Missouri students apologize for cotton ball prank

By ALAN SCHER ZAGIER, Associated Press Writer

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COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) -- Two University of Missouri ROTC students have apologized for scattering cotton balls outside the Black Culture Center in an incident that heightened racial tensions during Black History Month.

Nineteen-year-old freshman Sean Fitzgerald and 21-year-old senior Zachary Tucker were arrested Tuesday on suspicion of hate crimes and possible felony tampering. They have not been charged.

In a letter to campus leaders, local prosecutors and student groups issued Friday by their attorneys, the two apologized for their "inexcusable judgment."

The statement described "a series of foolish acts" that included riding a Missouri tiger statue on Francis Quadrangle, hurling another statue at Memorial Stadium and hoisting a pirate flag at the ROTC building. Both students have been suspended from school.

"Sean and Zachary deeply regret the pain their actions have caused others and the negative attention this incident has attracted to the campus and community," the statement reads. "This type of behavior is totally out of character for each of these young men and they hope for the opportunity to prove this to the community."

Nathan Stephens, director of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, met with Tucker and his parents Wednesday. Stephens said he accepts the students' apology.

"We don't hold any ill feelings," he said. "Our intent is to see these two gentlemen learn from this experience, and to develop and grow as people."

Chris Slusher, Tucker's attorney, called the episode "kids doing dumb things," not a hate crime.
"There are some very serious questions about whether the felony hate crime statute applies," he said. "We're confident that this is not a felony."

The Feb. 26 incident sparked widespread concern on the 30,000-student campus. A town hall meeting Monday night drew an overflow crowd of several hundred students and administrators. Many participants said the cotton balls, which invoked images of slavery, indicated broader racial divides on campus.

By Friday, the tenor had shifted to healing, not hate.

Chancellor Brady Deaton and University of Missouri system President Gary Forsee visited informally with students over lunch at the center, eating pizza and wearing "Pick UNITY" buttons. Students planned a "United We Stand" rally on the steps of Jesse Hall, the main administration building, for Friday night.

Deaton described a "tremendous will to unite" and "not letting this event, as upsetting as it was, to derail forward movement."

For Lysaundra Campbell, a sophomore from Kansas City, the cotton ball protests and unity rallies have shown a campus supportive of its black students.

"What these two guys did aren't the views of Mizzou," she said.
S T. LOUIS POST-DISP A T C H

2 MU students apologize for cotton ball incident
BY STEPHEN DEERE
ST. LOUIS POST-DISP A T C H
Saturday, Mar. 06 2010

COLUMBIA, MO. — Two students on Friday apologized for scattering cotton balls outside the black culture center at the University of Missouri in Columbia.

Zachary E. Tucker, 21, who is from the St. Louis area, and Sean D. Fitzgerald, 19, used "inexcusable judgment." according to a joint statement issued by their attorneys.

The incident was part of a series of foolish acts last Friday that included riding a tiger statue and hoisting a pirate flag at the ROTC building, the statement said.

The two were arrested Tuesday evening on suspicion of a felony hate crime and were released on bond. Neither has been charged, and prosecutors are not likely to decide what, if any, charges will be filed until Monday, said Ryan Haigh, an assistant Boone County prosecutor.

Both students have been suspended from the university.

Police said that between 1:30 and 2 a.m. on Feb. 26, cotton balls were scattered across the front lawn and sidewalk at the front door of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center.

The incident offended students who felt it harkened to days of slavery on cotton plantations.

Police arrested Tucker, a senior majoring in psychology, and Fitzgerald, a freshman majoring in political science, after receiving an anonymous tip.

The statement from the attorneys notes that neither man has a criminal record.

"This type of behavior is totally out of character for these young men, and they hope for the opportunity to prove this to the community," the statement said. "Fitzgerald and Tucker apologize to each and every person who was hurt and offended by their actions."

Marcus Mayes, a graduate assistant with the culture center, said he had not seen the statement but based on what he heard, he felt it was "a start."
"It's good they acknowledged what they did was wrong," he said.

