Courage to repair

A racist prank perpetrated outside the University of Missouri's Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center 11 days ago has evoked a reassuring response.

The two undergraduates — Zachary E. Tucker and Sean D. Fitzgerald — tried to make a mockery of the bitter history of black servitude. They scattered cotton balls outside the culture center under cover of night.

But their crude handiwork was greeted with sharp and universal condemnation. Both students were identified and suspended from school.

Last week, they were arrested. The Boone County prosecutor is weighing whether to pursue criminal charges.

On Friday, the students apologized for their misconduct. They acknowledged in a statement issued through their lawyers that they had exercised "inexcusable judgment." They claimed what happened was "totally out of character" and expressed hope "for the opportunity to prove this to the community."

The university and student organizations, meanwhile, responded with a campus-wide celebration of unity on Friday. Other public programs are in the works.

This much is clear: Missouri's flagship public university and the community in which it is situated will not tolerate overt racist behavior, even if it stems from a stupid jest.

Do the students have the courage, the community the imagination and victims of the misconduct the willingness to work toward a more lasting resolution?

That may come through "restorative justice," a movement centered on providing a forum for offenders to take responsibility for their actions by accepting punishment and trying to repair the harm they have done. Offenders are counseled to acknowledge and understand the impact their actions have had on others and to take concrete steps to make amends.

One compelling example: Aaron Poisson of Cumming, Ga., served nine months in jail for running over and killing Roger Kreutz on March 3, 2008. Mr. Kreutz, 54, a businessman, had tried to stop Mr. Poisson from fleeing with a stolen tip jar from a Crestwood Starbucks.
Last weekend, Mr. Kreutz's family and friends allowed Mr. Poisson, 21, accompanied by his father, to participate in a ceremony in which Mr. Kreutz's ashes were spread beneath a tree planted in his memory.

The families embraced. It was a poignant exercise of contrition and forgiveness as well an example to this community.

Marc H. Morial, president of the National Urban League, was in St. Louis on Monday as part of the organization's centennial celebration. When asked about the incident at the University of Missouri, he observed that "one of the fundamental aspects of the civil rights ethos" as laid down by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is a "redemptive component."

It asks, he said, how what occurred can be made "a positive learning experience that changes (the offenders') behavior for the rest of their lives?"

The cotton balls at the University of Missouri can't be un-tossed. But simply focusing on punishment is the easy way out. The University of Missouri and its students have a special chance as a learning community for a just and productive resolution.

They should help Messrs. Tucker and Fitzgerald make good on their promise to prove that what occurred does not reflect their true character.
KU students produce banner promoting unity with MU in stand against cotton-ball incident

By MARÁ ROSE WILLIAMS

A bridge of sorts between the Kansas and Missouri university campuses has been built out of a controversial incident.

Last Friday, some University of Kansas students heard about a possible hate crime involving cotton balls strewn across the lawn of the Gaines/Oldham Black Cultural Center at the University of Missouri in Columbia. It happened in late February, Black History Month.

"To me this was clearly racial, and I could see that it hurt people," said Kelsey Murrell, a white KU sophomore who said she was annoyed that some call it a prank.

"I wanted to show students at MU that a lot of people think this is a big deal," she said. "We stand up against racism. We are rival schools, but this is important — important enough for us to come together for."

Using Jayhawk crimson and blue and Tiger black and gold, Murrell and about 10 other KU students made a banner. Circulating in Lawrence residence halls Tuesday, the banner reads: "We choose unity. KU supports MU in the promotion of diversity."

When MU officials heard of the banner, they invited its creators to Columbia to join students in one of the town-hall meetings on diversity.

Fred Rodriguez, associate vice provost for diversity at KU, called it a "heartwarming" and "refreshing" gesture.

"I think we underestimate our youth today in their ability to see what is right and their ability to respond," he said.

After the cotton-ball incident, two men, one a senior and the other a freshman, were arrested. Through their attorneys, the men have apologized to the campus and community for their "inconsiderate" behavior.
Distinguished authors to lead discussion on words, music at MU

By Patrick Henseler
March 9, 2010 | 5:47 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — Dan Levitin and Tim Page trace the effects of music on the human mind.

The authors will participate in the "Words and Music" interactive panel, which will examine the importance of music and writing and its relation to the human mind Friday from 2 to 3:30 p.m. at the Fred W. Smith Forum at the MU School of Journalism. The event is part of the Sixth Annual MU Life Sciences and Society Symposium. Following short presentations, Levitin and Page will field questions on a wide range of topics from the audience. A book signing will immediately follow the event. The event is free and open to the public.

Levitin, best-selling author of "This is Your Brain on Music," "The Science of a Human Obsession" and "The World in Six Songs," brings his extensive knowledge as a neuroscientist, professional musician and music journalist to answer questions on how music relates to brain functioning in disorders such as autism. Levitin has experience working with Blue Oyster Cult, Chris Isaak, Steely Dan, Stevie Wonder, Santana and The Grateful Dead.

Page worked as a Pulitzer Prize-winning music critic for the Washington Post and brings a pervasive knowledge of information on music writing as a professor of journalism and music at the University of Southern California. Page published his memoir "Parallel Play: Growing Up with Undiagnosed Asperger's" in 2009.
Difficult Dialogues to take place Thursday at MU

Who: The Chancellor's Diversity Initiative and Difficult Dialogues

What: Courageous Conversations about the Black Culture Center Incident: Moving Forward

Where: Life Sciences Center (1201 Rollins St.), Monsanto Auditorium

When: 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday

Why:

- To discuss differing reactions to the cotton balls scattered at the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center
- To explore different perspectives on the incident
- To discover why it is difficult to talk about race

Call: The Chancellor's Diversity Initiative at 882-5838

— Katy Bergen
Risk-free treatment for women with low sexual desire

Scientists have found evidence that a low-cost, risk-free psychological treatment for women with low sexual desire is effective and may be a better alternative to drugs that have adverse side effects.

