‘I Believe I Can Leave This Place Better Than I Found It’

Black students describe racial division, isolation, and prejudice at the U. of Missouri

Reminders of their race are constant. On the streets, when drivers yell slurs at them. In class, when their mostly white peers expect them to speak for all black people. And in social settings, when the racial divide seems most unbridgeable.

Just 7 percent of a student body of 35,000, black students here at the University of Missouri are used to feeling invisible at times, singled out at others. They are hardly alone. Black students across the country in recent months have shared similar stories of isolation and prejudice.

But what happened here this past fall — a homecoming protest, a televised hunger strike, a show of support by the football team, the resignations of the system president and campus chancellor — made Missouri a stage on which black students’ frustration, in all its dimensions, played out for a national audience. On the campus and beyond, their cause has resonated. Yet many people are unsympathetic to some of the tactics protesters have employed, or are confused by what black students mean when they talk about being made to feel that they don’t belong. What is it that they go through? What do they want to change?

The Chronicle asked several black students at Missouri to describe what their lives here are like, and what they’re working toward. As they navigate college or graduate school, they say, they often feel caught between not wanting to speak for an entire race of people and knowing that if they don’t say something, stereotypes will lie unchallenged, and black and white people will stay in their own corners.

"If you continue on that path, seeing that separation as OK, you’re setting a course for misunderstanding," says AnDrea Jackson, a senior. "You’re basically setting yourself up to repeat history."

Missouri’s black population is concentrated in St. Louis and Kansas City, where neighborhoods remain largely segregated. As a result, many students, black and white, set foot on the flagship campus in Columbia having little experience with classmates of a different race.
Ms. Jackson grew up in St. Louis, 100 miles east of here, but in an uncommonly diverse neighborhood. Now 39, she also has moved around a lot, including out of state. She was shocked by how overwhelmingly white the campus here is. "A lot of white students who come from small towns are like, 'This is so diverse!' And I’m like, 'No, it's not,'" says Ms. Jackson, a journalism major who earned an associate degree in Georgia. "It didn’t take long for me to have an identity crisis."

The social segregation struck her one night as she was leaving the black-culture center, a second home for many black students. New students had been talking with upperclassmen about how to navigate campus life: heavy stuff like dealing with racism and day-to-day details like where to get their hair done. As Ms. Jackson was walking back across the campus, a stream of white students poured out of a building where they had wrapped up a homecoming-related event. Many black students consider homecoming, every fall, a largely white tradition.

Why is it, Ms. Jackson wondered, that when it comes to social life, Mizzou has two parallel tracks, white and black (or, sometimes, multicultural)? How could the university get unstuck from its past? In Atlanta, she says, people liked to learn from one another because they were different. Those differences actually brought them together, she says. "Here our differences separate us."

Teah Hairston has been wrestling with identity, too, and with the divisions she sees in the classroom. That struggle will probably influence her choice of career. She grew up in a diverse part of Sacramento, Calif., where, she says, "I didn’t have to pay attention to being black." Instead what united people she knew was being poor.

Now a graduate student in sociology, Ms. Hairston is conscious of how often she walks across the campus without encountering another black person. That the general curriculum reflects a white, male perspective she finds troubling, and that just 3 percent of the faculty members at Missouri are black weighs on her. "A lot of people in this department want to go on to be a professor," she says. "And I don’t. I don’t feel like I belong in this culture."

She teaches undergraduate courses, and she’s the first black instructor some of her students have had. They tell her they like her because her informal teaching style makes her relatable, and her classes relevant to their lives. But ill-informed views on race crop up on course discussion boards. One student this fall questioned how the graduate student who had gone on a hunger strike at Missouri could have experienced discrimination if his family is, as reported, well-off. Others have acknowledged that black and white students don’t interact much socially and asked why that’s wrong if it’s what both groups prefer.
Ms. Hairston uses students’ comments to start discussions about race, inequality, or sexuality. "I try to give them different ways to think about things," she says. "I’m not necessarily trying to change minds."

Black students say they frequently have to deal with snap judgments. Despite being a third-year doctoral student in psychology, Reuben Faloughi still gets introduced as an athlete (he played football as an undergrad at the University of Georgia). In those introductions, there’s a distinct undertone, he says: "This guy can’t ever be a scholar. He’s here for entertainment." Once a professor asked him to play rap music, as if that was all he listened to. "These are small things," he says, "but they add up."

The ignorance and intimidation some students experience has shocked them. Corie Wilkins, a senior, remembers having been on campus all of two days when a car passed by and the driver yelled "Nigger!" out the window at him and his friends. "If you say that to somebody on the street in Chicago, the consequences are understood," says Mr. Wilkins, who grew up on the city’s South Side. "And these guys were so fearless when they said it. At that point I knew, this is going to be a problem here."

There’s also a cluelessness he sees among some white students. I’m not racist, they tell him, because I have black friends, or I like fried chicken and sweet-potato pie. It’s OK to say "nigga," they say, as long as I drop the "r."

"No," says Mr. Wilkins, "you cannot say that, ever."

Racial slurs are frequent. This fall the student-government president, who is black, posted on Facebook his reflections on being yelled at by white men in a pickup truck. "I really just want to know why my simple existence is such a threat to society," wrote the president, Payton Head. "For those of you who wonder why I’m always talking about the importance of inclusion and respect, it’s because I’ve experienced moments like this multiple times at THIS university, making me not feel included here."

Tiana Glass knows the feeling. She looks to the faculty for mentors or role models and doesn’t find many. The only two black professors she’s had in three years have been in black studies. Classmates tell her she must be here because of affirmative action. An administrator, knowing little about her, thought she couldn’t afford a study-abroad trip to Ghana. "People are making assumptions," she says, "based on my blackness."

Ms. Glass looks back on a summer transition program for incoming students and thinks of friends she made who have since dropped out. She understands the reasons: culture shock, alienation, money. Eventually she found a home in the women’s-studies department, where two faculty mentors have offered support and a sense of belonging. If not for them, Ms. Glass says, she would have left long ago. "Mizzou is good at recruiting, but you have to retain," she says. "And I don’t see that."
To understand the protests at Missouri this past fall, you need to go back to August 2014. The fatal shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, by a white police officer in Ferguson, Mo., was a defining moment for many black students. They began to talk more about structural racism, and to organize, bringing to light the discrimination they experienced at the university and linking it to how the black residents of Ferguson were treated. It was the first time some of the students had considered taking a new approach to race relations on campus.

They formed the group MU4MikeBrown and held rallies. They staged a die-in in the student union. They met with administrators to talk about the tense racial climate and lack of diversity in the student body and the faculty. They discussed slurs scrawled on dorm-room doors and cotton balls strewn on the lawn of the Gaines/Oldham Black Culture Center, an offense in 2010 that resulted in two white students’ being charged with littering. Little seemed to come of it all, black students said, other than forums and promises that they were being heard.