Tucker's attorney, Christopher A. Slusher, said his client wants to continue attending school but declined to discuss what university officials told him about that possibility.

Tucker has met with Nathan Stephens, director of the Black Culture Center, to personally apologize. Stephens said he accepted the apology and offered to help mentor Tucker in cultural sensitivity.

"My desire for him is to learn and grow from this and to become a better person," Stephens said.
Students apologize for cotton incident

Published March 5, 2010 at 9:54 a.m.
Updated March 5, 2010 at 1:22 p.m.

A racist display left in front of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center last week now appears to have been one of several alcohol-induced stunts two students engaged in on the University of Missouri campus.

According to a statement today from their legal representatives, freshman Sean Fitzgerald, 19, and senior Zachary Tucker, 21, admitted to and apologized for leaving cotton balls outside the center early last Friday. In addition, the statement said, the two students jumped on the back of the tiger statue on Carnahan Quad, climbed a statue at Faurot Field and hoisted a pirate flag at the ROTC building the same night of the cotton incident.

Alcohol was involved, said attorney Kevin O’Brien from the law office of Harper, Evans, Wade & Netemeyer, which is representing Fitzgerald. Attorney Christopher Slusher is representing Tucker.

Students and employees at MU awoke last Friday to cotton balls strewn across the lawn in front of the black culture center, an overt reminder of slavery. Fitzgerald and Tucker were arrested Monday on suspicion of tampering, enhanced to a Class D felony with a hate crime classification. The men each posted $4,500 bond. Charges have not been filed.

The students also were temporarily suspended from school and are going through a student conduct process. MU spokeswoman Mary Jo Banken said the students’ other actions will be reviewed during that process.

This morning, Fitzgerald and Tucker issued the public apology through their attorneys.

“Sean and Zachary deeply regret the pain their actions have caused others and the negative attention this incident has attracted to the campus and community,” the statement said.

Both men “apologize to each and every person who was hurt and offended by their action. This experience has caused them to deeply reflect on how their actions affect others,” it said.

O’Brien said the students do not have a history of criminal behavior and want to make amends.

The cotton incident attracted national media attention. It also prompted the Legion of Black Collegians at MU to host a town-hall forum this week at which more than 300 students, faculty
members and community members discussed race relations. Today, a follow-up event is being held on campus to celebrate unity.
A Moment in Unity

By Nick King

Saturday, March 6, 2010

University of Missouri students, from left, Dreana Johnson, Alicen Irby and Khallilah Beecham listen to a student poet at a celebration of unity hosted by campus leaders Friday night outside Jesse Hall. About 80 people attended and heard speakers including Nathan Stephens, director of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, where cotton balls were dumped late at night last week in an incident that prompted an outcry on campus.
The Tribune's View

Hate crime

An impossible cure

By Henry J. Waters III

Friday, March 5, 2010

Brian Levin, director of California State University's Center for Study of Hate And Extremism, said recently in response to a flurry of racially charged incidents on campuses in his state, "These things touch a nerve, and these folks know it."

This brutal fact of life is evident in our own city as the scattering of cotton balls at the University of Missouri's Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center evoked an outpouring of outrage and efforts by prosecutors to impose extraordinary "hate crime" punishment on the perpetrators. Two white students have been arrested and temporarily suspended from the university.

When the hate crime designation first surfaced, questions arose about the ability of law enforcement to know what was in the mind of an offender. Just because an injured or harassed person is gay, does that mean his assailant necessarily is homophobic?

But consider the cotton ball incident. Without a hate crime category, scattering cotton balls would qualify as a littering misdemeanor, a designation clearly inadequate in the eyes of everyone who regards the act as despicable, a clear example of a larger problem with racial discrimination on campus and in society.

In California, similar protests dot the state responding to incidents demeaning ethnic and religious minorities. Thousands have come forth, and their outrage makes national news.

It might appear to make sense to simply ignore incidents like the cotton ball desecration. Certainly, one of the twisted pleasures of these perpetrators is the overt angst they cause, a twisted joy akin to that of an arsonist watching the burning of the building he torched. Observing a calm and unremarked sweeping of cotton from the lawn would not be as much fun.

