

Black at Mizzou
APM Reports Transcript

Part 1

(Sound of crowd and announcer: "All right! You guys ready?")

Lauren Brown: The University of Missouri. August 23rd, 2015. I was there. So were six-thousand other first-year students.

(Announcer: "Welcome to our new student class of 2015!")

In Missouri, people call the university "Mizzou." And Mizzou has this ritual to start off the school year. There's a row of six huge columns on campus. They used to be part of a building. Every year before classes start, all the incoming students meet up at the columns.

(Sound of band playing)

The marching band's there. Professors show up. Alumni. And all the new students go running through the columns.

(sound of cheering and crowd)

When you pass through the columns...you're in. You're a University of Missouri Tiger. You belong at Mizzou.

It's a nice ritual...and all... But things aren't that simple.

Running through the columns doesn't really make you "belong" at Mizzou. If you're a Black student, like me, belonging on a predominately white campus isn't that easy.

(Theme Music)

From APM Reports, this is "Black at Mizzou: Confronting Race on Campus." I'm Lauren Brown.

When I graduated from Mizzou in 2019, I got a job at St. Louis Public Radio. A couple of months later, I got a call from some producers at APM Reports.

They asked me if I wanted to help them with a story about what happened in the fall of 2015 at Mizzou. You might have heard about that. It was all over the news for a few months.

(News clip: “The university has been the center of national attention over racial tensions on campus”)

There were protests. A hunger strike. The football team threatened not to play.

Eventually, some top administrators resigned...and similar protests started on campuses across the country.

(News clip: “Activist students are following suit, from Yale to Ithaca College.”)

News clip: “Dozens of University of Michigan students took to the streets this morning to protest racism at the school.”)

I agreed to help these producers do a documentary looking back at that year. But I didn’t want to do just another story about protests at Mizzou.

The stories I’ve seen in the news make it seem like a couple of bad things happened. Out of nowhere. Then there were protests. And then things went back to normal.

But that's not what I saw.

I saw students put their grades on the line. Their jobs. Their reputations. So they could tell people what was really going on at their school.

And that’s what I want to tell you about. What it’s like to be a Black student on a predominately white campus. Because this is the same reality Black students face all over the country.

I want to tell you what we went through. And how we took care of each other. And how we built a community for ourselves that we call Black Mizzou.

Over the past year, I made several trips back to Mizzou with those producers.

We were there on the first day of classes in the fall of 2019.

(Sound of APM producers walking and talking)

I gave them a campus tour.

Lauren Brown tape on campus: Right now we are heading towards The Columns.

It had been four years since I'd run through those columns.

Lauren Brown tape on campus: That first week, I was just so excited. It was my first time being away from home. And that's about six hours away and so it was my first time being on my own and feeling like an adult.

I grew up in the south suburbs of Chicago.

Lauren Brown tape on campus: Illinois and Missouri are different. I noticed the change immediately. When I got to campus. It was sort of like a culture shock. I had never really been around a lot of people that didn't look like me or go to school with students that didn't look like me, and so, being the only Black person in class was a difficult thing at first, until I got used to it. And so I kind of felt isolated until I found my way around campus and found organizations to join and made friends.

(Music)

I would say that fall 2015 is my own personal experience. I don't think I know what a real freshman year college experience is like, because mine wasn't like that. So I don't know what average, you know, ordinary freshman year experience is for somebody that didn't go through what I went through. I saw everything I was there. I wasn't on the frontlines, but I witnessed it. And I witnessed something great or witnessed something that, you know, empowered me.

(Music)

Lauren Brown tape on campus: Black students actually call themselves Black Mizzou. So it's kind of like we have a whole other school, almost. I don't know who started saying Black Mizzou first, but I think they felt like we had to have something that we felt was our own to say, "Black Mizzou. We're Black Mizzou." Because maybe sometimes we don't feel like we're part of Mizzou as a whole.

(Music)

Payton Head: The first Black student wasn't admitted to Mizzou until 1950. And for a lot of people who think oh, well, that was just so long ago that doesn't have an impact. Well, you know, my mom was born in 1950.

That's Payton Head. He was a few years ahead of me at Mizzou.

When I got there, he was president of the student body.

And in the third week of school that fall, he ended up making the national news.

Head: So, I was walking on campus and some guys on the back of a pickup truck, you know, just screamed the N-word at me. And this was the second time that this happened to me because it's -- you know, apparently more common than you think it is. It had happened to me my sophomore year and that was one of the catalysts for me running for president. And so when that incident happened again, I went almost on a Facebook rant about it, you know, basically saying like, “why is my simple existence such a threat to you? Just me walking down the street. Why do you feel so compelled and so entitled to tell me where I belong and don't belong?”

Payton's Facebook post went viral. He says that's because he was the president of the student government.

