

Opinion

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GUEST COMMENTARY

Don't let the hashtags do the talking — and learning — for you

Last week's events featured some of the most tumultuous in the history of Columbia, Missouri: Death threats were issued; bricks were thrown through windows; a racist cult rallied at Speaker's circle; the KKK marched on campus; Dorms were being evacuated — Nobody was safe. Yet, I was able to enjoy a quiet walk home on a beautiful fall night. How can this be?? How in the world could I find

CHARLES HUTCHISON

serenity amidst chaos? Because none of these things happened. Yik-Yak. Erodr. Twitter. Facebook. I'm probably missing at least five more. According to these social media outlets, our campus was ground zero. Yes, someone decided to make some sort of asinine anonymous threat, stating "Some of you are alright. Don't go to campus tomorrow." In light of what the events our community has endured over the past week, this statement was absolutely tasteless at best, and at worst a declaration that the safety of our campus was indeed in doubt. However, according to an e-mail sent by the dean of the college in which I am a student, the police have identified the source of that threat and did not consider it credible. OK then, move on with my night.

But what about the cult that was at Speakers Circle? Someone was there. Someone witnessed it. Someone tweeted about it. Weird. What my friend saw first-hand was one white male shouting about what he sees as violations of our First Amendment rights. According to my friend — who told me about this before the tweets came out — the man's language was profane and his tone was provocative. He most likely offended more than one person who was watching him. That's OK. That's his right. That doesn't make him a cult.

But what about the KKK on campus? Erroneously reported on Facebook by a member of the student leadership, who later issued a kind of "oops, sorry guys!" What about the bricks through the window? Didn't happen. The rumor mill got so bad that a friend of mine who lives in Colorado called me to make sure I was OK, asking me if we were evacuating campus. Well, if they did they forgot to evacuate the libraries. As far as I can ascertain, the only accurate thing "tweeted" that night was, "at this point I feel like I could make Twitter believe that Bigfoot is on Mizzou's campus. #Mizzou."

Our insatiable thirst for social media is threatening our civilization. There truly is a frenzy

of instant gratification that has devolved us as a community. Somehow we were able to artificially construct a crisis that culminated in #prayformizzou as a trending topic on social media sites. That is embarrassing. The foulest part, to me, is that this is not even the worst thing our community has done on social media this week.

This week I looked on as a group of students took up a cause which was rooted in something that they truly believed in. Honestly, good for those students. What happened next, in my mind, is even more egregious than some constructed campus crisis. People who knew nothing of the situation that was going on other than a hashtag decided that this was a cause that had to succeed in order to fix racial discrimination. Op-Ed's began showing up, many of which said things like: "if you don't understand, then you're ignorant;" or "If you don't support this movement, you need to check your privilege;" or "you need to choose which side of history you want to be on."

To me, ignorance is making an uninformed reactionary decision based upon what is popular and sounds good, then shoving it in everyone's face and telling those who aren't comfortable with it that they are wrong. Check your privilege? Face it, we are students at the flagship university of the UM System, we are all privileged to be here, and we should all be privileged to be in a community that allows us to say how we feel without being ridiculed or demeaned because it might be different. And, honestly, the side of history I want to be on is the side that was not willing to look at this movement and seriously believe that we are making strides toward inclusion.

There is clearly a need for a more tolerant Mizzou. That cannot and should not be disputed. But, how can the root of the problem be solved through one-dimensional change? How can we begin to heal as a community by belittling the opinions of those we are supposed to call fellow students? How can something that is supposed to result in a more tolerant campus be predicated on the intolerance of others? It absolutely cannot. It absolutely cannot.

Here is a novel thought: talk to someone who doesn't think like you do. Form your opinion based on facts rather than emotions. Be willing to stretch your comfort zone. Do not simply accept other people's ideas as your own.

Stop being a hashtag, be a human being.

Charles Hutchison is a graduate student at MU.



If you love Columbia, be open to criticism

It's the week after, and we're all experiencing protest fatigue.

No matter which position you take related to the resignations of UM System President Tim Wolfe and Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, we all need a collective, long exhale. It's no fun being the poster community for failing to listen to the concerns of black students.

For hometown and longtime residents of Columbia, the veil of innocence has been removed. Columbia can no longer boast about its diversity and inclusion. Columbia has claimed the title of the most progressive and open-minded city in Missouri. Now, the national view of our community has been shaped by a series of activities that makes us the template of what not to do.

It's like a marriage just before the divorce. After years of poor communication, it all ends up in divorce court. The aftermath leaves both parties bruised by the fight leading up to the end. Sadly, the conclusion seems to never come. Wolfe's departure begins a new journey, but getting to the beginning is complicated by the confusion that preceded the first step of the new day.

We all need a few days of rest. Sadly, we can't take a vacation because there's too much to do before we jump on a plane to an ocean resort. There's too much to unpack before we take a break. There are lessons still to be learned and conversations waiting for deliberation. There are decisions that have to be made, with far too many people unwilling to participate in the solution.