Basically, people are asleep. To try to wake them up is to jolt them to a reality they don’t want to face. Still, coming together was a powerful experience. "It touched me to the core," says Mr. Faloughi, whose initial act of protest was to participate in a demonstration and die-in, which drew hundreds of people. "It was the first time I saw that many students committed to the cause."

This past fall, after Mr. Head’s Facebook post, Danielle Walker wondered what the chancellor, R. Bowen Loftin, would say. Surely, she thought, the student government president’s words carry weight. But days went by. "Oh," Ms. Walker, a graduate student in public policy, remembers thinking, "you all are really not going to say anything."

Six days after Mr. Head’s comments, the chancellor finally put out a letter. There was no mention of race or details about the incident. Mr. Loftin simply said that the university opposed bias and discrimination and was working "to address the issues brought forward."

Ms. Walker is familiar with that kind of response. As an undergrad here, she was a diversity peer educator, leading discussions in dorms. She would ask people to think about the biases they were raised with and would stress that acknowledging prejudice doesn’t mean you’re a bad person. But students rarely opened up. "I’d get what I call pageant responses," she recalls: bland and uplifting comments like, I accept everyone for who they are. White people, she says, often prefer to see racism as a series of isolated incidents. This isn’t the 1950s anymore, classmates would tell her. We have a black president.

Ms. Walker observes racism in more subtle interactions. A professor once told her that her Afro was too big and that she needed to sit in the back of the classroom so others
could see. Peers say she speaks well, as if she doesn’t match their expectations of how a black person should sound. After Michael Brown was shot, people attempted to offer reassurance: We know you’re not one of those people, Danielle. Michael Brown didn’t respect police authority.

Ms. Glass, the women’s-studies major, was taking a course in cross-cultural communication when Ferguson came up. That’s where she’s from. My mom always told me to be respectful toward the police, a white student said. Ms. Glass wondered if her classmate knew what it felt like to be afraid to talk to a police officer.

Black students have continued to mobilize. Ms. Walker formed a loose coalition called Racism Lives Here and staged marches and demonstrations. She was tired of many people's not hearing what black students had been saying all along. But activism was stressful, and she dealt with migraines all semester. As she walked to class, she says, students would pass by and say things like, "You’re what’s wrong with Mizzou."

The group Concerned Student 1950 also formed to bring attention to race, its name a nod to the year the first black student was admitted to Missouri. During homecoming, members staged a protest, linking arms and speaking about the black student experience.

As demonstrations gained momentum, some students’ perspectives shifted. Until this fall, when Ms. Jackson, the journalism major, heard insensitive or ignorant comments from classmates, she would feel that it was on her to correct the bias. The protests — and the pushback — led her to think that the problems were deeper than individual acts of ignorance, she says. "I got angry at what I was hearing and seeing: That we’re overreacting, that we’re whining, that we need to get over it, that we’re making things up, that the mere idea of being the only black person in the room is not such a big deal."

"I won’t say that my perspective was shattered," she continues. "But you understand that there are moments that are teachable moments, and there are moments when you have to fight."

The hunger strike and other tactics, such as protesters’ demand that the system president resign, divided black students, although they say those tensions were played up by outsiders, including the news media. For every "act of rage" that got attention, says Mr. Wilkins, the Chicagoan, "there were 10, 20, maybe 100 peaceful demonstrations or peaceful talks."

People were also quietly working behind the scenes. Marquise Griffin got involved in discussions with classmates and professors in the College of Education, where he is pursuing a master’s degree. Those conversations were constructive, he says, in ways he generally doesn’t see elsewhere on campus.
Through his job in the parent-relations office, he heard from lots of angry mothers and fathers during the height of the protests, when dozens of students were camped out on the quad. "I don't think my son or daughter should be exposed to all these protests," they told him over the phone. And he would wonder: "Why don't you? That should be part of what it means to learn."

He didn't actually say that. His instructions were simply to let parents vent. But occasionally, he says, someone would stop and ask him about his experience. People knew from his voice that he wasn’t white. So he would tell them: Since enrolling in June, he's been harassed and intimidated on several occasions. It’s particularly bad after football games, he says, when drunken white men drive through the streets of downtown Columbia and unleash expressions of "toxic masculinity." Once a big blue pickup truck, its headlights off, followed him to his apartment building.

After hearing Mr. Griffin describe his experiences, a caller would usually go silent for a few seconds, then refer to isolated incidents of racism. One parent told him she'd been sexually harassed a lot in college, as if to say that we all have to deal with bad stuff.

The turmoil at Missouri resulted in new leadership and a sense of urgency. The interim chancellor, Michael Middleton, is deeply respected by black students. As a black undergraduate at Missouri in the 1960s, he lived that generation’s struggles, and his activism led to, among other things, the creation of the Legion of Black Collegians (the black student government) and the black-culture center.

Minority students are glad to see that the university has created an Office for Civil Rights and Title IX, concentrating functions formerly handled by several offices to deal more directly and openly with their concerns. And they are encouraged that a new position — vice chancellor for diversity, inclusion, and equity — has been created (Chuck Henson, a black professor of law, is filling it on an interim basis). A race-relations committee, including students, faculty members and administrators, formed last spring and meets regularly.

That said, students remain wary of what may ultimately prove to be token efforts. They are unsure how to go about improving campus culture. They’re mindful that progress needs to be tangible but also that change is hard.

Rhodesia McMillian, a doctoral student in educational leadership and policy analysis, is one of many students working with the administration on improving the recruitment and retention of minority students and faculty.

Her group, MU Policy Now, advocated for Mr. Middleton’s appointment, and she is part of a systemwide graduate-student leadership-development program. She’s committed to pushing Missouri to do more to retain more minority faculty members, noting that the
professor who encouraged her to apply to the Ph.D. program has since been recruited away.

Ms. McMillian feels confident in her power to affect change. "I don’t need a bullhorn in the streets," she says. "All I have to do is set up a meeting. If I don’t feel my concerns are listened to, I can take my talents elsewhere."

Mr. Griffin, the graduate student who fielded calls from white parents, plans to continue engaging his classmates and professors. People in education policy and leadership, he says, need these discussions.

At the height of campus tensions, Mr. Griffin’s friends and mentors asked if he would transfer. "I was like, Of course not. Even though it has been rough, being a graduate student and a graduate assistant and a social activist here, I’m exactly where I need to be. I believe I can leave this place better than I found it."

Ms. Walker, the former diversity peer educator, wants to see Missouri put together a full history of the university, one that is explicit about the role of race in its evolution and character. She wants to see more minority staff members in key positions, including in student health, counseling, and the civil-rights office.

**THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

'Man Up' on Racism


**Black students at the University of Missouri at Columbia talk about how they experience racism on a campus where only 7 percent of students and 3 percent of faculty members look like them.** And the students lay out what their peers and professors need to do to bridge divides: Examine yourself, they say. Acknowledge prejudice. Empathize. Fight the status quo. Be a part of change.

**TRANSCRIPT**

CORIE WILKINS: I’ve heard every excuse from white people as to why racism isn’t an issue here and for every excuse I’ve heard a story or experience, you know a lived event, that directly contradicts the sentiment that we are making this up.

ANDREA JACKSON: I don’t think that I have ever lived in a place where it was so heavy on one side demographically as far as race was concerned. When I came here it was a culture shock to say the least. To be frank it was a very white city with a very white campus that functioned through white culture.
CORIE WILKINS: You know I came here and I found out that there are real people that have never seen a black person in their life. That happens in the United States of America. It is a real thing.

ANDREA JACKSON: I’ve never personally experienced overt racism here, but I did notice a separation of races on campus. If I go to a function that is sponsored by the black students on campus — the black organizations — it’s black people there. If I go to a function that, or when I went, rather, to the function that was sponsored by the Multicultural Center for a Latino/Latina mixer, it was all Latin-Americans there. When I went to the Homecoming Talent Show — Homecoming Talent Show, which is supposed to be a school-wide event, but it was all white people there. So wherever I went, the organizations were very separated and there didn’t seem to be any type of intermingling of the races at all.

TIANA GLASS: Living like this is not easy and is really not fun.

MARQUISE GRIFFIN: Something that really affects the culture here and that really affects people is willingness to learn about what is white privilege, what is institutionalized racism, what is systemic oppression, and actually understand that these things are real.

DANIELLE WALKER: We have a problem in regards to race relations and I am seeking and employing our administration to really create policy that really promotes having a more safe and inclusive environment.

CORIE WILKINS: My second day on campus, second day here my freshman year, I got called a nigger. A group of guys who were driving past in a car, right through the middle of campus. I was so shocked I honestly couldn’t even get mad that time, simply because that was so foreign to me. I knew people got called niggers, I knew it happened, but ultimately it was nothing I ever dealt with in Chicago, not from a white person.

DANIELLE WALKER: When we’re talking about racism, it’s not that someone is calling me the n-word when I am walking down the street or being pulled over by police, even though those are very salient examples of racism. I’m talking about the aspect of when I give a presentation and people saying, “Well you’re very articulate.”

REUBEN FALOUGHJI: You know Ferguson happened here and these ongoing police shootings, when it comes to class are we able to have those conversations in a safe space where I can say what I want to say but then also the teacher can facilitate the conversations? Because a lot of times you know students get bullied — sometimes by the faculty members, sometimes by students.

DANIELLE WALKER: I didn’t really encounter like a very crystalized racial experience until 2010 when the cotton-ball incident occurred, where a group of white students decided to put cotton balls all on the lawn of the black culture center. The overall crime that the students were convicted of was littering.
**CORIE WILKINS:** I’ve dealt with things like being stopped coming out the Mizzou store in the student center because the alarm went off as I was leaving the store. Everybody looks at me, and it’s like, You have to come here and, you know, we have to search your bag. Meanwhile white students are walking past and the detector is going off after each one, and I watched all of them get told, “Oh you’re fine, keep going.”

**REUBEN FALOUGHGI:** Just yesterday, a professor asked me again to play rap music, you know — one, as if I can’t listen to other types of music, and two, as if I’m a rapper.

**REUBEN FALOUGHGI:** The question that I have been getting, especially as an original member of the Concerned Student 1950 group is, “What next? What do we do next? We want to help. We’re ready.” That question lets me know – to some degree, to some degree — that there’s still some internal work to do. So I think what everybody can do is build their consciousness. So when I talk about consciousness that’s that internal knowledge of self.

**TIANA GLASS:** What I would want to see is accountability.

**ANDREA JACKSON:** Both faculty and students at this university, they see the separation, and they might view it as being OK.

**DANIELLE WALKER:** People will say, “Oh I don’t have a prejudice bone in my body,” and I would always lightheartedly, you know, challenge that.

**CORIE WILKINS:** Do your best to empathize and work with black people.

**DANIELLE WALKER:** Having a bias, recognizing that, doesn’t make you a bad person, and so it’s really important, after acknowledging that we have a problem, for people to figure out ways that they may continue to contribute to or perpetuate the problem.

**MARQUISE GRIFFIN:** We don’t want people who are trying to uphold the status quo. We want to bring in students and faculty and administrators who want to move Mizzou forward and make it more inclusive.

**ANDREA JACKSON:** If everyone mans up in sort of a way, to step up to the plate, to do their part to say that this has to change and so we’re going to take the initiative to be a part of that change — then I think it could.
A Year of Black Lives Matter

As the protest movement evolves, activists face pushback and growing pains.

A lot changed in a year. Black Lives Matter, the civil-rights protest movement that rose to prominence after Michael Brown was shot and killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, expanded its reach onto the campaign trail and college campuses. The movement forced presidential candidates to reckon with a legacy of racism and police brutality. It inspired student protests and demands.

Along the way, the movement provoked backlash, and experienced growing pains. As protestors shout and struggle to make their voices heard, a national conversation of equal intensity is emerging over who belongs in American society—and who doesn’t. When Donald Trump supporters attacked a Black Lives Matter protester at a November rally, the Republican presidential candidate responded: “Maybe he should have been roughed up.”

Activists are disturbed by the dark turn the election has taken. But backlash against Black Lives Matter is virtually guaranteed to galvanize support for the movement. Videos of deadly encounters between black men and police officers have fueled calls for reform. In much the same way, reports of racial slurs at Trump rallies make it difficult to deny the problem of racism in America.

“It’s terrible, but I don’t think it’s anything different than what’s been happening in this country for a long time. This hatred has been normal for a while, it’s just been in the shadows,” Alicia Garza, one of the co-founders of #BlackLivesMatter, an organization that shares a name with the movement it helps support, said in an interview.

The challenge, for the movement, is to stem the tide of violence against black men and women while working to fix what activists believe is a fragmented and broken society. It’s an ambition that won’t be easily achieved. But as the movement evolves and expands, it has forced change.

Over the summer, activists began publicly, and unapologetically, disrupting presidential candidates at events and campaign rallies. The strategy got results. Democratic candidates Bernie Sanders and Martin O’Malley rushed to release detailed criminal-justice platforms after high-profile clashes with Black Lives Matter activists. In August, Hillary Clinton convened a meeting with activists who showed up at a New Hampshire campaign event intending to disrupt it.
The confrontations signaled the start of increasingly high-profile political engagement for the decentralized movement. They also laid bare the complicated and tense relationship between the movement and the progressive left. Liberal Americans often assume that voting Democratic and espousing a belief in equality are adequate proofs of solidarity in the fight against racism. In the past year, Black Lives Matter challenged that idea.

Some progressives questioned the logic of targeting politicians who claim to be sympathetic to the cause. What that criticism seemed to miss is that the confrontations were designed to push candidates further than they had been prepared to go. The protests were also a reminder to progressives that simply believing in something isn’t sufficient to change the status quo.

“Part of what we need people to understand is that their silence, their complicity, is part of the problem,” said Ashley Yates, a Black Lives Matter activist who helped plan and carry out a protest at Netroots Nation, a conference where Sanders and O’Malley were slated to speak in July. “There’s an absurd quality to the idea of people telling you to be calm and controlled in your pain. To whisper quietly as you’re being killed.”