Head: I realized that people really didn't necessarily care about, you know, me. It was the position. It was the fact that this happened to the student body president. And all of the articles that came out after that was, you know, what the student body president did after somebody called him N-word. Things like that happen to students all the time, all around the nation. But I chose to speak out on it because I realized that so many people could say something like that and not have the platform of, you know, Washington Post and all these different publications calling them to see like, What's the story? What's up? To be completely honest with you, I didn't even know that that Facebook post would have an impact — as much as it did.

(Sound of Racism Lives Here protests)

A couple of weeks later, students held a protest. The theme was, "Racism Lives Here."

(Sound of Racism Lives Here protests)

The protestors were unhappy with the university's response to what happened to Payton.

The chancellor at the time didn't say anything at first. Then there were news stories.

After five days, the chancellor posted a letter online.

The letter mentioned - quote - “recent incidents of bias and discrimination directed at members of our community.”

It said the behavior was — quote — "totally unacceptable."

But the protestors said the chancellor took too long to respond.

And they wanted him to say something stronger — something specifically about what happened to Payton.

They said his response felt like too little too late.

There was another protest a week later.

And then it was Homecoming.

So I need to tell you some things about Homecoming. Because Homecoming’s an important part of this story in a couple of ways.

(Sound of Black Mizzou Homecoming)

There are actually two Homecomings at Mizzou. It’s been that way since the late 80s. Black students felt left out of the university-wide homecoming celebrations for years, so they made their own. This past fall I went back to Mizzou for Homecoming.

Lauren Brown at Black Mizzou Homecoming: I’m currently at the Black Mizzou Homecoming Tailgate at the Black Culture Center on campus. And this event is for a lot of Black students to come and hang out and convene and kind of have something for themselves.

There were a couple hundred people there, from freshmen all the way up to alumni. Dancing, laughing and talking about old times.

Markese Jones: When you at a predominately white institution like this one you tend to lose those kinds of moments where people can understand you.

I talked to Markese Jones.

Jones: When you get moments like this, you gotta cherish them because they are rare to come by.

Tierra Stevens: It feels great.

I also talked to Tierra Stevens.

Stevens: The weather's good, the Black feels good. This is my song that's coming on right now, so you'll have to get back to me.

Lauren Brown at Black Mizzou Homecoming: So is this like, a unity song? A swagger? How would you describe it?

Stevens: When this song comes on, everybody comes together, whether you don't like one another, whether that person is your friend or not, you put your arm around that person, and you go from side to side. And it's lovely.

(Music)

And then there's the other homecoming - the big celebration everybody goes to.

In the fall of 2015, my first year at school, something happened at the big Mizzou Homecoming parade. And it pushed the protests on campus to a new level.

I talked with some of the people who were there about why they did what they did. They were still upset about the university's response to Payton Head being called the n-word, and a string of other racist incidents.

A call went out on social media: Let's meet at the library.

Marshall Allen: Anybody who wants to do something wants to speak up, wants to speak out.

Marshall Allen was one of the students who showed up.

Allen: It was about 20-25 people that was there. Met, talked, made another meeting and by that second meeting, it was like 13.

By the third meeting, they were down to 11.

Andrea Fulgiam: Mainly, I would say people who had been involved in different protests or activist work.

Andrea Fulgiam was another one of those 11.

Before Andrea got to Mizzou, she wasn't an activist.

Fulgiam: Going into my college experience, I didn't really know what to expect. No one in my family went to college. So I would say that I was pretty, like, optimistic and excited. But I can vividly remember like random things happening when I was just like, I don't really like the way I'm being spoken to or how people are interacting with me.

(Music)

Fulgiam: Like in my abnormal psych class, students making rude comments about like, not wanting to sit by me, or I'm not gonna sit by the Black girl. And I was just like, what is this? You know, sitting in classes when people are like racism doesn't exist, they're just making it up. It's like, are you freaking serious? You're taking sociology with me, we're in a psych class, like we are talking about biases, and you're gonna say that racism does not exist?

Allen: Black students, by and large, have a completely different college experience. A completely different one.

Marshall Allen says he knew life would be uncomfortable at times at any predominantly white university.

And Mizzou was no different.

Allen: I researched the demographics before I came to Mizzou in the first place. So I expected to encounter racism. I expected to see prejudice. It's just one of the realities Black folk have to live with. You understand what it's going to be like when you're 7 percent.

Marshall remembers signing up for his first semester of classes.

He was getting help from an academic adviser. He told her he was interested in Black Studies.

Allen: We're picking out classes. I had what, Anthropology, History 1100. But I looked down and I saw Black Studies 2000. And I said, "can I take this?" And she said, "I guess you can. I mean I guess that can fit into your schedule. That can help count towards a Gen Ed." I said, "Why don't you lead with that?" Especially when, you know, I found out six months later that those classes, the classes that I was looking at could substitute, like I could have taken African American history, and it would have substituted. So, it's

stuff like that, you know, those small things that add up to, you know, being structural issues that keep Black students unaware, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Fulgiam: There's an English class you have to take.