I have no idea how criminal bigots regard the reactions they cause. The more they disturb the decent majority, the more they might like it. Most of us will support a more serious punishment for the cotton ball crooks than what plain littering normally would deserve. By all indications, if duly convicted, they are headed off campus. This is small enough retribution.
Even so, the admonition of the California official remains true. Another one or a few can, at the drop of a hat, spawn another feverish outcry. We must react but at the same time understand an isolated act does not represent a general attitude. The most disturbing comments from those decrying the incident alleged the haters with the cotton balls represent the general attitude of the white community toward blacks.

Not so. Let us whiteys share blacks' disapproval. We can't know their inherent personal anger over an incident like this, but we were not on the culture center lawn that night and do not forgive or approve what happened there. We can't be black any more than they can be white, but that does not mean we must always be on opposite sides. Let's give each other the benefit of doubt, overlooking the excesses of individuals as we judge our larger groups.

HJW III
Brooks' e-mails spark complaints

By Janese Heavin

Posted March 5, 2010 at 12:57 p.m.

A couple University of Missouri student bloggers are taking to task J-School Associate Dean Brian Brooks for e-mails he sent to journalism students following the cotton incident at the black culture center.

Brooks apparently sent the first e-mail on Wednesday, assuring journalism students that they are the best on campus but reminding them to take their great school seriously. From the email (which has been copied and posted on a couple different sites):

"I'm sure I don't need to say this, but I will in light of the recent events: The School of Journalism stands for diversity and tolerance," he wrote.

As I heard at Monday night's town hall forum, the word "tolerance" is tricky. Chancellor Brady Deaton used it in his email Friday evening, saying MU is committed to tolerance. MU Faculty Council Chair Leona Rubin questioned whether teaching tolerance should be part of the general education curricula.

Of course, they were likely using the word interchangeably with diversity, but some who commented at the forum suggested tolerance isn't enough.

If you think about it, tolerance has somewhat of a negative context. I, for instance, "tolerated" my ex-brother-in-law, but that doesn't mean I liked him or respected him.

So, needless to say, Brooks took some heat for using that word.

Brooks went on to write:

"When you have a great School like ours, it is imperative that it be a welcoming and open place for students of all races and religions. It also should be a place where political, sexual and other preferences are respected."
Note sexual preference, not orientation. Another loaded term, as Brooks found out.

In a follow-up email sent Thursday, Brooks apologized, saying his word choices were "unfortunate."

Brooks touted his "35-year track record of embracing diversity at MU in all its forms," and said colleagues and former students can attest to that.

Besides, he explained, the originally email was sent "in support of MU’s African American students."

Well, not exactly, Justin of the blog “Itsjustjustin.com” wrote. He pointed out the original email said nothing to offer support of black students but instead was used to brag about J-school students.

You can read Justin’s thoughts here, and a follow-up by blogger Colby Gergen here.
Armed robbery reported on campus

Monday, March 8, 2010

*University of Missouri police are investigating a report of an armed robbery on campus early Sunday.*

Around 2:45 a.m., officers responded to the report near the northeast corner of the Conley Avenue Garage. The male victim told police two men robbed him at gunpoint, taking his wallet and cell phone.

The robbers were described as black men 5 feet 10 inches to 6 feet tall and weighing 140 to 150 pounds, wearing black masks. One was wearing a gray hooded sweatshirt, and the other was wearing a black hooded sweatshirt. The weapon was described as a small silver semi-automatic handgun.

The victim said the robbers ran south on Sixth Street, then west on Stewart Road. He also saw a white sedan driving at a high speed north on Sixth and turning onto Stewart; the victim did not see the suspects get into the vehicle but believed it might have been involved.

Anyone with any information about the robbery is asked to call Detective Michael Laughlin at 884-2605 or CrimeStoppers at 875-8477.
Faculty vote gives partner benefits OK

Next move is up to UM president.

