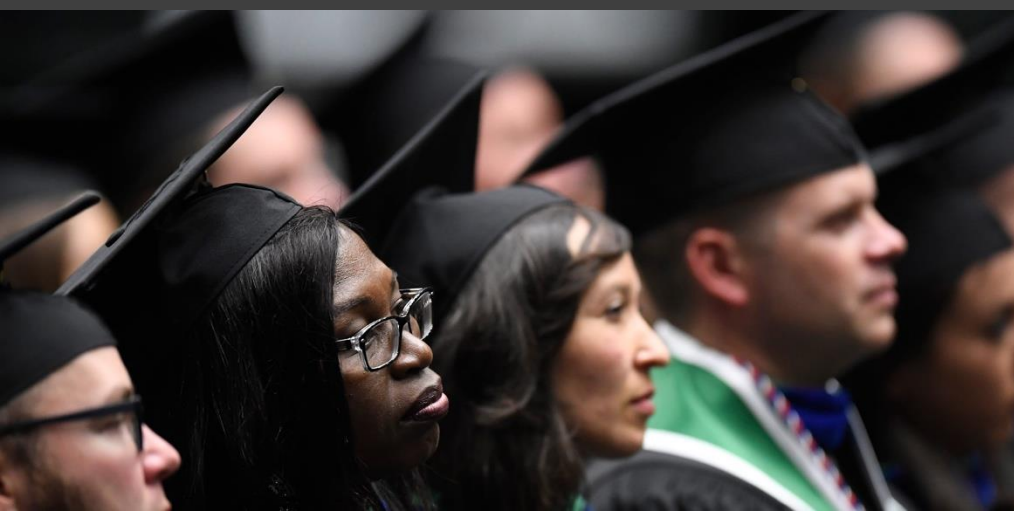




# A DREAM DEFAULTED

THE STUDENT LOAN CRISIS AMONG  
BLACK BORROWERS

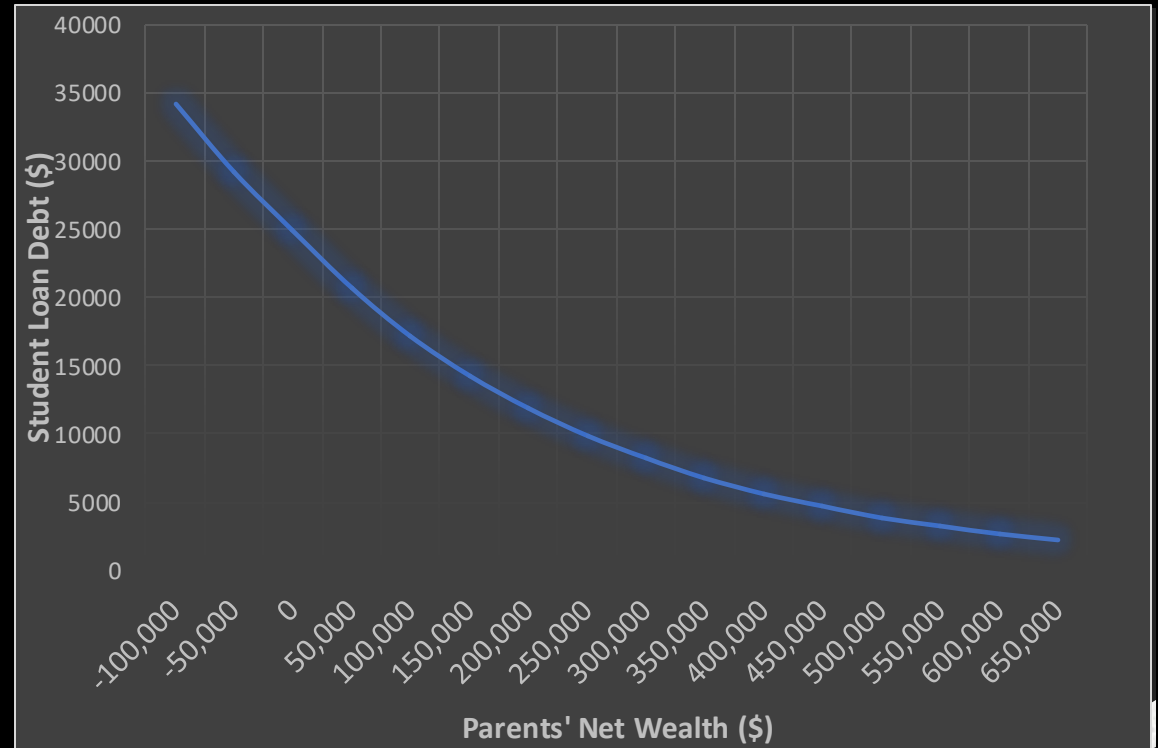




Off to College, Into the Red

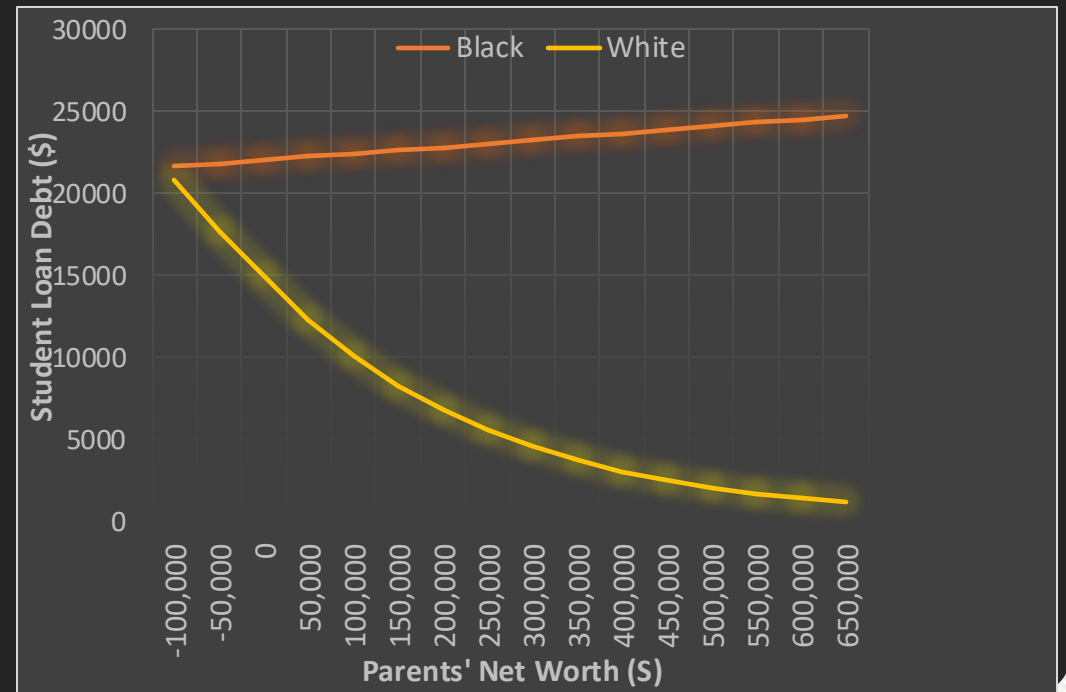


# Parental Wealth and Young Adult Student Loan Debt



- Addo, F., J. Houle, and D. Simon. 2016. "Young, Black, and (Still) in the Red: Wealth, Race, and Student Loan Debt." 2016. *Race and Social Problems* 8:64-76.

# Parental Wealth and Young Adult Student Loan Debt, By Race of Young Adult



Addo, F., J. Houle, and D. Simon. 2016. "Young, Black, and (Still) in the Red: Wealth, Race, and Student Loan Debt." 2016. *Race and Social Problems* 8:64-76.

## Relying on Family and Social Networks

“Mom and dad were just always there,” he said. “But my aunt committed to what she called the *Aunt Scholarship*. She paid for my books every semester as long as I kept my GPA at a certain level. That was out of the kindness of her heart, which was a super-duper big help.” Daniel, M, 22, graduate

“Freshman year, everybody helped in terms of extra money that I needed. [I was] still broke, but if I needed something, I could ask.” Agnes, W, 32, graduate



## Relying on Family and Social Networks

“She told me she said she did not want me to have to take on all that debt. So she was going to take that on for me. And so that was about it. I was really grateful. But I also knew that was kind of ridiculous about how much debt I haven't taken on in the name of my education.” Kellyanne, W, 28, graduate

“[During my college career] I took out like \$20,000. And then the loans that my parents took out—I don't know the exact number, but I think it was closer to maybe \$80 or \$90,000.” Alexandra, W, 28, graduate

# The Intergenerational Cycle of Debt

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# Intergenerational Inequality

“There’s no sugarcoating it. I think [the debt is] the main reason why they're not going to be retiring as early as they would like to. They’re approaching their 60’s, and they’d [like to retire by 65]. But that's impossible. It's not going to happen unless they won the lottery. Retirement without any savings or very minimal savings is not possible for them.” She paused. “For me my goal is to be able to help them pay that back. They don't expect it but, for me, I'm hoping that, because where I'm hoping to go with my career, I can pay them back.” Sofia, W, 23, graduate



# The Hidden Costs of Debt Repayment



## Self-blame and regret

“It’s like on one hand, I should’ve done more education for myself. But then I feel like ‘no, they kind of make you feel like it’s okay.’ So that financial literacy part is missing ... [but] I kind of feel like I’ve been manipulated a bit.” Naomi, 26, W, graduate


Jared, who accumulated approximately \$30,000 in debt in college, said he had no choice but to borrow, but thought that others were less responsible. 31, M, graduate

Stress,  
psychological  
anguish, and a  
certainty of  
hopelessness

“like a dark cloud over my head” Lisa, 33, W,  
graduate

“ now that I’m facing the monster, I’m not  
going to lie to you... sometimes I find it soul  
crushing.” Malik, 31, M, graduate

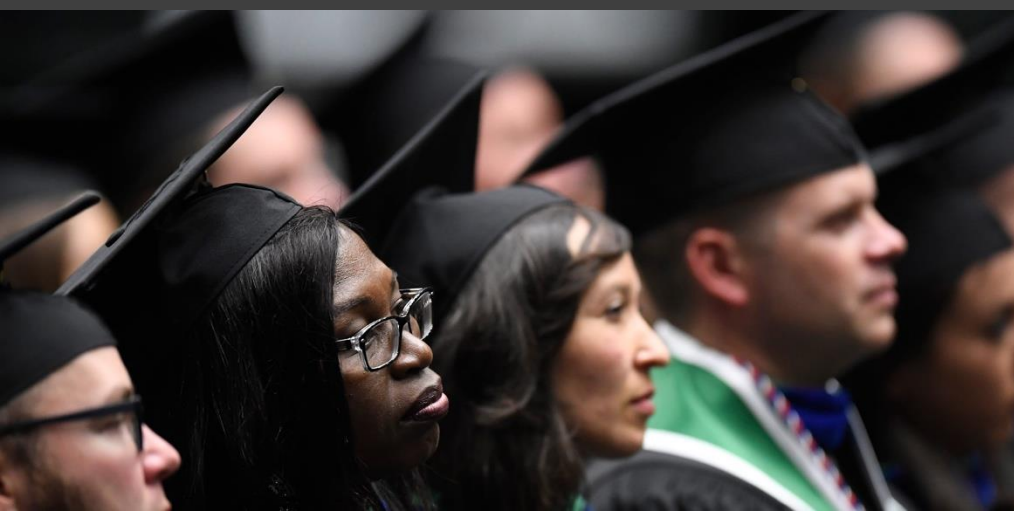
“Every time they send me an e-mail, I get a  
little nervous seeing the e-mail pop across my  
phone because, I feel like I never know what  
they want or I know that they could be asking  
for more money. Definitely stresses me out all  
the time.” Virgil, 28, M, graduate



## Dashed dreams in the transition to adulthood

- Delayed Milestones
- Career Reorientation and Sacrifices





Student Debt and the Reproduction  
of the Fragile Black Middle Class



## Planning for the future and falling short

“I mean, I would have more disposable income if I didn't have the debt. My net worth would be plus \$17,000 right now if I didn't have the debt. So I mean, in the abstract sense, it has impacted it. And every month, every dollar that I put toward the debt is less money that I can save or invest in something else.”

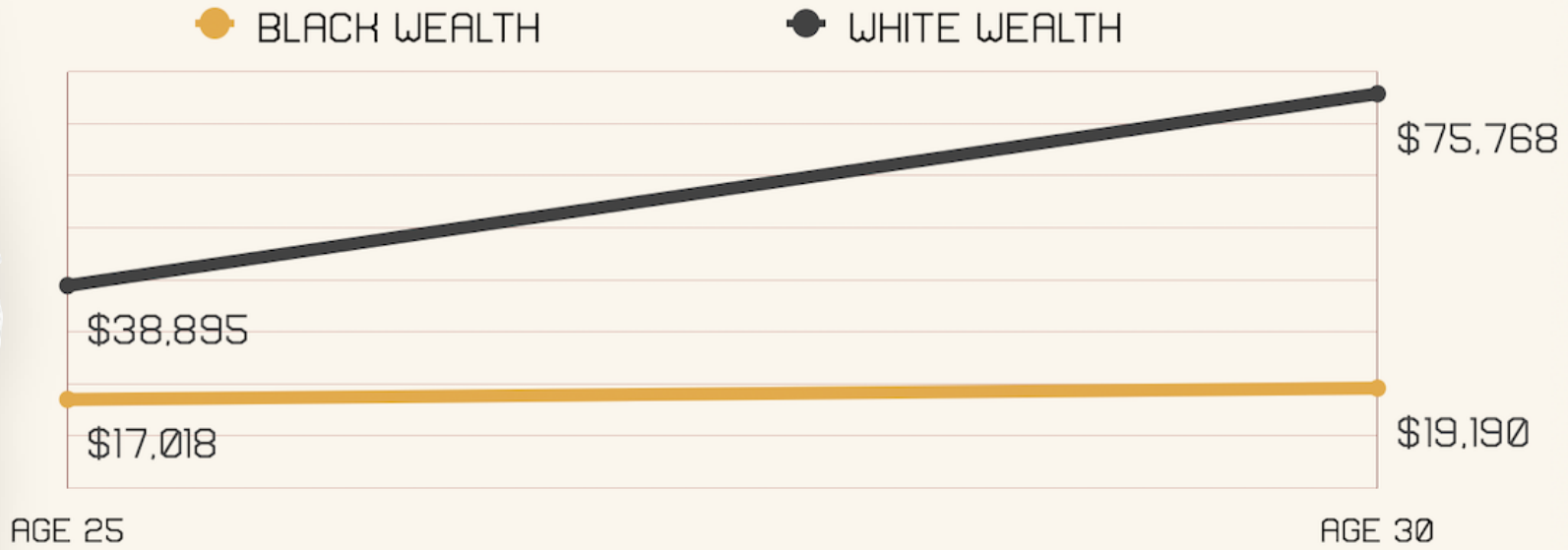
Yasmine, W, 32, graduate

## Planning for the future and falling short

“I think it's made me feel hesitant to want to make big financial steps in terms of like purchasing a house or starting a family,” he said, “knowing that I have these monthly payments looming and how much they are, it's been challenging to figure out how exactly could I begin to think about affording a house with these loans. That's one thing that's been really challenging.” Jaydnn, M, 30, graduate

# EXPANDING WEALTH GAPS AND STUDENT DEBT

FROM AGE 25 TO 30




# The Burden of Student Debt

- Many Black families use social capital, turning to extended family and community networks for financial support.
- College costs can be a burden on extended family, which can diminish wealth further as families help fund college education, often at great personal sacrifice.
- Student debt is associated with psychological, relational, and economic strains, including stress, self-blame, delayed life milestones, and constrained career choices.



# Summary and Call to Action

- Higher education must be critically examined for its role in perpetuating racial and economic inequalities.
  - Student debt isn't just an individual burden but a societal mechanism reinforcing inequality.
  - Empower borrowers by shifting the narrative from blame to systemic critique.
  - Encourage a shift toward greater support to reduce financial burdens and ensure equitable access to higher education.
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