Here's Andrea again.

Fulgiam: I got pulled into like one of the meetings with my professor. And she was asking me weird questions about like, scholarships: "So what scholarships did you get?" And all of this other stuff, so I kind of walked her through like -- in high school, like 4.2 GPA; I was involved in sports; I was top 10 of my class.

Andrea told the professor that during high school, she didn't think she was going to college.

When Andrea did decide to go to college, it was too late for most scholarships.

Fulgiam: But I did get the diversity and inclusion award. And so that's the scholarship that they give marginalized students. And I was blessed to have that because it did help with the payments.

(Music)

Fulgiam: And she goes into this conversation of like, "Well do you think is fair that like you all get this scholarship?" And I was like, "You all? What do you mean?" and she's like, "You know, do you think it's fair because there are white students who don't get a scholarship because they're white?" And I was just like, "Okay, why are we having this conversation? We're supposed to be reviewing my paper." And she went on this tangent about like, how almost like I did not deserve to be at Mizzou. And the only reason I was there was because of this scholarship. And for me, that was obnoxious I guess, and I was very agitated because I knew my work ethic. I knew my intelligence. And that conversation was very belittling to me. And I had to then explain to this professor, a grown woman, and I was just 18 at the time, like, "Do you understand that these systems were never built for people that look like me? And do you understand that that student still has more chances of success than me like statistically?" And so she started going into affirmative action, and how I was a part of a number, and that's the only reason why I was there and that was like one of the worst experiences like I remember calling my mom and just like, "Am I supposed to be at Mizzou?"

When I got to campus, I was thinking about classes and getting into the Journalism School.

But when Marshall got to campus, he joined political groups.

Allen: I came in looking for that stuff. The first thing I looked for was, do they have a chapter the NAACP? Do they have anything for Black students? Do they have any type of government? I came here looking for all of the things that the campus or organizations on campus had to offer Black students. I came and I searched for it.

When Andrea got to campus, she didn't join political groups right away.

But then a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri shot and killed Michael Brown. And she decided to join the protests on campus.

Fulgiam: I felt like whenever I had the chance to use my voice, that's what I was going to do.

A year after Ferguson, it was the fall of 2015. Andrea and Marshall were among the 11 Black students who wanted to do something about what happened to Payton Head.

They knew they wanted to have a protest.

Allen: We got to talking about what the plan would be, how to bring the most attention to the issue.

Marshall says they settled on Homecoming.

Allen: Obviously homecoming, you have alumni, you have cameras, parades, you know, everybody loves homecoming, everybody knows about it. And that essentially became where, the best place was to bring all of the attention to the issues that were at hand going on at Mizzou.

Here's the big message they wanted to deliver —

What happened to Payton was not an isolated incident.

Allen: What is going on today, how Black students are being treated and how they feel out of place and uncomfortable, it's not a one-time thing. It's a history of this. We're bringing that to you so that you can understand the context behind it. We're not just mad, right? for no reason. These are a multitude of situations, of occurrences, of happenings going that we're bringing attention to.

They decided to go to the Homecoming parade.

They would block the car of the president of the University of Missouri system.

They'd have megaphones.

And each of the 11 students would tell a small piece ... of the history of Black people ... at the University of Missouri.

Allen: What we had decided was, you know, we have stopped in front of, you know, the President's car, you know, with these megaphones, people are going to pay attention. They're gonna they're going to be listening because Why, one, has the parade stopped? Two: why are there 11 Black students in front of this car? Three: why are they yelling? People are going to pay attention. People are going to remember that day.

(Sound of homecoming parade protest)

I wasn't at the parade. But I watched the video a few times.

The parade happened in downtown Columbia.

The president of the University of Missouri system is sitting in a convertible waving to the crowd.

The sidewalks are filled with people. Most of them are white.

Then 11 Black students walk into the street and lock arms and block the president's car.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: "Hi Tim Wolfe, how you doing?")

A student starts talking through a megaphone.

He addresses Tim Wolfe, the President.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: "We're some concerned students, and we got something for you.")

One by one, the other students take the megaphone.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: “This is not an indictment of white folks, but it is an indictment of white structures and white supremacy.”)

They tell a 10-minute history of Black people at Mizzou.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: “In 1839, the University of Missouri was established as a flagship institution.”)

One student talks about Lloyd Gaines. Back in 1935, the law school refused to admit him when it learned that he was Black.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: “Lloyd Gaines refused to accept racial discrimination...”)

At this point, some of the white people leave the curb where they've been standing.

They start trying to break through the line of Black students. Some of the people in the crowd are yelling at the students.

It's tense.

But the students keep passing the megaphone and talking.