By Janese Heavin

Published March 5, 2010 at 1:27 p.m.

The University of Missouri Faculty Council yesterday unanimously approved a resolution supporting same-sex domestic partnership benefits, but it’s too early to say whether faculty support will actually result in changes to the UM System’s benefit packages.

UM President Gary Forsee ultimately will have to decide whether to put the proposal in front of the Board of Curators. If he does, that discussion would likely happen in late summer, when curators regularly review any proposed changes to benefits, UM spokeswoman Jennifer Hollingshead said.

Most curators were not available this morning for comment. Curator John Carnahan III of Springfield said he thought it would be premature to opine on the proposal before it is brought to the board. Curator Wayne Goode, a former state senator from St. Louis, said he personally supports the idea of same-sex partner benefits but said details would have to be hashed out.

"The university would have to develop some mechanism to make a determination when people were at least intending to be lifelong partners since they don’t have the legal step of marriage," he said. "Things like that need to be worked out satisfactorily."

Columbia is the second UM campus to pass a resolution calling for same-sex benefits. The Faculty Senate at UM-St. Louis passed a similar measure last semester. UM-Kansas City faculty has verbally expressed support.

Goode said he would take those resolutions into consideration if the proposal is brought to a vote.

"The faculty, that’s the guts of the university, and it’s about a third to half of all employees at the university," he said. "So I would certainly give consideration to what their opinions were."

Some have questioned whether adopting benefits for homosexual couples would result in political ramifications from conservative lawmakers. Forsee in December acknowledged that concern will be in the background of any decision.
Goode noted, though, that whichever way curators voted on the issue would likely spark criticism from legislators.

MU Faculty Council Chairwoman Leona Rubin said the resolution has been put off for years because of a conservative state legislature.

"It's the right thing to do," Rubin said. "If someone else wants to do the non-right thing, that's their choice. But we've been putting it off because of the political climate for too long."

Adding domestic partners to the benefit rolls is expected to come with about a $2.2 million price tag.

"The extra money is worth it to treat all faculty and staff equally," Rubin said.

The Faculty Council approved the resolution with no discussion. Last month, members discussed why the resolution calls for domestic partner benefits to be applied only to same-sex couples.

Leah Cohn, chairwoman of the diversity enhancement committee, said last month opposite-sex couples are not included because they have the legal option of marrying.

At yesterday's Faculty Council meeting, members also approved forming a task force to study how MU could become a more family-friendly campus.

Reach Janese Heavin at 573-815-1705 or e-mail jheavin@columbiatribune.com.
You've probably read by now that a group of scientists have positively, absolutely, without a doubt, proven that a giant meteor that struck the Earth 66.5 million years ago caused the dinosaur extinction.

What you might not know is that Ken MacLeod, associate professor of geological sciences at the University of Missouri, was part of that group that published their study this week in the journal *Science*.

"The debate on this subject was quite heated until the early 1990's, but the discovery of the crater was a key turning point for many scientists," MacLeod said. "Most geologic changes are too slow to be easily detected and even very large events, like the recent earthquakes, have only regional consequences. This event created the boundary between the age of dinosaurs and the age of mammals, but it played out in a biological instinct."

In the study, the team studied the thickness and abundance of materials around the Chicxulub crater site. There, they found rare elements, special minerals and "melt-glass" typically generated by large impacts.

"While there were big volcanic eruptions around this time, they started before and kept happening after this event," MacLeod said. "They were so big and they disrupted the environment, but those changes were separate from the extinctions. The volcanic activity happened over hundreds of thousands of years and the extinction event was much quicker and catastrophic."
Student center at MU far ahead of schedule

By Janese Heavin

Saturday, March 6, 2010

The main-level atrium of the new Student Center on the University of Missouri campus is expected to open in August, almost a year ahead of the original schedule.

Opening the atrium by Aug. 18 will give students in the next school year more dining options and 600 additional seats, said Michelle Froese, spokeswoman for MU Student & Auxiliary Services. It’s also expected to improve pedestrian traffic in that part of campus, becoming the center’s main entry.