As Black Lives Matter becomes increasingly intertwined with mainstream politics, activists have found people in high places ready and willing to listen to their demands. But that creates new challenges, as activists attempt to engage with a political system they want to change without compromising or capitulating.

“It would be naive not to realize that there is some kind of desire for mutual benefit when candidates agree to sit down and speak with us,” said Brittany Packnett, a protester and activist with Campaign Zero, a policy-focused group affiliated with Black Lives Matter, who has met with Sanders and Clinton. “But if we don’t take the fight everywhere we won’t win. It just means we have to be that much more clear about our intentions, hold that much more integrity when we engage in those spaces.”

Deep distrust of established political power has made many in the movement wary of any kind of engagement with either Republicans or Democrats. Still, many activists believe that the election is important. When President Obama leaves office, it will mark the end of an era. There is a sense of urgency over what happens next.

It won’t be easy to alter laws and institutions, but there has been political change in the past year. In May, Obama called for an end to transfers of certain kinds of military-style equipment from the federal government to police departments. In December, the Federal Bureau of Investigation announced a new effort to improve its tracking of fatal police shootings. Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake fired their police chiefs amid protests over police brutality.

**Student protest also reached new heights on college campuses around the country. High-profile protests at the University of Missouri and Yale University over discrimination and racial insensitivity led to resignations at both schools.** Civil-rights agitation on college campuses is nothing new. But some movement leaders say the protests are proof of a fundamental shift in the mentality of a younger generation of activists.
“People used to believe that if you go to college and dress the right way, have a certain level of education, you would be spared,” said Erika Totten, the cofounder of the Washington, D.C., chapter of Black Lives Matter. “Now there’s a growing recognition that that’s not the case. College campuses don’t shield you from discrimination. Students are waking up en mass and realizing that they have to bring the fight there too.”

Critics have characterized student protests as a plea for special treatment that infringes on free speech. Many activists view that as an attempt to dismiss, and shut down, what the movement is trying to achieve, and argue that the criticism operates from a premise that fails to acknowledge profound racial inequity.

“We’ve seen a continuation of the narrative that demanding that your life has value somehow takes value from someone else,” Garza said. “At the most compassionate, it’s a denial of the fact that people are not treated equally in our country. At its most nefarious, it’s a deliberate distraction, a distortion of reality.”

The past year also witnessed tragedy. In June, a gunman killed nine people at a black church in Charleston, South Carolina. 21-year old Dylann Roof reportedly confessed to the shooting, saying that he wanted to incite a “race war.”

It was an event that echoed past atrocity. “It takes me back to the time when black churches were burned with impunity in the ’60s and ’70s,” said Opal Tometi, a co-founder of #BlackLivesMatter and the executive director of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. “Today we have the same type of domestic terrorism on the rise, we aren’t supposed to call it that, but that is exactly what it is. We are seeing these white supremacist networks grow and become stronger.”

When grand juries declined to deliver an indictment in connection with the deaths of Tamir Rice, a 12-year old who was fatally shot by a police officer while playing with a toy gun, and Sandra Bland, a 28-year old who died in jail after being pulled over for a routine traffic violation, it provoked deep disappointment and outright anger.

Yet even as the legal system has failed to yield outcomes that activists hoped for, the movement has succeeded in focusing intense scrutiny on criminal justice and policing in America.

As activists confront obstacles, the movement has experienced growing pains. Social media has been a powerful tool for activists, but the public nature of the medium makes protestors uniquely vulnerable. Documents obtained by various media outlets through the Freedom of Information Act detail how the Department of Homeland Security monitors the movement on social media. And many activists believe they are under surveillance.

Police officers she has never seen before will sometimes call Ashley Yates by her full name, she says. Yates recalls one instance in which an officer grabbed her arm at a New York protest and referred to her by her Twitter handle, @brownblaze. “It does something to your idea of freedom as an American when you know you’re being surveilled,” Yates said. “They let you know that they know who you are and they’re watching.”
Tension among activists has been on display in the past year. Movements derive strength from the fact that different people play different roles—and Black Lives Matter is no exception. But as activists chart different paths, disagreements have erupted over strategy and tactics as well as demands.

One point of contention is whether the movement has adequately responded to the impact of violence against black women and girls. The #SayHerName campaign works to call attention to violent encounters between black women and police. But many activists say that far more needs to be done.

There is also a recognition that Black Lives Matter must build an increasingly sophisticated infrastructure to support its growth.

Some activists are looking to expand the ways the movement engages in politics: “The movement is evolving and there are different ways that people are working to advance that and make that happen,” said Tarik Mohamed, an activist based out of New York City who recently set up a super PAC intended to advance the agenda of Black Lives Matter. “We need to continue to evolve our political voice, and that’s what I’m trying to do.”

Across the country, Black Lives Matter activists are investing time and effort to recruit and train a legal aid and emergency response network. For the protest movement to survive, a powerful support network will need to be in place.

“We’re at a breaking point in this country right now,” Yates said. “We got to this moment with people sacrificing and putting their lives on the line and we have to support each other through that. It sounds easy to remember, but sometimes it’s hard.”

MISSOURIAN

Breaking the grass ceiling: MU ag leadership group all-female for first time

MARIA KALAITZANDONAKES, 1 hr ago

COLUMBIA — When Heteng Cui told her parents she wanted to study veterinary medicine, they blanched.

"It didn't seem like a suitable career for a woman to them at first," Cui said. "My mom felt that girls should work in an office and not outside. ... But I see myself as someone who can do as much as a boy."
Cui's friends thought she should study art or economics, because it was more "appropriate," she said. But Cui has known since summers on her grandfather's farm that she wanted to study animals.

"My dream has always been to be a bridge between animals and people for food production," Cui said.

Eventually, with persistence from Cui, her family supported her choices. She studied for two years in China, then transferred to MU to study animal science. She is now a junior in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources — a long way away from her grandfather's swine, watermelon, cucumber and peach farm in rural China and her family's seaside home in the nearby city of Qingdao. She plans to pursue her master's degree after graduation to study animal nutrition.

In December, Cui and 12 other students were selected as the first all-female Dickinson Scholars group. The MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources program pairs students with Kansas City agribusinesses so that scholars can have an immersive experience in the fast-paced world of agriculture. The 2016 all-female Dickinson Scholars class reflects a slow but steady shift in agriculture — in universities, businesses and more slowly, on the farms.

The 13 scholars — Cui, Renee Adler, Laura Bardot, Emma Downing, Nora Faris, Malinda Foster, Tori Lock, Jaime Luke, Lindsey Robinson, Sydney Seba, Taylor Strain, Savannah Taylor and Betty Thomas — illustrate this change.

Demographics change

Thomas Payne, vice chancellor and dean of CAFNR, said he's noticed a shift in demographics since joining MU in 1999.

"When I began my academic career, colleges of agriculture were predominantly men, as students and faculty," Payne said. "Now our student body is close to 50-50 women and men, and there are many more women faculty."
CAFNR now has 97 female faculty and staff, according to data collected from CAFNR department websites. Percentages of female faculty depend on the varying sized departments, ranging from 75 percent in Science and Agricultural Journalism to 7 percent in both Agricultural Systems Management and Soil, Environmental and Atmospheric Sciences. Plant Sciences has the most female faculty and staff in CAFNR, at 24.

Student body demographics are changing in CAFNR as well. As of this fall, CAFNR had 57.5 percent female and 42.5 percent male students in its undergraduate programs. MU's undergraduate student body is 52 percent female, 48 percent male, according to MU's Division of Enrollment Management.

Dickinson Scholars has been around since the mid-1990s, said Stephanie Chipman, director of CAFNR Career Services. The scholars program assigns each student to a partner agribusiness in Kansas City. During winter intersession, students tour businesses in addition to their own, interact with company leaders and prepare a final project.

Students are selected based on academic excellence, career aspirations and demonstrated leadership. They submit an application and resume to CAFNR Career Services. After initial selection, students submit a recorded interview to a panel of CAFNR faculty who select the final scholars.

All CAFNR academic programs are available to both men and women, Payne said. Programs such as Dickinson Scholars, John Brown Scholars and Agriculture Future of America Scholars provide hands-on experience to students in CAFNR, and Career Services encourages all students to apply.

Sophomore Tori Lock applied to the Dickinson Scholars program after encouragement from her older sorority sisters. Lock belongs to Sigma Alpha, a professional agricultural sorority. Lock is a third-generation cattle rancher from Carrollton, Missouri. There, she helped with feeding, castrating, giving shots and bottle feeding new calves.
"Many times on any given frozen winter day, we'd have an extra passenger — a calf — in the cab of the truck on the way home to the farm," Lock said. "We'd load up calves that weren't doing as well and take them home to doctor them back to health."

Her favorite job was to ride along to cattle sales with her father. She plans to work in agricultural advertising before returning to the farm.

"There have been moments where I have not been treated completely equal as the males in the industry, but I believe now more than ever (that) women are working just as hard as men, and achieving at that, to continue the legacy of the agriculture industry," Lock said.

Lock now studies science and agricultural journalism, with minors in agricultural economics and agricultural education and leadership.

Nationally, data shows that women are the minority in agriculture. According to the Census of Agriculture, conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture in 2012, just 14 percent of the nation's 2.1 million farms have a female principal operator. The data show that in general, farms run by women tended to be smaller (54 percent of woman-operated farms in the U.S. are smaller than 50 acres, compared to 39 percent of all farms) and less lucrative — 76 percent of woman-operated farms in the U.S. make less than $10,000 from farm sales, compared to 56 percent of all farms.

The agricultural community is taking notice, and many organizations are attempting to change this. This year, the World Food Prize, an annual international gathering of agricultural leaders in Des Moines, Iowa, focused two of the main panels on encouraging young women to pursue STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — fields and empowering female farmers. The University of Nebraska hosts a Women in Agriculture conference annually. This year was the third year the Missouri State Fair hosted a Women in Agriculture award.

Another Dickinson Scholar winner, Jaime Luke, grew up in Stanberry, Missouri with four older brothers. They supported her and pushed her to study agriculture, too. Her involvement in
agriculture began on her family's cattle and row crop farm. She loved tending to the chickens and riding along in the combine with her father.

In high school she worked at a John Deere implement store and with a local veterinarian. Luke also got more involved in the National FFA Organization, which is where she found her passion, she said.

"I ended up being the only girl to join FFA in my class, and I was a really shy kid," Luke said. "My adviser pushed me to do a creative speaking competition, and I ended up getting second in state.

"I found out that I really knew a lot about agriculture, and I could be a great voice for it."

Luke wants to work in public policy internationally after graduation. She's studying agricultural economics with a minor in international agriculture.

"I think as long as you're knowledgeable but still open to listen to what others have to say, you can succeed, no matter your gender," Luke said. "I'm excited to be a Dickinson Scholar to see the real world of ag businesses."

Industry opportunities

Nora Faris, a sophomore in science and agricultural journalism from Concordia, Missouri, is excited to see how policies affect agricultural businesses. She hopes to work in agricultural law or policy after graduation. Growing up, Faris preferred watching the news over cartoons, she said, so journalism and politics was a natural choice.

Faris sees a stark difference between perception of women running farms versus holding leadership roles in the business world.

"The perception is that farm women are strong and capable, just not being in charge," Faris said. "The production side of agriculture has a ways to go in accommodating women who are
interested in owning and operating their own farms. But the policy and business side of things is very inclusive."

Robinson has shown pigs since she was 3 and actively involved in her family's swine farm even before that. Robinson helped with daily feeding and cleaning of barns. As she got older she also helped with breeding and birthing. She hopes to work for a livestock magazine after graduation.

Chipman finds the demographics of the 2016 Dickinson Scholars encouraging. Chipman has been frustrated over the years, she said, after hearing female students recount sexist questions asked during employer interviews.

"Just the other day I had a student tell me the interviewer asked her if she had a boyfriend, and if she would be able to leave him for the job," Chipman said. "I am appalled that that sort of question is still asked in 2015. Although there are still struggles for women, I know that all of my students are finding their place in agriculture."

Chipman said she's excited about this year's Dickinson Scholar group and can't wait to see the projects these women come up with after working with the businesses. The scholars leave Monday for their trip.

“We are more than just farm moms,” Robinson said. “Women have major roles on farms and in ag businesses across the country. And people are recognizing their roles now."
Former Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin: “You can look back and say that if I’d done this differently, this might not have happened. But what’s the value in that? You cannot go back and relive history. I can’t change what’s happened.”

R. Bowen Loftin first visited the University of Missouri in the late 1970s. A physics professor at Texas A&M University at Galveston, he and a colleague came to Columbia to use the nuclear reactor for research. He cold-called the director of the reactor explaining that they wanted to collect data but had no money to compensate the university.

“They were very welcoming,” Loftin said. “I’ll never forget how wonderful it was to be with the people here at Mizzou, because they were really quite helpful in spite of the fact that we gave them nothing in return except acknowledging their support in publications.”

He didn’t visit MU again until November 2013, when Texas A&M traveled to Columbia for a football game while he was A&M’s president. A month later, he was named MU’s chancellor.

As chancellor, he worked to give students and visitors the same welcoming feeling he had felt when he first visited, making a point to talk with them on Francis Quadrangle and around campus. Despite his resignation, he wants to continue to be part of this atmosphere.

“I think all this stuff we’ve gone through the last few months has sort of tainted things a bit, but I do believe fundamentally that Mizzou is a very welcoming place,” he said. “You can certainly talk about individuals and talk about issues of racism here, which have been quite prominent lately, but I think by and large, the university does welcome people.”

Loftin resigned Nov. 9 following increasing criticism from students, faculty and administrators.

He plans to stay in Columbia for the rest of his academic career, he said in a mid-December interview in the public first floor of the Residence on the Quad, the traditional home of MU’s chancellor. He and his wife Karin live in the second and third floors, but they’re currently searching for a new home in Columbia and plan to move in the next few months.