Another student talks about Lucile Bluford.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest)

In 1939 she was accepted by the School of Journalism...but she was turned away when the school found out *she* was Black.

That student on the megaphone is Andrea Fulgiam.

Fulgiam: I remember feeling then like, I cannot believe this is happening.

Marshall Allen takes the megaphone and talks about 1977, when the first Black person was appointed to the university's Board of Curators.

And another student talks about a day in 2010 when two white students scattered cotton balls across the lawn of the Black Culture Center.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest)

Some of the white people in the crowd tried to drown them out by using the Mizzou chant — M-I-Z-Z-O-U.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: M-I-Z....)

The whole time ... Tim Wolfe stays in his car...

He says nothing to the protestors.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: “We have nothing to lose but our chains!”)

After ten minutes the protestors do a final chant before they leave the street.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest: Ashe! Power! Ashe! Power!)

You can see the emotion on their faces. You can see the tears; you can hear the pain in their voices.

And they were telling each other, it's okay, we're gonna get through this. And I knew from seeing that — from seeing that emotion — I knew that something was going to happen next.

I didn't know what it was, but I knew that it wasn't just going to end that day.

(Sound from homecoming parade protest to fade out)

You're listening to Black at Mizzou, a documentary from APM Reports. I'm Lauren Brown.

We'll take a short break.

Then I'll tell you what happened when the protests at Mizzou came to a head. And how it changed the lives of the people who went through it.

Including me.

You can hear all of the APM Reports education documentaries at APM Reports dot org ... or listen to them on the Educate podcast - wherever you get your podcasts.

Support for APM Reports comes from Lumina /Foundation and the Spencer Foundation.

More in a moment. This is APM, American Public Media.

PART 2

Lauren Brown: From American Public Media, this is an APM Reports documentary, *Black at Mizzou*. I'm Lauren Brown.

This hour, I'm telling the story of the protests back in 2015 at the University of Missouri ... where I went to school. And I'm talking with other students about being Black at a predominately white campus.

After the Homecoming protest in the fall of 2015, there were more protests on campus. And more racist incidents.

Somebody made a swastika on a wall with human feces in one of the dorm bathrooms.

And I had my own problems in the dorm.

(Sound of producers entering dorm building)

Lauren Brown at dorm: So right now we're walking into my dorm that I stayed in freshman year — Hatch Hall.

On one of the trips back to campus this year, I took the other producers I was working with to my old dorm.

(Sound of producers in dorm building)

We went down to the student lounge in the basement. A couple of guys were playing ping pong in one end of the room.

We sat down on some couches, and I started talking about my first semester on campus.

And some of the things that happened in this dorm.

Lauren Brown at dorm: During that time, it was a group of white males. Two or three white males. They used to harass us. They would like knock on the door, kick it, run off, spit out food, throw trash. About three times a week, it would be something different. One night, I said, I can't take it anymore. So I got out the bed, and I was like, "hey, why

do y'all keep throwing trash in front of our door? Why do y'all keep kicking the door?" And so they ran. I decided I might as well chase them. I don't know what I was going to do in my head, but I was just so upset at that point that I just felt like I had to do something. We went from the third floor, to the fourth floor, to the fifth floor, and they didn't know that I ran track. I was right behind them, like on their heels. They got into their room but slammed the door and they kept saying "B" get away from the door "B" get away from the door, and I was right outside the room. I would have stayed there all night. But my friends just told me, "come on, let's go, we'll figure it out." We talked to our RA and then she sent us to the next person up and we had a conversation about what was going on and then she had a conversation with the males about what was going on but nothing happened.

We scheduled a meeting with the Office of Civil Rights & Title IX. They wrote down what happened. A few days later, they followed up to say they had the incident on file.

They said, "Reach back out to us if you need anything else."

Lauren Brown at dorm: We just had to go back to regular life. But I worked at the restaurant in the basement of the dorm with them. And so I went to work one day and I saw that we were on the same shift and I told my boss I said, "I can't work here anymore." So they asked me why, and I told them. "I can't work here because these guys that continue to just harass us work here." So I quit that job, and then I made a list of everything that happened from the first day they did it to the last day. I made a list, it was probably about like two pages, and I posted it on Twitter and a lot of other like Black students were just commenting like that's wrong, that's not right or whatever.

Two Black students messaged me and said they wanted to help.

Lauren Brown at dorm: And we started texting back and forth and I met with them at the Black Culture Center.

They offered to come to the dorm.

Lauren Brown at dorm: They sat outside our room one night. And so that was, that was a big thing. That really made us feel better. Feel like we had somebody. Like we had somebody that was going to protect us anyway that they could.

That's when I realized how important Black Mizzou was.

(Music)

(Audio from Field of Vision-Concerned Student 1950: We, Concerned Student 1950, demand the immediate removal of Tim Wolfe from office as president of the University of Missouri system.)

A couple of weeks after the protest at the Homecoming parade, the 11 students issued a list of demands.

The group called themselves Concerned Student 1-9-5-0. That's a reference to the year 1950... when Mizzou first allowed Black students to attend.

The group demanded that the president of the University of Missouri System resign.

They demanded that Mizzou increase the number of Black faculty members from three percent to ten percent.

And they said the university should meet the list of demands that Black students had issued way back in 1969.

Those demands came from a student group called the Legion of Black Collegians.

It's still around. It's the official Black student government at Mizzou.

It's the only Black student government at any public university in the country.

They hold elections and organize events, like any student government. But for Black students.

Mike Middleton: It was formed because there was there was nothing here speaking for Black students, that spoke genuinely for Black students

Mike Middleton was a student at Mizzou in the late 60s. He was one of the founders of the Legion of Black Collegians.

He says the demands he delivered to the chancellor in 1969 were similar to demands from Black students on other campuses at the time.

Middleton: More Black students more Black faculty and staff. A Black Studies program, a Black Culture House.

He says when he got to Mizzou, there were no Black faculty members. And not that many Black students.

Middleton: There were about 150 to 200 African American students here out of 26,000, So you seldom saw anybody that looked like you on campus, and, you know, you were either ignored or taunted on a regular basis. I came here on a band scholarship and I quit the band in my first semester here because marching Mizzou would march at the football games while the Kappa Alpha fraternity waved a Confederate flag in the stands, and the band would play Dixie. And I just couldn't, I couldn't do that. So I gave up my scholarship and gave up music. (16:09) I was an angry guy. I was, you know, I started being a social justice activist when I was seven or eight years old in Mississippi. Going into the NAACP meetings with my aunt, mostly. ... So I would kind of go to sit in the back of the NAACP meetings and listen to the adults talk about this kind of stuff. And when I started seeing the lawyers come south, Thurgood Marshall and others, I figured I could do that. I can talk and I, you know, I'm gonna go to law school and be like them. And that's what I did.

(Music)

Mike Middleton got a bachelor's degree and a law degree from Mizzou.

He worked as a civil rights attorney for the Justice Department.

In the 1980s, he came back to Mizzou. He was the first Black professor in the law school.

Then, he became an administrator. He was deputy chancellor for 17 years.

He retired from the University of Missouri in the summer of 2015.

Two months later, the protests erupted on campus.

Middleton: I was proud of the students for what they were doing.

During my first semester on, the protests continued.

Members of Concerned Student 1-9-5-0 kept pushing for the president of the University of Missouri system to step down.

(News clip: They want a handwritten apology from the president, they want him to be removed, they want future presidents to be elected by a collective group of students and

staff from diverse backgrounds, and in two years they want 10 percent of the faculty and staff here at Mizzou to be from diverse backgrounds.

(Audio from Field of Vision-Concerned Student 1950: We are camping out on Carnahan Quad until Wolfe resigns or is fired from his position.)

Protestors set up a dozen tents in the middle of campus. Mike Middleton brought them sleeping bags. One student went on a hunger strike.

The number of reporters covering the story kept growing.

And then, six days after the hunger strike started, the national news media got really excited. Because the football team joined the protests.

(News clip: Football players announced on Saturday night that they would not participate in team activities until Wolfe is gone.

News clip: Their head coach announced support with a single image of his players locking arms.

News clip: The team is scheduled to play in Arrowhead stadium in Kansas City on Saturday, and the school could lose more than one million dollars if the game is cancelled.)

And the next day...President Tim Wolfe resigned.

(News clip: Please, please use this resignation to heal, not to hate. [Journalist] Tim Wolfe is answering the call for change at the University of Missouri. He stepped down from his post as president among heated racial tensions at Mizzou's main campus. [Wolfe] I take full responsibility for this frustration, and I take full responsibility for the inaction that has occurred. [Journalist] News of the resignation was met with celebration by some students.)

Lauren Brown on campus: So right now we're standing where all the tents were for the hunger strike. So right here in this grass area.

On one of my trips back to campus this past year, I went back to the Quad. And remembered that day in 2015.

Thousands of students were there.

Lauren Brown on campus: Everybody was talking about Tim Wolfe resigned, Tim Wolfe resigned. And then they started playing music.

(Sound of music on quad)

Lauren Brown on campus: And everybody was dancing and shouting and just kind of just exploding with excitement and just feeling like this worked and maybe some change will happen.