We can't press the pause button yet. It doesn't help that Columbia hasn't begun the conversation. It's easy to claim this is an MU problem. Systemic racism is something the university has constructed. Yeah, right. It's easy to place the blame on the people on the other side of Elm Street.

Sorry folks. The problems at MU are there because of the bigotry inherent in the city. MU can commit years constructing a plan to alter



CARL KENNEY

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racism on campus, but none of it will stick until Columbia contends with how racism shows up in the broader community.

Like I said, that's a hard pill to swallow for those who love Columbia for the image they've constructed from their privilege. Columbia is a great place to live if you are white. It's a miserable place to live if you are black.

I was called a racist by a middle-aged woman last week. It happened while I attempted to explain how I feel as a black man living in Columbia. I did my best to communicate the angst fueled from being the only black person that shows up. When I eat at a restaurant, when I attend an art exhibit, when I seek places that reflect my musical taste — I'm reminded I'm a minority in a room seeking people who look like me.

I shared the pain stirred by the scarcity of black-owned businesses. I mentioned the absence of a black-owned radio station. I felt the bubbling of tears rise as I reflected on the community I left in Durham, North Carolina. I shared the significance of diverse friends and the importance of living in a community that authentically celebrated a variety of cultures. I talked about desiring a community transcendent of black and white. I pressed her to ponder what is missing in Columbia, in a way that suggested what could be, if only people understood what is missing.

I was told I needed to spend

time with her friends. She didn't get it. She couldn't get it. Her life is framed from the perspective that Columbia is a great place to live. That is true for her and others committed to the commentary of Columbia's progressive, diverse reputation.

That's when it hit me. We have a long way to go. The work in Columbia hasn't begun.

Can a brother get some rest? I'm tired of protesting because of racism. It feels like I've been doing it my entire life. I'm tired of singing that song. Can we stop singing "We shall overcome someday"? I'm tired of posting comments on Facebook about black people facing injustice. I'm tired of yelling, "No justice, no peace" and other protest slogans that rally the crowd.

I'm tired of preaching social justice sermons intended to evoke compassion among people far removed from the pain I preach about. I'm tired of all of it, but ...

More than anything, I'm tired of attempting to convince white people that what I feel is real.

I'm tired of being told to stop acting like a victim and that the problems black people face are caused by their own actions. I'm way past being tired of being told to suck it up and act like a man living in a country that grants all people the resources to rise above the snags in the way of progress.

I'm tired of talking about how it feels to be black, and I'm tired of white people telling black people it's all a figment of my imagination.

Maybe white people are tired of having to listen to black people talk about how it feels to be black. If so, I almost feel sorry for them. I can't because there are too many memories to prevent me from jumping on the Ben Carson bandwagon.

We all need a break. Sorry, there's too much work to do to take a vacation.

Carl Kenney is co-pastor of Bethel Baptist Church and an adjunct professor at the Missouri School of Journalism. He writes a weekly column for the Missourian.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

Cooperation on display in the Gateway Arch expansion project

No longer will the Gateway Arch, dominating the St. Louis skyline, resemble an island separated by Interstate 44 from the city's downtown. A new Missouri Department of Transportation-provided park over the freeway eliminates that obstacle. It's part of the \$380 million public-private makeover for the 50-year-old monument on a National Park Service site.

"It's St. Louis' calling card to the world," said Ryan McClure, director of communications for the CityArchRiver Foundation.

The St. Louis area investment is huge. Residents voted to tax themselves to put the Arch on better footing. The project also stands out as possibly the largest private investment in a national park since the renovation of Ellis Island.

In 2013, St. Louis city and county voters approved a three-sixteenth-cent sales tax of which \$90 million will go to the project. McClure said \$221 million in private donations were raised combined with \$69 million in additional state, federal and local funds. The work includes an expansion of the park grounds to about 100 acres, or 40 city blocks.

The original construction of the Arch began Feb. 12, 1963, was completed in 1965 and fully opened to

visitors in 1968. The total building cost back then was \$13 million for the Arch. The monument symbolizes St. Louis' role as an old Mississippi River town in the westward expansion of the United States.

About 2.3 million people annually visited the Arch in recent years. The improvements, which will include an additional five to seven miles of biking and hiking trails, are expected to boost that number past 3.2 million.

The Arch will remain open through most of the work, which will include a bigger, better and more true-to-life Museum of Westward Expansion.

Visitors will find themselves more engaged and having to consider what they would take West and how they might react under a certain set of circumstances.

The sizable investment is not only good for St. Louis, but it will also benefit the state and the region.

"The Arch is our symbol," said Susan Trautman, executive director of the Great Rivers Greenway District. "It defines who we are. It defines the state. It is the front door."

Indeed. It also represents how many groups can put aside their agendas and work together for what is one of the best attractions in the Show-Me State.

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WALTER WILLIAMS, FOUNDING DEAN, MISSOURI SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM