

# University of Missouri students protest against racial discrimination and harassment, 2015

- [\(mainly or initiated by\) people of color](#) [1]
- [\(mainly or initiated by\) student participants](#) [2]

## Timing

September

2015

to:

November

2015

## Location and Goals

Country:

United States

Location City/State/Province:

Columbia, Missouri

Location Description:

University of Missouri

[View Location on Map](#)

Goals:

I. We demand that the University of Missouri system president, Tim Wolfe, write a handwritten apology for the Concerned Students 1950 demonstrators and holds a press conference in the Mizzou Student Center reading the letter. In the letter and at the press conference, Tim Wolfe must acknowledge his white male privilege, recognize that systems of oppression exist, and provide a verbal commitment to fulfilling Concerned Student 1950 demands. We want Tim Wolfe to admit to his gross negligence, allowing his driver to hit one of the demonstrators, consenting to the physical violence of bystanders, and Leslie refusing to intervene when Columbia Police Department use excessive force with demonstrators.

II. We demand the immediate removal of Tim Wolfe as UM system president. After his removal a new amendment to the UM system policies must be established to have all future UM president and Chancellor positions be selected by collective of students, staff, and faculty of diverse backgrounds.

III. We demand that the University of Missouri meets the Legion of Black Collegians' demands that were presented in 1969 for the betterment of the black community.

IV. We demand that by the academic year 2017–2018, the University of Missouri increases the percentage of black faculty and staff campus wide to 10%.

V. We demand that the University of Missouri compose a strategic 10 year plan by May 1, 2016 that will increase retention rates for marginalize students, sustain diversity curriculum and training, and promote a

more safe and inclusive campus.

VII. We demand that the University of Missouri increases funding for resources for the University of Missouri Counseling Center for the purpose of hiring additional mental health professionals; particularly those of color, boosting the mental health outreach and programming across campus, increasing campus-wide awareness and visibility of the counseling center, and reducing lengthy wait times for prospective clients.

VIII. We demand at the University of Missouri increases funding, resources, and personnel for the social justices center on campus for the purpose of hiring additional professionals, particularly those of color, boosting out reach and programming across campus, and increasing campus-wide awareness and visibility.

## Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 039. Parades
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 005. Declarations of indictment and intention

Methods in 5th segment:

- 159. The fast (fast of moral pressure, hunger strike, satyagrahic fast)
- 162. Sit-in

Methods in 6th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 037. Singing
- 050. Teach-ins
- 060. Suspension of social and sports activities>30 Black Missouri Tigers players boycott all football related activities

Notes on Methods:

The teach-in took place when Concerned Student 1950 and the Legion of Black Collegians held a “mock tour” during the college’s recruitment day.

Segment Length:

8 days

## **Classifications**

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Undergraduate and graduate students

## **Leaders, partners, allies, elites**

Leaders:

Concerned Student 1950

Partners:

Legion of Black Collegians, Jewish Students Organization

External allies:

Missouri Tigers Black student athletes, Bethel Baptist Churchgoers

Involvement of social elites:

Gov. Jay Nixon, U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill and Rep. Steve Cookson, R-Butler County

## **Joining/exiting order of social groups**

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Concerned Student 1950

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Bethel Baptist Churchgoers

Groups in 4th Segment:

- Jewish Students Organization

Groups in 5th Segment:

- Mizzou Tigers

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Legion of Black Collegians

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

The Legion of Black Collegians had been peripherally involved from the beginning as a proxy of Concerned Student 1950, though it was only until the 6th segment that they participated in an action with distinction from Concerned Student 1950.

Segment Length:

8 days

## **Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence**

Opponents:

UM System, UM System President Tim Wolfe

Repressive Violence:

Missouri police combated student protesters at the Homecoming Parade with pepper spray.

## **Success Outcome**

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

4 points out of 6 points

Survival:

0.5 points out of 1 point

Growth:

2 points out of 3 points

Total points:

6.5 out of 10 points

Notes on outcomes:

Out of the 8 demands, only 3 were met. However, the most difficult of the 8, the removal of UM System President Tim Wolfe, was sustained. Therefore, I rank their success a 4.

Before protests against racial discrimination and harassment began at University of Missouri campuses in 2015, tensions had risen for a number of years. For example, on 26 February 2010, two students spread cotton balls on the fields of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center as a racist mockery of enslavement. A lack of substantive administrative action in response to such cases of racial discrimination provoked the ire of the university's Black students. In addition to the unwelcoming racial climate, graduate students were becoming increasingly discontented with the medical services offered by the University. Between 21 August 2015 and 3 September 2015, the University of Missouri system quietly ended ten contracts with Planned Parenthood locations, where students frequently made clinical visits. Similarly, in August of the same year, the University of Missouri also cut health insurance subsidies for its graduate students.

Black student frustrations grew on 11 September when Payton Head, a Black senior and president of the Missouri Students Association, made a viral Facebook post about racial slurs other students yelled at him on campus. On 24 September, Danielle Walker led the first of two "Racism Lives Here" rallies as a member of Concerned Student 1950, an organization named in homage to the year the first Black student was admitted to the university. Beginning at Speaker's Circle, participants made their way to Jesse Hall holding signs and chanting. The rally emphasized incidents of racism that occurred on University of Missouri campuses, like the racial slurs yelled at Payton Head. It also called attention to the "slow response" of University administration to condemn such incidences and offer support to students.

Danielle Walker organized a second "Racism Lives Here" rally on 1 October. During this event, 50 participants marched from the restaurant "Mort's in the Shack" outside of the Student Center, to different floors of the

Center. Participants carried signs with various phrases, including: "I am not here because of affirmative action," "Are you anti-Racist or nah?" and "#BlackLivesMatter." Other signs affirmed intersectional solidarity with other identities, reading "Queer and Trans POC Lives Matter." One sign, "#Bacons Rebellion 1676," alluded to Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, a historical protest "against the governor of Virginia for unfair treatment of his citizens."

On 8 October, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin announced that, beginning in 2016, diversity and inclusion training would become mandatory for all students, faculty, and staff. In his message, Loftin stipulated that should students not complete the training they would not be eligible to enroll in classes. Jonathan Butler, a graduate student involved with Concerned Student 1950, released an open letter in the campus newspaper, *The Maneater*, in response to Loftin's announcement. He maintained that such a display was "a step in the right direction" but "not enough", criticizing the reactionary nature of the initiative.

During the University of Missouri's annual Homecoming Parade on 10 October, members of Concerned Student 1950 stopped President Tim Wolfe's car, in which a driver was chauffeuring him and his wife as part of the procession. Wearing black shirts to signify their unity, the Concerned Student delegation held Wolfe at the intersection of Ninth Street and University Avenue for 15 minutes as they chanted and made speeches through bullhorns condemning the inaction of the University's administration in responding to racism. Jonathan Butler, one of the protesters, explained the action as necessary to their cause stating, "we disrupted the parade specifically in front of Tim Wolfe because we need him to get our message...We've sent emails, we've sent tweets, we've messaged but we've gotten no response back from the upper officials at Mizzou to really make change on this campus. And so we directed it to him personally. That we are here. We want to make our presence known, that we are here and we deserve respect, we deserve humanity."

Some parade-goers joined the protest in support, while others chanted "MIZ ZOU", a shortened form of the University's name that is typically a chant of school spirit, in an attempt to drown out the sound of Concerned Student 1950's speeches. Breanne LoPresti, a spectator, joined in support of Concerned Student 1950 because she did not wish to stand in "white silent compliance." LoPresti went on to state, "I feel like I can't just sit by and watch. It's not my fight, but I support it." While Wolfe's car was unable to break from the protesters, and in fact hit one accidentally in an impatient attempt to maneuver away, the rest of the parade diverted from the main route through a Domino's Pizza parking lot. Police eventually dispersed the protesters using pepper spray and physical force, to the supportive cheers of the cheering parade spectators.

A separate group of student protesters organized by Carl Kenny, co-pastor at Bethel Baptist Church and columnist for the *Columbia Missourian*, a local newspaper, marched in solidarity with the Concerned Student 1950 movement within the parade itself. Holding an orange banner reading, "We Support Our Minority Students," 12 other protesters marched from Conley and 5th streets behind the MU Water Ski and Wakeboard Club and a pickup truck carrying former Missouri football wide receiver Bud Sasser. These two demonstrations were organized independently of each other.

Concerned Student 1950 released a list of eight demands on 20 October making clear their desire for change. The demands, circulated on social media platforms like Twitter, called for the resignation of University of Missouri System president, Tom Wolfe. Additional demands included an increase in Black faculty and staff to 10%; an increase in funding and resources for the Campus Counseling Center so as to increase capacity to hire more mental health professionals of color; and an affirming nod given to the demands made by the Legion of Black Collegians in 1969.

In the early morning on 24 October, a swastika was found to be painted inside of a bathroom in Gateway Hall, a residential building. Following the filing of a police report, the Jewish Students Organization expressed their

desire to coordinate a solidarity social media campaign with the Legion of Black Collegiates under #hateliveshere.

On 2 November, Jonathan Butler, a graduate student and organizer with Concerned Student 1950, announced that he would begin to hunger strike at 9:00 AM. He vowed that he would not eat until UM System president Tom Wolfe resigned. At 8:29 AM, Butler sent his letter to curators, the governing body of the University of Missouri System that had the authority to dismiss President Wolfe. Butler then uploaded the letter to his Twitter account at 10:00 AM, which detailed the motivation for his strike by referencing “black students being called racist slurs, the sudden removal of graduate student health insurance subsidies in August, MU’s cancellation of Planned Parenthood contracts and the swastika drawn with human feces found in an MU residence hall.”

In response, Wolfe released the following letter at 5:00 PM via email:

“It is extremely concerning when any of our students puts their health and safety in harm’s way. I sincerely hope that Mr. Butler will consider a different method of advocating for this cause. I respect his right to protest and admire the courage it takes to speak up.

“I believe that the best course of action is an ongoing dialogue about the racial climate on our four UM System campuses. Immediately after my initial meeting with the ConcernedStudent1950 group on 26 October, I invited Jonathan to meet again so we can build a deeper relationship and open a frank conversation about the group’s frustrations and experiences. I remain hopeful that they will accept my invitation.

“This meeting with the ConcernedStudent1950 group is one example of our engagement at the UM System level on this complex, societal issue. I have met with our chancellors, campus diversity officers, students and faculty about the scope of the problem, so that collectively we may address these issues that are pervasive and systemic in our society. We must always continue our efforts to affect change at our UM System campuses.”

Also on 2 November, students began an occupation of Mel Carnahan Quadrangle to demonstrate their frustration with the UM System’s lack of administrative care. Students set up twelve tents within the encampment, ten for sleeping and two for holding food and water.

Shortly after the hunger strike, Concerned Student 1950 launched a Change.org campaign to raise public awareness and invite external participation in the call for Wolfe’s resignation. The campaign cited the events of the Homecoming parade protest and Butler’s hunger strike as its motivating factors. In addition to admonishing Wolfe, the petition also tagged Governor Jay Nixon and the UM System Board of Curators. At the time of its conclusion, the petition had amassed 7, 314 signatures.

Concerned Student 1950 announced that they would be engaging in a boycott of the services offered by the university, including the purchase of merchandise from its stores, food from retail dining services and ticketed events, on 4 November. The next day, prior to a football game being played between the Missouri Tigers and Mississippi State, Concerned Student 1950 led a march through campus. The mixed group of 200 members and allies chanted “Join us in the revolution!” as they walked.

On 6 November, Wolfe issued an apology to Concerned Student 1950, stating that “racism does exist at our university and it is unacceptable...It is a long-standing, systemic problem which daily affects our family of students, faculty, and staff. I am sorry this is the case. I truly want all members of our university community to feel included, valued, and safe.”

In a large escalation of pressure on the UM System, 30 Black players of the Missouri Tigers, Mizzou’s football

team, announced a boycott of all football-related activities, including practices and games, on 7 November. They were poised to sustain their boycott until UM System President Tim Wolfe left office. The student-athletes cited concern for fellow peer Jonathan Butler, whose health was not faring well as a result of his hunger strike, and their desire to express their own concerns about the mistreatment of Black students on Mizzou's campuses. This development, coming from one of the strongest contenders in the Southeastern Conference college football league, had the potential of costing the university \$1 million should the team forfeit the upcoming match against Brigham Young University.

On the same day as the Missouri Tigers' announcement, Concerned Student 1950 and the Legion of Black Collegians held a "mock tour" during the college's recruitment day. The two groups informed prospective students of racist incidents that occurred on campus, including the littering of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center lawn with cotton balls. Concerned Student 1950 and the Legion of Black Collegians gave presentations in several locations and sang as they marched to different stops on their journey. The action included stops and sometimes prayers at dining halls, the Black Culture Center, the protest campsite at Mel Carnahan Quad, and the Alumni Center.

On 8 November, following an incident during which two trucks flying Confederate flags drove past the Mel Quad encampment, over 150 students gathered at the sit in during the evening to pray, sing, and read Bible verses. Many camped in the plaza overnight, despite temperatures in the 30s (fahrenheit).

Missouri lawmakers, including Gov. Jay Nixon, U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill and Rep. Steve Cookson, R-Butler County, the chairman of the Missouri House Committee on Higher Education, called on UM System administrators to step down on 8 November. They released a series of public statements condemning Mizzou's racial issues and leadership.

Tim Wolfe resigned from his position on 9 November. On the same day, Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin demoted himself to a lower position. The resignation of Wolfe met the second demand of Concerned Student 1950; the announcement of his apology on 6 November was the group's first victory. In addition to these, the university committed to the development and implementation of mandatory diversity and inclusion training for all students, faculty and staff partially in line with the fifth demand made by the group.

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Joy George, 02/03/2019

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