Even though he’s in a new role as the director for research facility development, he still hopes to work with students. The 66-year-old former chancellor doesn’t want to dwell on past events from his 22-month tenure; he wants to learn from them and move forward.

“I don’t envision myself being at a university anywhere else but here,” he said.

A historic week

Loftin announced Nov. 9 that he would be transitioning into a new role, effective Jan. 1. Two days later, the UM System Board of Curators voted to accelerate the transition of chancellor responsibilities to interim Chancellor Hank Foley and immediately remove Loftin from the role. Loftin said he’s been working out of the office in his home since then.
Although the fall 2015 semester was filled with student movements and protests against administrators over MU’s racial climate, graduate student health insurance and Planned Parenthood, administrators — including nine different deans — had also called for Loftin’s removal. In a letter to the curators, the deans wrote that Loftin had created a “toxic environment through threat, fear and intimidation.”

Loftin didn’t want to discuss his resignation, but he said the first inkling that faculty and other administrators had “any issue at all” with his leadership was on Sept. 23. He realized his time was limited as chancellor in early October through “different encounters and different kinds of meetings.” In their letter, the deans wrote that they asked UM System President Tim Wolfe for Loftin’s resignation in meetings on Oct. 9 and 13.

Wolfe announced his resignation at 10:15 a.m. Nov. 9, a week after graduate student Jonathan Butler had started a hunger strike with the goal of Wolfe’s removal. Loftin said Wolfe’s resignation was what he’d remember most about that week because it was a complete surprise to him, even though the two of them had previously met and talked about Loftin’s future at MU.

“We spent time together that evening before and the morning before he made the announcement, and never was that mentioned to me in any way,” Loftin said. “That was quite a shock. It changed everything.”

Reflections

Loftin said he has had more time to himself since stepping down, compared to his hectic daily schedule as chancellor.

“You have very little time to reflect, which is a loss, quite frankly,” he said. “I guess you could say ‘no’ more, but I feel like saying ‘no’ is not quite the right thing you want to do as the leader of a major campus.”

Loftin said he doesn't think about what he would change about his time as chancellor. His wife Karin said in an email she supported her husband 100 percent and “he always had the best interest of Mizzou in mind.”

“Cherish what you have, what you had,” he said. "Don’t worry about trying to change it, because you can’t.

“You can look back and say that if I’d done this differently, this might not have happened,” he said. “But what’s the value in that? You cannot go back and relive history. I can’t change what’s happened.”

He said the biggest problem at MU is its need to evolve for the future.

“You can dissect all these smaller topics here, but fundamentally I think the problem is that Mizzou is caught up, as are other universities around the country, in a very, very rapidly
changing landscape of higher education,” Loftin said. “It’s really a matter of adapting or slowly becoming less relevant. I think that’s where we are today and have been for a while.”

Loftin’s time as chancellor was marked by a series of controversial events, beginning with a balcony collapse at University Village apartments and the investigation of swimmer Sasha Menu Courey’s sexual assault and suicide in spring 2014, just months after his tenure began. He created a full-time Title IX administrator position in June 2014, which was later filled by Ellen Eardley.

In fall 2014, racial tensions on campus escalated following the shooting of black teenager Michael Brown by white police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson. MU students held protests, marched to Loftin’s doorstep and called him out for a lack of action in race relations forums.

Loftin was criticized more than ever during a series of events in the fall 2015 semester, including the cancellation of graduate student health insurance, controversies over Planned Parenthood contracts and more instances of racism on campus. Students used the hashtag “#LoftinCantExplain” to demand faster, more effective responses from the chancellor following instances of racial discrimination.

Even with constant criticism, however, Loftin said he always found joy in talking to students. He spent at least two hours each day on Twitter reading every tweet that mentioned him, replying to direct messages and using his timeline to “get the pulse of the campus.” He was well-known for shaking students’ hands at football games and obliging to requests to take photos.

“The job is very intense,” he said. “No matter how you do it, it’s very intense. You have to find some way to derive benefit from it, otherwise it’s empty, it’s very empty.”

He said what he did as chancellor changed every day based on his calendar, from sitting in meetings to going to as many as 14 student organization events in one day.

“Clearly, I’m not a young person anymore,” he said. “I’m fairly old, and you really have to push yourself hard to keep up each and every day with all the responsibilities you may have. Those are all things that I find important to do, but they do consume virtually all your waking hours.”

From one SEC school to another

Loftin wasn’t originally planning on coming to MU. In July 2013, he announced that he would be stepping down from his position as Texas A&M’s president in order to focus on teaching and research. The Houston Chronicle reported that he was forced to step down, but he called that resignation “a very different circumstance” to his resignation at MU.

That fall, however, a member of the search firm hired by the UM System to replace former MU Chancellor Brady Deaton called. Loftin met with then-President Wolfe at a meeting in Washington, D.C., then with the search committee in Kansas City and the Board of Curators in St. Louis.
Wolfe announced his appointment as chancellor in December 2013, and Loftin began the position the next February. He said at the announcement that he wouldn’t have dreamed of coming to MU without a long-term commitment.

“Mizzou presented an interesting challenge,” Loftin said. “There were a number of things about the university that attracted me, and No. 1 was the students here.”

Here, he wears black and gold bow ties instead of maroon and white. The maroon ones are stored upstairs with his other A&M-colored clothing, he said. He has over 400 bow ties total.

He said the two universities have “a very similar culture among faculty,” but there were parts of MU he still had to adjust to. He said one main difference between MU and Texas A&M is in MU’s comprehensive nature, as A&M is better known for agriculture and engineering.

Loftin said when he was hired at MU, there was a “sense of urgency” compared to at A&M. Soon after he was hired, he adjusted MU’s strategic plan to raise the university’s ranking in the Association of American Universities.

“It was made very clear to me by both the president and by the board that they wanted things to change,” he said. “Given what I saw and my own circumstance in terms of how much time I had here, I felt it was important to move quickly.”

A future at MU

Loftin’s new administrative position has multiple parts: He will oversee construction and renovation of research facilities on campus, with current projects including Lafferre Hall and a new wing of the Missouri Orthopedic Institute. He also hopes to connect the Tiger Institute, a partnership between MU and health IT company Cerner, more directly to MU’s research community.

Loftin wrote in his transition agreement that he anticipates holding his new position for five years. After that time, he said he will re-evaluate and potentially teach or do research at MU.

“I don’t view administrative roles, like the one I’ve been asked to do, as permanent,” he said.

He said he plans to finish his academic career at MU, and he anticipates returning to Texas someday.

As for MU, Loftin said that while it’s not his place to set goals for the new chancellor, he hopes they will “continue to advance Mizzou in terms of its mission of educating the students and discovering new knowledge.”

Loftin said he expects Foley to hold his position as interim chancellor for at least 18 months, because the Board of Curators will likely select a new system president before beginning the search process for MU’s chancellor. At the end of 2015, no search committees have been announced for the president or chancellor positions.
Even in a different role, Loftin said he hopes to continue working with students — the reason he originally came to MU.