Lauren Brown on campus: I wasn't in Concerned Student 1950 but I still felt their pain. And I felt like I was a part of it too. Even though I wasn't in that group, they did something for me. They gave me a voice. A lot of people don't feel like they are strong enough to, you know, be the front person. And so that group kind of gave us something to hold on to like, okay, you're here for me, you're here for me. And so a lot of the Black students, even if they weren't my friends, we started talking, hanging out, you know. I think the feeling lasted for the rest of my time here. I always felt like this is Black Mizzou. I belong here. These are my people. And I think I had a new meaning to my own life as a Black woman, and just being on this campus in general, and just being in this country in this world, I realized that this is just a small place, but the world is kind of just like this place. So, it kind of gave me a little more confidence, a little more strength to be like – Okay -- I'm Black. I'm a Black woman and I'm going to be fine.

(Music)

But the resignation of the president wasn't the end of the story.

The next day, someone made a threat on social media.

(News clip: Campus police and administrators were on high alert Tuesday night after multiple anonymous threats were posted on social media app, Yik Yak.

News clip: A Missouri man posted that he would shoot every Black person he saw after the University of Missouri president resigned.

News clip: It was enough for some professors to cancel classes, although a campus wide cancellation was never implemented.)

Black students didn't know if we should go to classes. We didn't know if it was safe.

I stayed off campus for a night with my cousin who also went to Mizzou.

The police arrested a 19-year-old former Mizzou student for making the threat. He was eventually sentenced to five years of probation.

And then, before the week was even over, there was a new interim president of the University of Missouri system.

(Audio from Middleton speech: As the system's interim president, I look forward to collaborating with the chancellors and their leadership teams...)

Remember Mike Middleton? The first Black law professor at Mizzou? He came out of retirement

Middleton: I figured when the crisis hit, I started thinking they're gonna call me and ask me to be President, interim President, I was having a good time I was playing a lot of golf and hanging out, you know, doing nothing. And then I got the call. It was kind of like, well it's about time. I didn't want to rub it in anybody's face and say, you know, you should have called me 10 years ago. // (1:40:49) I have no doubt that my color was a large part of why they selected me to be the president. And the only reason that I think they would do that would be so they could show that they -- they were woke. I don't mind that because it gave me the opportunity to do something.

Mike Middleton had come full circle. From the student activist delivering demands to the administration ... to the top administrator in the University of Missouri system.

Middleton: The 22-year-old version of myself probably would have called me a sellout. You're going over to the dark side. // But in fact, if you really want to make change, you've got to get inside of that which you are trying to change and change it. You know, protesting and holding up signs and shutting down offices can be the catalyst for change, but somebody's got to be in a position to make the change. Once that, that protest starts. I spent enough time protesting to understand that maybe I could be more effective if I were on the inside of the organization and work with the people who have control of the strings.

He says universities have changed since he was in college in the 1960s.

Schools have gotten better when it comes to educating — and welcoming — Black students.

But not good enough.

Middleton: I see it as slow progress. Very slow progress. You know, 50 years and essentially the same issues are being raised. So yeah, that that's slow.

(Music)

Middleton: I had a good friend, Derrick Bell, who was the first African American law professor at Harvard. He was also a civil rights lawyer and a government lawyer right before I was, I mean -- I kind of followed in his footsteps. And I was talking to Derrick once and I was bemoaning the fact that I was feeling pretty dejected because nothing's changed. You know, you do this work as long as we've been doing, and nothing's really changing. And I said, "How do you manage to maintain your good humor and happiness. I don't get it. I'm, I'm frankly, getting a little pissed. And I feel like I'm unsuccessful." He said, "Mike, you're measuring success by the wrong measure. If you view success as the elimination of racism in this country, you will probably never see it. So don't set that as your measure of success." I said, "Well how do you measure your success?" He said, "You measure your success by the extent to which you've been engaged in the struggle." And I said, "Well I've been engaged in the struggle all my life." He said, "Well, you're pretty successful."

Mike Middleton was interim president for about a year and half. He made some changes that he's proud of.

Mizzou now has a vice chancellor in charge of diversity, inclusion and equity. And Mike Middleton was actually on the search committee for the newest hire to fill that job.

His name is Maurice Gipson.

Maurice Gipson at video forum: We've spent some time this morning talking about our progress and what we've done since 2015...

Maurice Gipson was part of a live video forum this summer. Half a dozen administrators were on the call to talk about Mizzou's plans to be more inclusive.

Gipson mentioned something called the "ACE report."

After the events of 2015, the American Council on Education interviewed students and faculty and staff.

And they released a report about Mizzou's racial climate.

Maurice Gipson at video forum: And quite honestly, they rated us as having low capacity to deal with issues as relates to, you know, racism, insensitivity and so on. And it said we had low capacity. So we're excited that the new report, the 2020 report has moved us from having a low capacity to solidly moderate.

Gipson also unveiled some new programs.

The school will be reviewing the campus police department's use-of-force policies.

And Mizzou will have a new "bias hotline."

Maurice Gipson at video forum: You're going to have an opportunity to report in real time incidents of bias that happens on the campus. What we're saying as a university is that we're committed to action, right as it happens. And the bias hotline will help us identify the areas that we need to work on. Immediately.

