

Bio



A trenchant cultural critic, celebrated sociologist, and award-winning writer, Tressie McMillan Cottom is known for rearranging your brain in the span of a

carefully-turned phrase. Her breadth is phenomenal – it moves from the racial hierarchy of beauty standards and the class codes of dressing for work to the predation of for-profit colleges and the stain of racial capitalism on our plural democracy – all while reimagining the essay form for the 21st century as she goes.

Professor Tressie McMillan Cottom's first book, *Lower Ed*, captures the zeitgeist on how profit, and debt, moved from the margins of higher education to bankrupt the very heart of American meritocracy. Influential change-makers like Senators Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren and activists like The Debt Strike Collective cite her book as important for changing the conversation about higher education. Her sharp insights do not let anyone off the hook – she argues that bad federal policy, state disinvestment, amoral narratives about meritocracy, and prestige-driven cultures of traditional higher education all share responsibility for LowerEd.

Tressie McMillan Cottom is a professor with the Center for Information, Technology and Public Life at UNC-Chapel Hill, a New York Times columnist, and 2020 MacArthur Fellow.

Tressie's far-ranging intellectual interests include books, articles, magazine profiles and opinion-editorials but it is her essays that routinely shape the discourse. Tressie's version of the essay – or Tressays, as her devout fans refer to them – is part revolutionary pamphlet, part poetic chapbook, part sociological analysis, and part call-to-arms. Her 2019 collection of essays, *Thick*, was a National Book Award finalist that reimagines the modern essay form. Tressays are powerful storytelling that make problems for power. Careful and poetic, Tressie explores the everyday culture of big ideas like racism, sexism, inequality, and oppression by giving us the language to live better lives.