“I get joy out of it,” he said. “Others get joy out of other things. You have to figure out where’s your bliss at, if you will, and what really will make you happy.”

How to Cultivate the Art of Serendipity

Do some people have a special talent for serendipity? And if so, why?

In 2008, an inventor named Steve Hollinger lobbed a digital camera across his studio toward a pile of pillows. “I wasn’t trying to make an invention,” he said. “I was just playing.” As his camera flew, it recorded what most of us would call a bad photo. But when Mr. Hollinger peered at that blurry image, he saw new possibilities. Soon, he was building a throwable videocamera in the shape of a baseball, equipped with gyroscopes and sensors. The Squito (as he named it) could be rolled into a crawlspace or thrown across a river — providing a record of the world from all kinds of “nonhuman” perspectives. Today, Mr. Hollinger holds six patents related to throwable cameras.

A surprising number of the conveniences of modern life were invented when someone stumbled upon a discovery or capitalized on an accident: the microwave oven, safety glass, smoke detectors, artificial sweeteners, X-ray imaging. Many blockbuster drugs of the 20th century emerged because a lab worker picked up on the “wrong” information.

While researching breakthroughs like these, I began to wonder whether we can train ourselves to become more serendipitous. How do we cultivate the art of finding what we’re not seeking?

For decades, a University of Missouri information scientist named Sanda Erdelez has been asking that question. Growing up in Croatia, she developed a passion for losing herself in piles of books and yellowed manuscripts, hoping to be surprised. Dr. Erdelez told me that Croatian has no word to capture the thrill of the unexpected discovery, so she was delighted when — after moving to the United States on a Fulbright scholarship in the 1980s — she learned the English word “serendipity.”

Today we think of serendipity as something like dumb luck. But its original meaning was very different.

In 1754, a belle-letterist named Horace Walpole retreated to a desk in his gaudy castle in Twickenham, in southwest London, and penned a letter. Walpole had been entranced by a Persian fairy tale about three princes from the Isle of Serendip who possess superpowers of
observation. In his letter, Walpole suggested that this old tale contained a crucial idea about human genius: “As their highnesses travelled, they were always making discoveries, by accident and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of.” And he proposed a new word — “serendipity” — to describe this princely talent for detective work. At its birth, serendipity meant a skill rather than a random stroke of good fortune.

Dr. Erdelez agrees with that definition. She sees serendipity as something people do. In the mid-1990s, she began a study of about 100 people to find out how they created their own serendipity, or failed to do so.

Her qualitative data — from surveys and interviews — showed that the subjects fell into three distinct groups. Some she called “non-encounterers”; they saw through a tight focus, a kind of chink hole, and they tended to stick to their to-do lists when searching for information rather than wandering off into the margins. Other people were “occasional encounterers,” who stumbled into moments of serendipity now and then. Most interesting were the “super-encounterers,” who reported that happy surprises popped up wherever they looked. The super-encounterers loved to spend an afternoon hunting through, say, a Victorian journal on cattle breeding, in part, because they counted on finding treasures in the oddest places. In fact, they were so addicted to prospecting that they would find information for friends and colleagues.

You become a super-encounterer, according to Dr. Erdelez, in part because you believe that you are one — it helps to assume that you possess special powers of perception, like an invisible set of antennas, that will lead you to clues.

A few months ago, I was having a drink in Cambridge, Mass., with a friend, a talented journalist who was piecing together a portrait of a secretive Wall Street wizard. “But I haven’t found the real story yet; I’m still gathering string,” my friend told me, invoking an old newsroom term to describe the first stage of reporting, when you’re looking for something that you can’t yet name. Later that night, as I walked home from the bar, I realized “gathering string” is just another way of talking about super-encountering. After all, “string” is the stuff that accumulates in a journalist’s pocket. It’s the note you jot down in your car after the interview, the knickknack you notice on someone’s shelf, or the anomaly that jumps out at you in Appendix B of an otherwise boring research study.

As I navigated the brick sidewalk, passing under the pinkish glow of a streetlight, I thought about how string was probably hiding all around me. A major story might lurk behind the Harvard zoology museum ahead or in the plane soaring above. String is everywhere for the taking, if you have the talent to take it.

In the 1960s, Gay Talese, then a young reporter, declared that “New York is a city of things unnoticed” and delegated himself to be the one who noticed. Thus, he transformed the Isle of Manhattan into the Isle of Serendip: He traced the perambulations of feral cats, cataloged shoeshine purveyors, tracked down statistics related to the bathrooms at Yankee Stadium and discovered a colony of ants at the top of the Empire State Building. He published his findings in a little book titled “New York: A Serendipiter’s Journey.”
The term “serendipiter” breathed new life into Walpole’s word, turning serendipity into a protagonist and a practitioner. After all, those ants at the top of the Empire State Building didn’t find themselves; Mr. Talese had to notice them, which was no easy matter. Similarly, Dr. Erdelez came up with the term super-encounterer to give us a way to talk about the people rather than just the discoveries. Without such words, we tend to become dazzled by the happy accident itself, to think of it as something that exists independent of an observer.

We can slip into a twisted logic in which we half-believe the penicillin picked Alexander Fleming to be its emissary, or that the moons of Jupiter wanted to be seen by Galileo. But discoveries are products of the human mind.

As people dredge the unknown, they are engaging in a highly creative act. What an inventor “finds” is always an expression of him- or herself. Martin Chalfie, who won a Nobel Prize for his work connected with green fluorescent protein — the stuff that makes jellyfish glow green — told me that he and several other Nobel Prize winners benefited from a chain of accidents and chance encounters on the way to their revelations. Some scientists even embrace a kind of “free jazz” method, he said, improvising as they go along: “I’ve heard of people getting good results after accidentally dropping their experimental preparations on the floor, picking them up, and working on them nonetheless,” he added.

So how many big ideas emerge from spills, crashes, failed experiments and blind stabs? One survey of patent holders (the PatVal study of European inventors, published in 2005) found that an incredible 50 percent of patents resulted from what could be described as a serendipitous process. Thousands of survey respondents reported that their idea evolved when they were working on an unrelated project — and often when they weren’t even trying to invent anything. This is why we need to know far more about the habits that transform a mistake into a breakthrough.

In the late 1980s, Dr. John Eng, an endocrinologist, became curious about certain animal poisons that damaged the pancreas, so he ordered lizard venom through the mail and began to play around with it. As a result of this curious exercise, he discovered a new compound in the saliva of a Gila monster, and that in turn led to a treatment for diabetes. One of Dr. Eng’s associates (quoted in a 2005 newspaper article) remarked that he was capable of seeing “patterns that others don’t see.”

Is this pattern-finding ability similar to the artistic skill of a painter like Georgia O’Keeffe? Is it related to the string-gathering prowess of Gay Talese? We still know so little about creative observation that it’s impossible to answer such questions.

That’s why we need to develop a new, interdisciplinary field — call it serendipity studies — that can help us create a taxonomy of discoveries in the chemistry lab, the newsroom, the forest, the classroom, the particle accelerator and the hospital. By observing and documenting the many different “species” of super-encounterers, we might begin to understand their minds.

A number of pioneering scholars have already begun this work, but they seem to be doing so in their own silos and without much cross-talk. In a 2005 paper (“Serendipitous Insights Involving
Nonhuman Primates”), two experts from the Washington National Primate Research Center in Seattle cataloged the chance encounters that yielded new insights from creatures like the pigtail macaque. Meanwhile, the authors of a paper titled “On the Exploitation of Serendipity in Drug Discovery” puzzled over the reasons the 1950s and ’60s saw a bonanza of breakthroughs in psychiatric medication, and why that run of serendipity ended. And in yet another field of study, a few information scientists are trying to understand the effects of being bombarded on social media sites with countless tantalizing pieces of “string.”

What could these researchers discover if they came together for one big conversation?

Of course, even if we do organize the study of serendipity, it will always be a whimsical undertaking, given that the phenomenon is difficult to define, amazingly variable and hard to capture in data. The clues will no doubt emerge where we least expect them, perhaps in the fungi clinging to the walls of parking garages or the mating habits of bird-watchers. The journey will be maddening, but the potential insights could be profound: One day we might be able to stumble upon new and better ways of getting lost.

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**Tobacco companies line up on both sides of Missouri tax debate**

The parent company of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco donated $1 million to one tobacco tax proposal.

Value-brand cigarette producers are spending big to bankroll the rival tobacco tax measure.

**BY JASON HANCOCK**
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JEFFERSON CITY - A civil war in the tobacco industry could play out in Missouri this year.

A pair of rival ballot measures seek to raise the state’s lowest-in-the-nation 17-cents-a-pack tax on tobacco products.
One would ask voters to amend the state’s constitution to raise the tax 60 cents per pack and use the new money to pay for early childhood education. The parent company of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., makers of Camel and Newport cigarettes, recently donated $1 million in support of the measure.

The other would ask voters to increase the tobacco tax 23 cents per pack and put the money toward road repairs. That campaign is being run by the Missouri Petroleum Markets and Convenience Store Association, a longtime opponent of previous efforts to raise the cigarette tax, and is being largely funded by smaller, value-brand cigarette companies like Cheyenne International LLC and Xcaliber International Ltd.

Both campaigns are eyeing the 2016 ballot. And the battle between Big Tobacco and Little Tobacco could be a deciding factor.

The key issue drawing the two forces into the debate is the fact that for more than a decade Missouri lawmakers have declined the state attorney general’s request to pass a law to nullify a pricing advantage that small tobacco manufacturers enjoy.

Big tobacco companies like R.J. Reynolds and Philip Morris were included in a 1998 legal settlement that forced them to make annual payments to Missouri to cover the health damage their products caused smokers. Smaller tobacco companies were not included in that settlement.

The early childhood education ballot measure would address that difference. The transportation funding ballot measure would not.

Another major difference in the two proposals is a provision in the road funding measure voiding the tax increase if any future tobacco tax increase is placed on a state or local ballot. That means if a tax increase only appears on a local ballot, even if it never passes, the 23-cents-per-pack increase would disappear.

Regardless of the contents of the proposals, a tobacco tax increase faces an uphill fight in Missouri.

Ballot efforts to raise the tax in Missouri fell to defeat in 2002, 2006 and 2012. But the last campaign lost by less than a percentage point.
A third proposal to raise the tobacco tax to fund higher education was abandoned in the wake of the resignations of top officials at the University of Missouri.

MISSOURIAN

Breaking Blood donation guidelines change for gay, bisexual men

MARIA KALAITZANDONAKES, Jan 3, 2016

COLUMBIA — As a response to the AIDS epidemic, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned blood donations from gay men in 1983. By 1985, one of every 2,500 HIV cases were from blood transfusions, according to the FDA's report.

The advent of HIV testing, the use of questionnaires at blood banks, and better understanding of disease transmission have decreased the risk of contracting HIV through blood transfusion to about one in 1.47 million transfusions.

The lowered risk was among reasons the FDA on Dec. 21 changed its longstanding policy and recommended that blood banks begin accepting donations from gay and bisexual men who hadn't had sex with another man for a year.

Donald Burke, professor of molecular microbiology and immunology at MU, said he was surprised it took the FDA so long to make the change.

“It was an easy decision in the 1980s to cut off one potential transmission route: Blood transfusions were one way to get the disease, and gay men were the most recognized group affected by the disease,” Burke said. “Once there was a reliable test for exposure to the virus, ... there was really no justification to continue the ban."
Dan Fox, spokesman for the American Red Cross in the Missouri-Illinois blood services region, said the Red Cross in Columbia will be following the new voluntary guidelines.

The rule is more consistent with blood bank policies for other risk factors that are declared on a form before giving blood. A donor must also wait 12 months after getting a tattoo, being incarcerated for more than 72 hours or traveling to areas where malaria might be found. Research from the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute, transfusion studies and examples of successful implementations of policies that required one-year waiting period in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Hungary, Japan, Sweden and the UK encouraged the FDA to reverse the rule, according to the FDA recommendation.

“During the five years before and five years after a change in a one-year deferral in Australia, there was no change in risk to the blood supply,” the FDA’s revised recommendation stated.

The one-year deferral period gives donors more than enough time to recognize symptoms of HIV, Burke said.

“We now have 25 years of experience, and we can be extremely confident in the understanding of transmission and the possible risks,” Burke said. “This ruling is pretty late.”

Five possible changes in policy were considered, including one that would only defer “high-risk” candidates — for example non-monogamous, sexually active, gay or bisexual men. But the questions aren’t always effective and can be off-putting, the FDA report noted.

"Most of the people I've known over the years who are gay don't want to donate blood," David Huddlestonmith said. "They don't want to go through all the questioning. ... You're told you're bad over and over. Why go through that?"

Huddlestonsmith was a practicing physician in Los Angeles County in the 1980s and said he remembers the chaotic time when the original ruling was put into place. He worked at the only hospital in the area that took in HIV-positive patients and said he was accidentally pricked by a
needle of an HIV-positive patient. He had to wait four years for an effective test to tell him he was not going to get sick.

Huddleston smith also saw the risks of blood transfusions at the time when he cared for a female patient who contracted HIV after receiving 10 units of blood after a difficult birth. There was no treatment.

"HIV was essentially a death sentence," Huddleston smith said. "I was there during the real bad times. … Things have come a long way."

Although there is no cure for HIV, it can be controlled with medical care. HIV is transmitted most commonly through sexual behaviors or needles.

Fair treatment in medical care continues to be an issue for the LGBT community. The Institute of Medicine, in a 2011 report on LGBT health, discussed health professionals refusing service and increased mental health issues. Huddleston smith said he could relate to his LGBT patients when he practiced medicine because of his own experience "coming out" when he was 33.

"Things seem to be changing in the last five years," Huddleston smith said. "I think gay patients appreciate the open dialogue … and not having to be so damn closeted."