On the video call, the administrators also talked about some of their challenges.

Like, the number of Black students at Mizzou has fallen since 2015.

And only four percent of Mizzou's faculty members are Black.

(Music)

The students who were at the University of Missouri in 2015 have moved on.

When I was doing interviews for this story, I asked people to look back.

I wanted to know what the events of that fall mean to them now.

Payton Head: We are forever connected. All of were there at that time will forever be connected.

Here's Payton Head.

Head: And I think the solidarity was so important, especially when the media started to tell the story of Mizzou, the story that they wanted to tell. Because a lot of the media was talking about how bad Mizzou was. I remember one headline said, Mizzou: A Hotbed of Racial Harassment. America is a hotbed of racial harassment. And when we don't admit that I think that we --we don't allow ourselves to be able to say like, hey, there's some issues that we can solve together. We can work on this together. But you have to call it what it is.

After he graduated, Payton got a master's degree in public policy at the University of Chicago.

Now he's a public speaker. He goes to campuses around the country. And he's been back to Mizzou.

Head: I have a complicated relationship. Because in many ways, like I-- I can resent you know my experience a little bit and be sad about it but in many ways, I really loved what I went through at Mizzou and who it's made me into. I love the students there, the faculty, the staff, everybody. I love the community and the people who poured into me so that could be who I am today. And that's why I'm -- I want to see it be successful. I want to see it do well. I want to see people heal and move on and I want to see it be a model of excellence for other institutions around the world, for not only how you deal with issues like this, but how you address them head on.

Andrea Fulgiam: I'm not really in touch with Mizzou now.

Andrea Fulgiam says she went back to Mizzou for one Homecoming.

She doesn't know how much 2015 changed the school.

But she says that it changed her.

Fulgiam: I think some people are just like, Yeah I hate Mizzou or you hate Mizzou, And it's like, no, I feel like Mizzou can do better. I feel like the school has so much potential. Whenever, you know, people asked me about like my career path and things like that, Mizzou really did help shape me. I started teaching right after I graduated, and that first year I was an interventionist, so you work to get students on grade level for reading. And they wanted to do a protest. They're 11, 12, 13 years old. They wanted to walk out for Black Lives Matter. And they came to me, and they're like, hey, Miss Fulgiam, what do you think about protests? And I'm just like, you know, I feel like you should find that out for yourself, or what have you looked at? -- so I wasn't really trying to answer their question because I honestly did not know how to respond. And then they go, we googled your name, and we want you to be honest, because we seen what you did at your school. I was like, Oh, okay. This is a bunch of eighth graders and they're basically like, we do not want the fluff. We want you to be honest with us.

(Music)

Marshall Allen got his bachelor's degree and then stayed at Mizzou for two more years to get a master's. He's applying for PhD programs in Black Studies.

Marshall says he's talked with Black people across the country who graduated from Mizzou — and from other predominantly white universities.

Marshall Allen: A lot of Black alumni will tell you I understand that in order for me to do what I needed to do, I needed this higher education. In order for me, you know, to be a journalist, to be a teacher, you know, to be an engineer, I needed to have a degree in said field in order to progress. That doesn't mean that while I was here, I enjoyed getting it. That doesn't mean that while I was here, I liked being here, right? I lived in this town, I came here, I got a scholarship here. This is where I got the most money from. So this is where I came. Doesn't mean I had a blast being here, but I knew that this is what I needed to do if I wanted to do X, Y and Z.

Marshall says the protests of 2015 were huge for the people who were in them. But he's skeptical about them making a lasting difference on the school.

Allen:

I'm not saying we didn't do what we were supposed to do. Right? I'm not saying that the Black students in the Black community at Mizzou didn't do what they were supposed to do. But what exactly changed? You know, when people ask me what I felt like I did, I tell them the same thing. I just made a couple of white folk uncomfortable. I made a few white people on campus feel as if you know, it was too much to be here. I made them feel annoyed. I made them feel like they didn't want to spend any time in Memorial Union. They didn't really want to walk around campus. They were afraid they're gonna see, you know, Black students saying, you know, oh, you know, Black Lives Matter or something like that, you know. I made a couple of white students uncomfortable. I made a couple white administrators uncomfortable. When you talk about the actual changes that were demanded of the university? Not too much of that has actually happened. Right?

Lauren Brown talking with Marshall Allen: I was explaining to them... (sigh)

Remember when I told you about getting harassed in my dorm? And that two Black students came over and sat outside my door?

One of them was Marshall. I hadn't talked to him about it since. And I wanted to tell him something.

Lauren Brown talking with Marshall Allen: I was explaining to them the harassment in the dorm and how y'all told me we you'd sit outside my dorm room to make sure we were okay to make sure we were safe and like that was just so important to me because it was like, I never really experienced like, racism, they're heavy. Like I always tell them

when I got here like I was like, this was the real world. Like my dad told me that this is the real world like you've been living in this little fantasy land. This stuff is still going on. So like, I really appreciate it that like, I really thank you for that. And I feel like that's something that I'll never forget like ever. That's always going to stay with me forever. And I think like, that's the community that that we were during that time like, I never felt so proud to be like Black I never feel so proud to be like a Black woman. I never felt so like, so strong. I never felt so like powerful. Like, y'all did that for me. (Sorry. You're alright. Mumbles.)

Allen:

That's, in my head, that's what needed to be done. You know. I'll sit out there all night, I've got homework. I have people that can come in and we can all sit outside the dorm. A lot of times people think that, you know, when you're trying to make a difference that it's this large, and this very grandiose idea of change. But oftentimes it's those small actions, cause like I said, that's, in essence, that's what it means to be a community. You need help, we're supposed to be there.

(Music)

This summer, protests broke out across the country after George Floyd was killed by police in Minneapolis.

And Black Mizzou Twitter blew up, too.

Current students and alums tweeted about what it was like to be "Black at Mizzou."

Reading of Tweet: Praying for a Black student to be in the class with you just to feel like you aren't alone. Hashtag, Black at Mizzou.

Reading of Tweet: Walking out of the Mizzou store with a white friend of mine when the alarms go off and only my backpack gets searched. Hashtag, Black at Mizzou.

Reading of Tweet: Existing in 2 completely different worlds with different traditions and histories until they need you for a photo op. Hashtag, Black at Mizzou.

And it happened at other schools, too.

I was talking about this with producer Sabby Robinson. She's Black, too. And she also went to a predominantly white university... U-S-C.

She told me she's been seeing social media posts like the ones at Mizzou from Black students around the country.

Sabby Robinson: I've seen Instagram accounts dedicated to posting anonymous accounts of racism from students at dozens of universities and colleges around the country. I'm just going to read a few of them.

“After the USC vs Colorado game I ran into a grown white man who was wearing full Blackface... curly wig and all... It was 2019, and not a single person called him on it.”
#Black at USC

One from a Black at Tulane Instagram account reads—

“Being Black at Tulane is asking upperclassmen and alumni which professors to avoid because they're racist”

And here's one more.

“My professor would ask me to speak in front of the class to demonstrate African American vernacular and when I didn't speak how she thought I should she thought I was joking. She told me to speak how I would at home, and I did but it wasn't to her liking.”
#Black at Temple

Lauren Brown talking with Sabby Robinson: It's sad to see that this is going on in other places, but it's also, you know, it makes me feel more connected. Like we're brothers, we're sisters, we're in this together. And, you know, I'm gonna vouch for you. I'm gonna, you know, believe you when you say that these things are happening to you, because a lot of times people think that, oh, you're making it up or, h, it's not that serious. And then Like, no, it is like this is a threat to our lives and our being. So it's like, you know, we have to say something at a certain point, you just have to say something you have to speak up. You have to put your voice out there.

Robinson: Yeah, I totally agree with you. I mean, I think it is pretty hard reading a lot of these accounts just because like, you know similar things that have happened to, you know, your friends or people that you know, but at the same time, I thought it was pretty awesome how kind of like virtual communities were being built through these accounts. Like, people were posting on their stories and like commenting on posts, saying, you know, I'm here for you. Even though we're so far apart, and, you know, in our own places, like during the pandemic, these stories were still like bringing Black students together. And I guess that made me a bit hopeful.

(Music)

Robinson: What was it like for you to work on this project?

Brown: So when I first heard about the project, I never thought about myself being in it at all, I never thought about that. And so when the idea came about, I remember, Sabby, you were telling me like, you know, are you sure you want to do this?

Robinson: MM hmm.

Brown: I was like, Yeah, I can do it. And I didn't think about how it would affect me at all. I didn't think about how it would affect my other job.

Robinson: Yeah. And I know that you're now hosting the podcast. What's it been like doing this and that at the same time?

Brown: So the podcast I work on is called We Live Here, and it's about race and class in the St. Louis region.

Robinson: Mm hmm.

Brown: And it's just like, every day I was talking about being Black. I'm like, Oh my gosh. It's like, every day at my regular day job, I'm like, race and class in the St. Louis region. Then, with APM, like race at Mizzou. It was just like a gift and curse, in a way. It's like it's a gift because I want to shine light on these issues. I want to bring these stories to life. But the curse is that it's like, it's so much weight on me.

Robinson: Totally.

Brown: And I'm happy that I stuck it through. I hope that this pushes the needle, this moves things. I hope that you know, one day things are better for you know, Black students, at any college.

(Music)

You've been listening to "Black at Mizzou: Confronting Race on Campus," from APM Reports. It was produced by me, Lauren Brown, Alex Baumhardt, Sabby Robinson and Chris Julin.

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