Construction of the $63 million student center project comes from a $35-per-semester assessment on activity fees paid by all MU students and from self-supported auxiliary services at MU.

The project’s first phase, which included the MU Bookstore and Tiger Tech, opened in January 2009 at Hitt Street and Rollins Road.

The main-level atrium was to open by spring 2011. Froese said administrators worked with the contractor, VCC, to speed up the project, mainly to provide more dining space.

Opening the center by the fall semester will require crews to work overtime, but the project included a contingency for an earlier opening date, said Jeff Zeilenga, assistant vice chancellor of student affairs.

“It’s incredible that we can open this key student facility ahead of schedule,” Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs Cathy Scroggs said in a prepared statement.

Froese said the five restaurants opening in the atrium next school year include a sandwich shop, a coffee shop-bakery, a pizza and pasta place, a sushi eatery and a restaurant featuring Brazilian barbecue and carved meats. All will be operated by Campus Dining Services.

Construction of the final section of Phase 2, which incorporates the old Brady Commons, is still expected to be completed by spring 2011. That section will include a return of the popular MU eatery, “The Shack,” a Mizzou Market convenience store, meeting rooms, a Mizzou Traditions lounge, and space for various university organizations including the Maneater, KCOU and MUTV.
Bistro will let faculty sip, snack and chat

By Janese Heavin

Friday, March 5, 2010

The University Club’s Tiger Bistro at the Reynolds Alumni Center will become the place to be for University of Missouri faculty members come March 25.

That’s when the “MU Faculty Network” is scheduled to debut. The network — an unofficial name for now — is meant to give faculty members from different departments an opportunity to meet and share ideas.

For months, the MU Faculty Council and its chapter of the American Association of University Professors have discussed the idea of organizing informal faculty get-togethers to promote cross-campus collaboration.

At yesterday’s Faculty Council meeting, Chairwoman Leona Rubin announced the Tiger Bistro will be reserved for that purpose from 4 to 6 p.m. the third Thursday of every month.

The bistro, part of Campus Dining Services, will provide snacks and soft drinks, and faculty members will have the option of purchasing beer or wine from a cash bar.

Rubin said in an e-mail this morning that the monthly event is a good opportunity for both the membership-based University Club and MU faculty members.

“Faculty will have a nice venue in which to meet, and the U Club will get exposure to more faculty and maybe more members,” she said.

Provost Brian Foster was unavailable for comment this morning but has expressed support for the idea, spokesman Christian Basi said.

Basi said Foster sees it as a key component of Mizzou Advantage, a new initiative that promotes collaboration between disciplines.

“He is very much in favor of having a regular place for faculty to meet and mingle,” Basi said.
Students arrested after drugs found

Friday, March 5, 2010

Three University of Missouri freshmen were arrested yesterday when LSD and marijuana were discovered during a traffic stop in south Columbia.

The incident occurred around 4:07 p.m. in the parking lot of Campus Lodge Apartments, 2900 S. Old 63, where a vehicle carrying five men was discovered to be obstructing traffic flow, MU Police Capt. Brian Weimer said. After speaking to the driver, the officer searched the vehicle's occupants, which led to three arrests.

Matthew D. Norris, 19, of 1306 E. Rollins St. had a backpack in his possession that contained 125 grams of marijuana divided among 17 bags and six tabs of LSD, Weimer said. Police also found a scale, $70 in cash and a grinder with marijuana residue in the backpack. Norris was arrested on suspicion of possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia and distribution.

Remy T. Bourgeois, 19, of 901 Maryland Ave. was arrested on suspicion of possession of drug paraphernalia, and Matthew L. Weintrub, 19, also of 901 Maryland Ave., was arrested on suspicion of possession of a controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia and resisting arrest.

Weimer said Weintrub was the driver of the vehicle and refused to get out. Thirty bagged LSD tablets were found in his possession, Weimer said.

All three suspects have been released on bond from the Boone County Jail. Two others in the vehicle were not arrested.