"Low sexual desire is the number one problem women bring to sex therapists," said Laurie Mintz from University of Missouri.

"Drugs to treat low sexual desire may take the focus away from the most common culprits of diminished desire in women, including lack of information on how our own bodies work, body image issues, relationship issues and a stressful lifestyle.

Indeed, research demonstrates that relationship issues are far more important in predicting women's sexual desire than are hormone levels. Before women seek medical treatments, they should consider psychological treatment," she added.

Mintz has authored a book based on this premise. In her book, Mintz suggests a six-step psycho-educational and cognitive-behavioural treatment approach that she based on scientific literature and more than 20 years of clinical knowledge.

The treatment plan includes chapters about one's thoughts about sex, how to talk with your partner, the importance of spending time together, ways to touch each other in both erotic and non-erotic ways, how to make time for sex and different ways to make sexual activity exciting and thus, increase women's sexual desire.

In a study demonstrating the effectiveness of her treatment, Mintz recruited married women between the ages of 28 to 65, who said they were uninterested in sexual activity. All the women were employed and a majority had children. All participants completed an online survey that measured sexual desire and sexual functioning.

Then half of the participants were selected randomly to read her book and perform the exercises outlined in her book. After six weeks, they were emailed the same survey again. The control group did not read the book.
Mintz found that the intervention group who read the book made significant gains in sexual desire and sexual functioning, compared to the control group who did not read the book. On average, women who read the book increased their level of sexual desire by almost 30 per cent.

"This finding is especially exciting because low sexual desire among women has been not only the most common, but the least successfully treated of all the sexual problems brought to therapists" Mintz said.

Mintz will present her findings at the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT) annual conference.
Bond speaks to science leaders from MU, other schools

Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., spoke to researchers and civic leaders Monday in Kansas City as part of the Missouri Regional Life Sciences Summit, a gathering of scientists led by the University of Missouri.

All four schools in the UM system are attending the summit, as are 23 other universities, groups and corporations. Scientists from all the schools will be able to find partners with whom to collaborate on future projects, and Bond encouraged them to do so Monday.

“We are proud that Missouri is home to many visionary biologists and leaders in the biotechnology movement,” Bond said, according to a statement on his Web site. “So make contacts, share your ideas and expertise, because events like this give us the opportunity to do so.”

The Bond Life Sciences Center on the MU campus is named after the senator, who worked with MU officials during his terms as governor to establish the center as the primary site for interdisciplinary research in the state.
COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Education students get opportunity to question School Board candidates

By Alix Wiggins and Doug Davis
March 9, 2010 | 11:15 p.m. CST

COLUMBIA — An MU College of Education forum brought hoards of education students ready to pick school board candidates’ brains Tuesday night.

It’s the first year the college has held a candidate meet and greet. Eryca Neville, assistant director of the college’s Teacher Development Program, put together an event that got the community and all five Columbia School Board candidates talking.

Neville teaches a class called Inquiry into School Communication and Society and said she thought the chance to talk to the school board was an important part of students’ education.

The event started with a round-robin discussion with the candidates followed by introductions and a Q&A session. Questions included what to do about technology in classrooms and how to make public schools the first choice. However, the big question on the education students’ minds was what the candidates thought about the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

James Whitt

“That’s the law. There’s nothing we can do about it so you’ve got to move on. The good thing about No Child Left Behind is that it forced schools to look at subgroups.”

Jan Mees

“It has put a lot of accountability on the schools.”

“The one thing we have to understand about standardized testing is that it’s a snapshot.”

Jonathan Sessions
"It brought a lot of attention to troubling matters, but it may not have been the best approach."

"I think we'll continue to see a change."

**Dan Holt**

"It was flawed from the beginning."

"People should be allowed to fail. It's those failures that bring back future successes."

**Philip Peters**

"Principally, they set it too sharp, too steep."

"I applaud the authors."
University of Missouri farm economists told Congress on Tuesday that they expect the agricultural economy to pick up — that is, if the general economy continues to do the same.

"The biggest point we're making is that the health of the farm economy depends on the health of the larger economy," said Pat Westhoff, co-director of the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute at MU.

The institute's annual report, which MU researchers have released for the past 25 years, predicted that the U.S. farm economy, which lost $30 billion last year, will spring back by about $10 billion. But, Westhoff said, "That depends on people being able to spend some money."

Farm income is predicted to rise over the next two years, mostly because growing global demand for meat will boost livestock prices. But, the report says, that rise depends on several variables, particularly energy costs, which affects the price of grain.

Pork producers, who have been losing money for more than a year, could break even this year — but that, too, depends on the global appetite for pork.

Dairy producers, who also had a disastrous 2009, could see some recovery as world dairy prices climb.

Consumers will likely see higher prices at the grocery as farm income improves, but food inflation will not reach the escalated levels of 2007 and 2008 when it peaked at 5.5 percent, according to the report. Last year, food inflation hit 1.8 percent.

While corn won't reach the peak prices of 2008, demand for biofuels will continue to support prices, the report said. Westhoff explained that foreign demand for corn-based animal feed and ethanol mandates continue to use larger portions of the U.S. corn crop. Federal mandates require increasing ethanol use until 2015. Beyond that, corn prices will depend largely on oil prices, Westhoff said.

The report is delivered annually to the agriculture committees in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

The FAPRI report comes on the heels of a U.S. Department of Agriculture analysis that predicted a similar picture for the farm economy.

"The degree of uncertainty is deeper than normal," Westhoff said.